

NEW MEDIA IN NEW DEMOCRACIES:
PERCEPTIONS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE
AMONG TRADITIONAL AND INTERNET-BASED
MEDIA USERS IN KYRGYZSTAN

A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the potential and role of the Internet-based media in the Kyrgyz Republic's political processes after the 2005 March Revolution. It uses a model of interaction between the government and citizens through various types of realities: the reality constructed and imposed by the state-controlled media, the reality created by alternative, independent sources of information online, and the realities experienced by citizens in their daily lives. The model pulled together various theories from political science, sociology, psychology, and mass communication and focused on the exit-voice-loyalty options available for the citizens in response to governance practices.

The research project uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The results of content analysis have shown that in coverage of the 2007 Constitutional Referendum, independent Internet-based media indeed constructed a reality alternative to the official propaganda imposed by state media and were more critical of the government in terms of good governance practices than the state media. Further, the results of surveys and focus groups provide the evidence that Internet-based media play a significant role in shaping perceptions of good governance among politically interested Internet-based media users toward more negative evaluations of and higher levels of frustration with the government performance. Finally, the Internet media use is associated with the higher levels of intent to leave the country (i.e., exercise the exit option) among the research participants with low political interest.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation project was designed to explore the role of new media in forming citizens' perceptions of good governance in a post-Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan, where a "color" revolution took place in 2005, following the 2003 Orange Revolution in the Ukraine and 2004 Rose Revolution in Georgia. Grounded in the theories of democratic transition and consolidation, as well as in the ongoing debate on the Internet's role in democratization, the research focuses on how the traditional and online media construct realities for citizens and attempt to shape their perceptions on the one hand and how the citizens process the media-constructed realities and create their own understanding of good governance on the other.

The question of how these perceptions drive citizens' views of their government's performance and their own role and future in the country is the central focus of the study. In addition, the project explores whether those who are more knowledgeable about politics thanks to their access to Internet-based media and participation in on-line discussions share the information with those who have no Internet access, i.e. whether they perform the role of opinion leaders.

Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods, such as content analysis, face-to-face and online surveys, observation of Internet users, and focus groups with both the users and non-users of Internet, the research attempts to answer a set of questions probing the perceptions of governance and how they relate to the participants' political knowledge, beliefs and media use patterns.

This research project is designed to produce results that will provide evidence for one of the opposing views of the Internet as a medium facilitating or impeding

formation of the public sphere and democratization following the collapse of a semi-authoritarian regime.

According to the first view, the Internet has an advantage over traditional media as a more democratic and open medium with unrestricted, uncensored information. Therefore, those on-line media users who are interested in politics will be more aware of good governance characteristics and will be more critical in assessing their governments' performance than the traditional media users. If such users choose to voice their concerns and share their views with others who have no Internet access, they can become influential opinion leaders in both the online and off-line world.

Supporters of the opposing view believe that the Internet is an elite medium widening the digital divide and impeding the democratic processes through fragmentation of audiences and users' exclusion from the political debate in favor of non-political activities. This view is widely spread and actively discussed in established, mature democracies where the information in the traditional media is free from the government's direct control and multiplicity of sources provide wider choices for the media users.

In contrast, the governments in transitional countries such as Kyrgyzstan still control most of the traditional media, and in particular widely accessible television channels. Under such restrictions, the Internet users interested in politics and public affairs will be more knowledgeable in politics than the traditional media users almost by definition, simply by the virtue of having access to alternative information sources not controlled by the government.

This logical assumption serves as a key hypothesis for this project prompting other relationships between the perceptions of government practices and performance, various realities and options available for key players – the government and the citizens.

The theoretical model developed specifically for this project and presented in Figure 2.2 (see Chapter 2) synthesizes various theories and perspectives from political science, psychology, sociology, and mass communication.

In essence, the model illustrates that in a fragile and weak democracy, the government projects and constructs the reality through the state media with the goal of maintaining a certain level of citizens' loyalty and support for the government, at least so that the citizens do not protest against the government and demand its resignation. On the other hand, citizens live daily in their own experienced reality, which is much worse than what the government tries to convince them it is.

If the gap between the two realities is wide, the citizens develop a certain level of frustration with the government that would translate into one of two options. The first one is that including an attempt to change the situation by expressing their frustration through the means available to them, such as voting, active involvement in political organizations, especially opposing the government, and participation in protests and demonstrations against the government (the voice option). The second option involves searching for a better life elsewhere, i.e. to leave the country either temporarily or permanently (the exit option).

This project looks at both how the reality is constructed through various types of media and how the citizens' experienced reality connects or disconnects with the options available for them. The project consists of two distinct parts of analysis. The first part, presented in Chapter 1, is aimed at understanding how various types of media, in particular state and independent and print and online, construct the reality for the citizens, i.e. this is the analysis focused on the sender's end. The main theoretical foundation of the content analysis is the framing theory. It allows for establishing that

through selection of various frames different types of media indeed construct realities so vastly different that they seem like perfect mirrors of each other.

The second part of the analysis is focused on the receiving end – citizens – and attempts to tap into their experienced reality, evaluations of government performance and options available for them to change the reality. This part is presented in Chapter 2. It is based on the theoretical model presented in Figure 2.2, briefly described above and elaborated upon in Section 2.2.5. As for the methods, this part of analysis uses observations, surveys of traditional media users and Internet users, and focus groups with both traditional media users and Internet-based media users. The results of this part of analysis show that the frustration with the government is indeed so high that the citizens are considering the options of exit more and more, less of the voice, and almost never loyalty, which is expressed in low evaluations of government performance.

Finally, the Conclusions chapter brings everything together in the light of the theoretical model of the Government-Citizen interaction and options and presents some policy implications and recommendations.

CHAPTER 1. FRAMING A GOOD GOVERNANCE ISSUE: COVERAGE OF 2007 CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM BY KYRGYZSTAN'S PRINT AND INTERNET-BASED MEDIA

1.1 Background

On Sept. 19, 2007 the Kyrgyz Republic's President Kurmanbek Bakiev announced a decree scheduling a national referendum for Oct. 21, 2007. The Referendum was to reject or approve two major pieces of legislation – a new Constitution draft and the Election Code. The decision did not come completely unexpected because several days earlier, on September 14, the Constitutional Court had ruled void the previous Constitution versions adopted by the Parliament in October and November 2006 since they had not been subject to the Constitutional Court evaluation. Still, many a president's critic accused him of rushing the events and "declaring the Referendum on his own people like a war."¹

The opponents formulated five main reasons against the Referendum as a means to approve the proposed legislation. The first reason was that since the Referendum format allowed no article-by-article voting on each proposed draft, it could only be used to approve the major changes in principle but not to introduce such complicated and sophisticated legislation as the Constitution and Election Code in their entirety. Second, the critics argued, the documents had not been discussed broadly earlier and one month was not enough for the citizens to study and evaluate them meaningfully. Third, for the citizens to make an informed and intelligent decision, the drafts should be broadly and publicly discussed in comparison with not only the current legislation but also alternative and more progressive drafts, which would be impossible to do in the media

¹ Avdeeva, E. (Sept. 21, 2007). 'Hello to the Bakievs, or give me the Constitution I will vote for!' *Bely Parohod*.

environment largely controlled by the state and pro-presidential circles. Fourth, the referendum as a means for approving major legislative changes had been discredited by the previous president, Askar Akaev, and allowed too much room for manipulation and vote rigging. Finally, the fifth and most important reason was that the Constitution draft submitted to the Referendum effectively expanded the president's authority even beyond the 2003 "Akaev" Constitution, which had been often cited as one of the reasons for the 2005 "Tulip Revolution" (for the timeline of main events, see Appendix A).

The president's proponents, however, dismissed these arguments by formulating counter arguments aggressively promoted in the state media. First, they maintained, the Referendum was the best way for the people to express their will directly and thus legitimize the drafts by giving them the vote of confidence; in addition, the Referendum was only to approve the drafts in principle and later they would be evaluated and amended as needed. Second, the presidents' supporters responded to the argument that there was not enough time for the citizens to make a decision, the constitutional reform had been discussed so much and so many drafts had been debated that any citizen now was an expert in constitutional matters, therefore one month would be more than enough to make up one's mind. Third, the legislative drafts will be published in all media and the media will be expected to provide space and opportunities for discussing them. Fourth, no administrative resource will be used to force people to vote or to rig the referendum results, and both domestic and international observers will make sure that the referendum is conducted honestly and transparently.

As for the main claim that the new Constitution draft expanded the presidential powers and could lead the country to enforcement of authoritarianism, the president's political consultants counter argued that the amendments were not about consolidating the power but about taking ultimate and sole responsibility for the reforms, as well as

about better control over the various levels of the executive branch of power, especially the local government.

These two interpretations of the presidential initiative so crucial for the country's life illustrate two opposing approaches to good governance – one based on the true democratic participation and conscious expression of will by the people and the other based on the leader's duty to take responsibility, single-mindedly make the decision for the entire nation and hone support for it by various means, including skilful and subtle manipulation of the public conscious.

In the country where most of the traditional print and electronic media are controlled by the state either directly or through partial ownership, the first view is underrepresented in the public domain. It should find a better venue for expression and discussion in the Internet-based media, which are largely open and independent of the state. The goal of this project is to test this theoretical assumption. Using both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of stories published on the Referendum and relating events, this part of the research project tests whether there are significant differences between Kyrgyz print and Internet media in covering such a crucial good governance issue as a referendum.

1.2 Literature Review

Since the goal of this chapter is to see how the print and Internet-based media framed the coverage of the referendum and surrounding events, a brief overview of the framing theory is necessary to set up the theoretical context.

Perhaps the first scientific framing analysis in the history of mass communication was the 1920 Lippmann and Merz's pioneering analysis of how *The New York Times* covered the 1917 Russian Revolution and subsequent events up to the spring of 1920. "The chief censor and the chief propagandist," Lippmann and Merz argued, "were hope

and fear in the minds of reporters and editors” (p.3) that framed the coverage. This hope and fear drove the newspaper staff to omit undesirable information and to rely on the opinions of government officials, self-proclaimed experts, and even anonymous sources clearly biased against the revolution and for the Bolsheviks’ defeat. In addition, dependence on untrustworthy journalists whose “sympathies are too deeply engaged,” inadequate preparation of correspondents and the breach of “the time honored tradition of protecting news against editorials” (pp.41-42) misleadingly presented opinions as facts and violated the core professional standards. Thus, Lippmann and Merz conclude, the New York Time’s coverage of the Russian Revolution uncovered serious problems in journalism as it was practiced at the time:

...the professional standards of journalism are not high enough, and the discipline by which standards are maintained not strong enough, to carry the press triumphantly through a test so severe as that provided by the Russian Revolution. (p.42)

In relation to Kyrgyzstan, a former Soviet republic with a lingering influence of Soviet journalism, it is useful to keep Lippmann and Merz’s study as a reference point because even though journalists today have better skills and means for fact-checking, they still have trouble setting aside their individual preferences, hopes and fears, especially in the media environment like Kyrgyzstan’s, where the standards of balanced and unbiased journalism are taking root slowly and opinion journalism still prevails.

Lippmann and Merz’s study made a lasting contribution to the inquiry about international political communication (Hardt, 2002), but it will have been half a century before communication scholars returned to the issue of news framing. Goffman (1974), who is often cited as a framing research originator, was first to conceptualize a frame as the device helping humans to construct and comprehend reality, to “locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its

limits" (p.21). Many of the later definitions and research on news frames are based on this sociological approach to news as knowledge and focus on the frames as instruments for the newsmakers to present the knowledge to the publics.

Tuchman (1978) talks of the news as "a window on the world" whose delineating frame may distort reality through selection of the view, its angle, distance from the window, the surrounding background, and other factors associated with the viewer such as ability to pay attention to fine detail, recognize connections between the elements, perceive the picture as a whole, etc. (p.1). Clearly, the one who looks out the window (newsmaker) may distort the reality for those whom he/she describes the view to. Gitlin (1980), whose definition of frames is considered to be one of the best and is widely cited in the framing literature, is more specific about how the newsmakers utilize frames to organize the reality:

Media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and inclusion, by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual. (p.7)

Reese (2002) echoes Gitlin's definition looking at the frames as "*organizing principles* that are socially *shared* and *persistent* over time that work *symbolically* to meaningfully *structure* the social world" (p.11, emphasis original). In a similar way, Entman (2004) defines framing as "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular evaluation, interpretation, and/or solution" (p.5). He also adds a functional dimension to frames stating that frames perform "at least two of the following basic functions in covering political events, issues and actors: (1) defining effects or conditions as problematic; (2) identifying causes; (3) conveying a moral judgment; and (4) endorsing remedies of improvements" (p.5). Finally, one of the most recent attempts to synthesize the framing

research and approaches produced a definition that is useful for this study as it relates to the issues of good governance: “Media frames are pervasive, durable sociocultural and professionally shaped constructs that convey ethnocentric, nationalistic elite views and largely reinforce the status quo” (Ross & Bantimaroudis, 2006, p.87).

The last conceptualization of framing is particularly useful for this study as it will explore how the print media controlled by the state, i.e. by definition media reinforcing the status quo and the official viewpoint, tried to make sense of an important political event crucial for the country’s future. These media’s influence on the general public is significant as the independent print papers have limited readerships and the online independent media are accessible only to 10-13 per cent of people with Internet access.

For the purposes of this chapter, the newspapers and news agencies in Kyrgyzstan are categorized into print and online by the mode of production and availability for the readers, as well as into state-controlled, conformist, independent and foreign in terms of the amount of control the government is able to exert upon them. In relation to how the different types of media sources evaluate the referendum and government in general, the following model is at work:

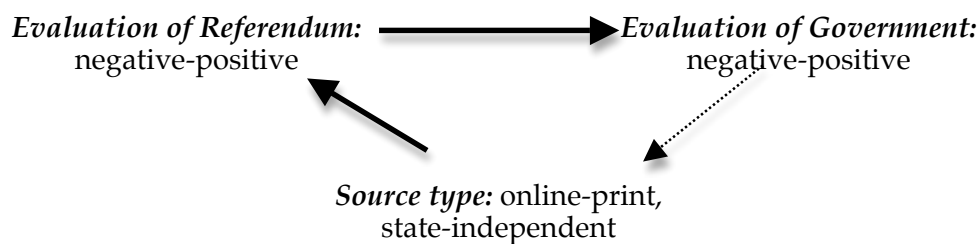


Figure 1.2.1. Source Type and Evaluations of Referendum and Government

As the model shows, the source type predetermines whether the Referendum will be evaluated as a negative or positive event. Logically, a state-controlled newspaper

will not evaluate the referendum, which is a state initiative, as a negative event, while independent media have more freedom to give their critical evaluations. The online-print mode of production plays a role here inasmuch as it roughly falls on the state-independent division: most of the truly independent media in Kyrgyzstan are forced into the online world because the state controls the real world media market. If independent papers are published, they try to stay away from politics and government (like newspaper *Delo #* that covers crime) or have very small circulation (like newspaper *Bely Parohod* with 3,000 printed copies), so they do not have a lot of impact in the real world, and the state-controlled and conformist newspapers will skew the reality for the majority of citizens who have no Internet access.

Further, the evaluation of the Referendum determines the overall evaluation of government, which is always based on the material of the story relating to referendum. Basically, when the newspapers evaluate the government, i.e. try to put the Referendum into a bigger picture of democracy and a better governance system, it is inevitable that this evaluation is driven by the Referendum evaluation. Thus, the source type will affect the overall evaluation of the government as well, both directly and indirectly.

It may be argued that the overall evaluation of the government should in its turn drive the evaluation of the Referendum. However, the source ownership a priori defines the government evaluation: it is difficult to imagine that a state-controlled newspaper would go against a government initiative without severe consequences for the editor and journalists (this relationship is represented by a dotted line in Figure 1.2.1). Given this caveat, the relationship will not be tested in the analysis. The focus will be placed on how the media evaluate the Referendum and the government in a broader context, but still shaped by the Referendum and surrounding events.

Based on the view of the Internet media as contributors to democratic processes and development of the public sphere under the conditions where the traditional media are controlled by the state, the following three hypotheses were formulated to test the differences between the state print and independent online media coverage of the referendum:

Hypothesis 1: Compared to state print media, independent Internet-based media will be more critical and negative in their evaluation of (a) Constitutional Court/ Referendum decision and (b) the overall evaluation of the government actions in terms of good governance.

Hypothesis 2: When reporting the referendum results, the independent and Internet-based media will (a) report lower turnout rates, (b) mention the violations, and (c) refer to the use of administrative resource more frequently than the print and state-controlled media.

Hypothesis 3: In predicting future events, the independent online media will be more pessimistic about possible developments than the state print media.

In addition, two research questions were formulated to explore the professional standards of original material in reporting, as well as qualitative frames that the media used to give detail and analysis of the political and public events surrounding the referendum:

Research Question 1: Will there be any differences between the print and Internet-based media in terms of originality of the material they tend to use to cover such a complicated and politically sensitive issue?

Research Question 2: What frames are used to make sense of the events in terms of their meaning for the key political players – (a) the president, (b) the parliament, and (c) the people as carriers of democracy?

1.3 Method and Procedures

This part of the research project uses both qualitative and quantitative content analysis of all stories obtained from the print and Internet-based sources in Kyrgyzstan covering the Referendum and relating events. The sample period starts on September 14, when the Constitutional Court made its decision invalidating the December 2006 Constitution, and ends on October 31, after the Parliament was dissolved, the Government resigned and the coverage of the Referendum-related events diminished.

1.3.1 Sampling Procedure

In the first week after the Presidential decree on the Referendum was published, all printed newspapers available in the newspaper stands, both current and back issues, were perused for any stories relating to the Constitutional Court decision and the Referendum. Since most print papers have online versions, starting from the second week the stories were downloaded immediately after their publication on the websites.

This comprehensive search produced 286 stories. After a closer examination, stories shorter than 200 words were excluded because they did not contain any evaluations beyond brief factual reporting of events. Such stories came mostly from the news agencies – independent *24.kg* and state agency *Kabar*, only analytical stories from which were included into the sample. Further, reprints of numerous political addresses and statements in support of the Referendum made by various pro-presidential political parties and organizations that did not include any commentary or analysis by the source staff were excluded as well. This data collection method produced a total of 212 stories for analysis (see Table 1.3.1).

As the table shows, the largest number of stories from a single source is from the state paper *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, followed by a conformist print newspaper *MSN*. *BPC* has the largest number of stories among independent online sources (24), followed by *24.kg*

with 21 stories. Analytical websites *Fergana.ru* and *Centrasia.ru* also provided a considerable number of stories, while other sources published 1-12 stories each.

Table 1.3.1. Summary of Sources and Published Stories

#	Source Title	Source Description	Source URL	# of stories
1.	<i>24.kg</i>	Online independent news agency	www.24.kg	21
2.	<i>AKI-Press</i>	Agency for Commercial Information, online business-oriented news agency	www.akipress.com	11
3.	<i>Bely Parohod</i> ²	Independent online newspaper with a printed version	www.parohod.kg	12
4.	<i>Bishkek Press Club</i>	Independent online news portal for and by journalists comparable to a news agency	www.bpc.kg	24
5.	<i>Centrasia.ru</i>	Non-governmental analytical Russian Internet portal covering events in former Soviet Union countries	www.centrasia.ru	15
6.	<i>Delo #</i>	Independent print newspaper focusing on crime and public safety issues	delo.ktnet.kg/index.shtml	12
7.	<i>Fergana.ru</i>	Moscow-based analytical portal covering Fergana valley (areas of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan around Fergana city)	www.ferghana.ru	17
8.	<i>IWPR</i>	London-based news and analysis portal of Institute for War and Peace Reporting	www.iwpr.net	4
9.	<i>Kabar</i>	State online news agency	www.kabar.kg	5
10.	<i>Kommersant</i>	Russian top-quality financial daily newspaper of record	http://www.kommersant.ru	5
11.	<i>Megapolis</i>	Print Bishkek city business newspaper		1
12.	<i>Moskovsky Komsomolets v Kyrgyzstane</i>	Russian print tabloid with a special section for Kyrgyzstan produced by local staff independent of the Moscow office	www.mk.kg	2
13.	<i>MSN</i>	"Moya Stolitsa Novosti" - Bishkek City capital area print newspaper	www.msn.kg	27
14.	<i>Pr.kg</i>	Independent online newspaper with frequently updated news service similar to a news agency	www.pr.kg	9
15.	<i>Obschestveny Raiting</i>	Independent print newspaper affiliated with pr.kg		7
16.	<i>Slovo Kyrgyzstana</i>	Official government print newspaper with national coverage	www.sk.kg	34
17.	<i>Tazar.kg</i>	Independent analytical website	www.tazar.kg	6
<i>Total:</i>				212

² As of March 11, 2008 the paper comes out under the new name *Bely Parus* (www.parus.kg).

1.3.2 Coding and Analysis Procedures

A group of 22 AUCA mass communication students assisted in coding the stories using the coding sheets presented in Appendix B. They coded a total of 42 (20 per cent) of the sample stories, which I also coded for inter-coder reliability test. The inter-coder reliability coefficient for the quantified items was .82, while the agreement on qualitative frames was roughly estimated to be at 75 per cent, i.e. for most stories, two coders similarly identified at least three out of the four frames (items 3-6 in Coding Sheet 1).

After the coding, the quantified items were run through descriptive statistics (frequencies and cross-tabulations). To test Hypotheses 1, 3 and Research Question 1, ordered logistic regressions were used. Linear regressions were run to test Hypothesis 2 for the subsample of 72 stories covering the referendum results.

For the qualitative frames analysis (Research Question 2), all identified frames were grouped into larger thematic clusters, characterized as either “negative” (mostly used by independent sources) or “positive” (mostly used by pro-government sources), and compared for frequency of appearance and dominance.

1.3.3 Sample Characteristics

Figure 1.3.1 below presents the distribution of stories by dates and source type – online or print. As it shows, the three highest spikes in the figure are around three dates: 1) September 19, when the Referendum was announced, 2) September 25, when several parties formed the movement “For Constitution, Reform, and Development” that became later the foundation for the pro-presidential party ‘Ak-Jol’, and 3) October 20-24, when the Referendum results became known.

During the entire period on the sample, online sources published 112 stories (53%), while print sources – 100 (47%), so the sample is split roughly equally between the online and print stories.

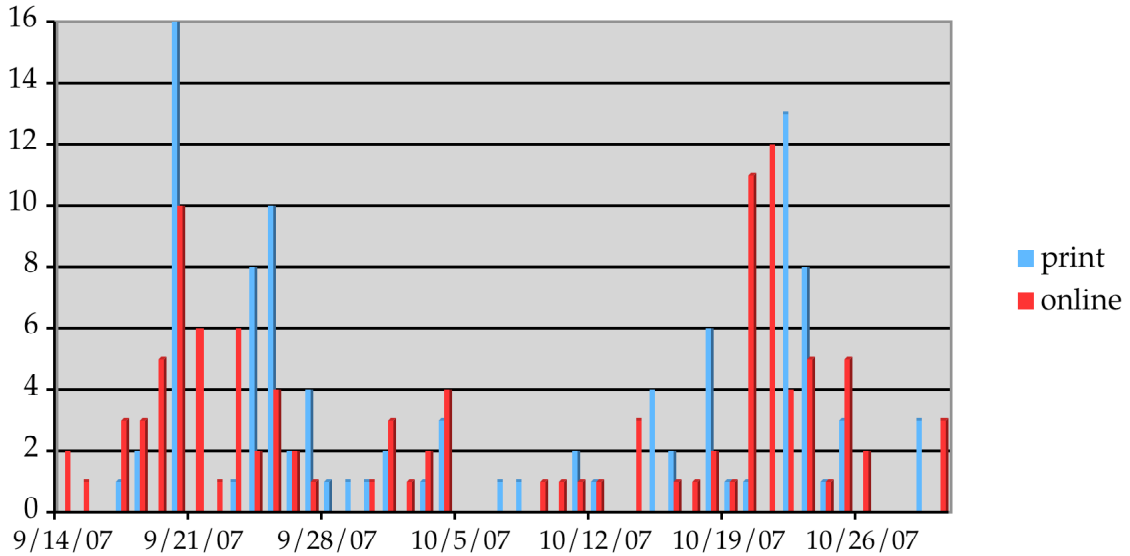


Figure 1.3.1. Distribution of Stories by Date and Source Type

Further, the online sources were divided into groups based on the potential for their material to “spill over” into the off-line world. In this sense, Internet newspaper such as *Bely Parohod* has the largest potential equal to any other print paper because it has its own print version (albeit with a small circulation of 3,000), the news agencies are in the middle because their materials are picked up by both online and print sources, and analytical websites have the lowest potential because they are usually read only by experts and “political junkies” with regular Internet access.

All the sources were also categorized into four groups based on independence from the government: 1) state sources, such as official government newspaper *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* and news agency *Kabar* directly controlled by the government; 2) conformist sources controlled by the state through either partial ownership or an unofficial agreement, such as *MSN* newspaper; 3) independent sources that publish materials critical of the government, such as news agency *24.kg*, newspapers *Obschestvoenny*

*Raiting, Delo #, and Bely Parohod, and analytical websites BPC and Tazar.kg; and 4) foreign independent sources, such as Russian newspaper *Kommersant* and analytical website *Centrasia.ru*. Newspaper *MK-KG* and analytical websites *Fergana.ru* and *IWPR*, although affiliated with foreign organizations, were categorized as independent local sources because they have desks in Bishkek run by the local staff and are quite independent in their editorial decisions. The distribution of stories in the sample by source independence and off-line impact potential is presented in Table 1.3.2, which also shows the variables' coding schemes in brackets.*

As the table shows, stories from print newspapers represent all types of source independence, as well as stories from independent sources represent all types of off-line impact potential. There are no stories from analytical websites and online papers in the state and conformist categories of source independence. This may be at least partly explained by the fact that the government does not create online media because it is not particularly concerned about the impact on the Internet readership comprising only about 10-15% of the total population. It also indirectly confirms that the Internet is a more open and independent space.

Table 1.3.2. Off-line Impact Potential by Source Independence

Off-line Impact Potential	Source Independence				Total
	State (1)	Conformist (2)	Independent (3)	Foreign (4)	
(1) Print newspaper	34	27	22	5	88
(2) Print version of online newspaper	0	0	12	0	12
(3) News agency	5	11	21	0	37
(4) Online paper	0	0	9	0	9
(5) Analytical website	0	0	51	15	66
Total	39	38	115	20	212

The largest number of stories come from independent analytical websites (51, or 24 percent of the sample) and print state newspaper (34, or 16 percent). The sample is also roughly equally split between the stories from print (100, or 47 percent) and online (112, or 53 percent) sources, while on the independence dimension the stories from independent local sources represent about 54 percent (115 stories) compared to 36 percent (77 stories) from non-independent local sources.

In summary, the three variables serving as “demographics” of the sample – story categorization by print/online mode of production, off-line impact potential, and source independence from the government control – show that the sample reflects the existing diversity in Kyrgyzstan’s newspaper market quite well and represents the range of media reporting, opinions and analyses available for the country’s readers. The next section presents the key results and findings on how these media sources covered the events in terms of good governance.

1.4 Results and Discussion

1.4.1 Quantitative Content Analysis

Hypothesis 1 was formulated to test whether the print and online media differ in how critically they evaluate the Constitutional Court decision, the referendum initiative, and relating government actions in terms of good governance. Table 1.4.1 presents the results of the ordered logistic regression for evaluation of the Constitutional Court/Referendum decision (coded as 1=negative, 2=neutral, 3=positive) by source online/print type (coded 0=print, 1=online) and independence from the state. For all variables and their coding schemes, see Appendix D.

As the table shows, the source being print rather than online has only a marginally significant positive association with the government action evaluation. However, the source independence is a better predictor: in comparison to the foreign sources that are

serving as a base category here³, as the source moves to state-controlled, the expected ordered log odds increases by 2.533 as the evaluation decision moves from negative to neutral to positive. Thus, in comparison to foreign sources, the state-controlled and conformist sources are more likely to evaluate the government decisions positively.

Table 1.4.1. Evaluation of Constitutional Court/Referendum Decision

Independent (location) variables	Estimate	St. Error	Wald
State-controlled sources	2.533***	.612	17.133
“Conformist” sources	1.508**	.558	7.293
Independent sources	-.188	.461	.684
Print source	.556	.308	.071
(Threshold 1)	-.556	.437	1.619
(Threshold 2)	1.790*	.461	3.261
Model summary	N = 212, Cox & Snell Pseudo R ² = .292, X ² = 73.273***		

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Likewise, the “conformist” sources have a significant positive effect on the decision evaluation. The independent sources have the hypothesized negative association, but their influence is not statistically significant. Thus, the sample provides partial support to Hypothesis 1(a), suggesting that source independence is a better predictor of how negatively or positively the government decision is evaluated than the source being online or print.

Hypothesis 1(b) is tested using the same two demographic characteristics of the sample – source independence and print/online nature. However, since a large part of the overall evaluation of the government actions (coded from 1 – strongly negative to 5 – strongly positive) includes evaluation of the Constitutional Court/Referendum decision, it is also included into the model as an independent variable.

³ I have also run ordered logistic regression models where the state-controlled sources were taken as a reference category, but they did not perform as well as the models with the foreign sources as the base.

Table 1.4.2. Evaluation of Government Actions in Terms of Good Governance

Independent (location) variables	Estimate	St. Error	Wald
State-controlled sources	3.108***	.659	22.228
“Conformist” sources	2.140***	.604	12.561
Independent sources	.909*	.490	4.537
Print source	-.507*	.318	3.232
CC/Referendum negative evaluation	-5.585***	.563	98.284
CC/Referendum neutral evaluation	-3.208***	.456	49.421
(Threshold 1)	-3.848***	.660	33.977
(Threshold 2)	-2.270***	.653	12.069
(Threshold 3)	-.831	.638	1.692
(Threshold 4)	1.025*	.595	2.969
Model summary	N = 212, Cox & Snell Pseudo R ² = .652, X ² = 223.711***		

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

As the results presented in Table 1.4.2 for one-tailed test show, the source being print or online effects the overall evaluation of the government action in the expected direction: as the source moves to the online type, the expected ordered log odds increases by -.507 for every category of evaluation, i.e. becomes more negative. The source independence also has a significant positive effect for all types of sources, suggesting that their overall evaluation of government actions is likely to be more positive than that of the foreign sources that serve as a base category in the model.

The strongest predictor is the evaluation of the Constitutional Court/Referendum decision, and this relationship is in the expected direction: negative and neutral evaluations of these decisions greatly increase the likelihood of the overall negative evaluation of the government actions discussed in the story.

Thus, both ordered logistic regression analyses presented in Tables 1.4.1 and 1.4.2 provide sufficient support for Hypothesis 1, suggesting that independence from government control is a strong predictor of how critically the source will cover the

government actions. Characterization of sources in terms of whether they are online or print has a significant effect on the overall evaluation of the government actions.

Hypothesis 2 was tested with OLS regressions on the subsample of stories published on and after October 21, when the referendum results became available, which includes 72 stories. In Hypothesis 2(a), the dependent variable is the reported turnout rate, coded as 1=the officially reported rate, 0=lower rate (see Table 1.4.3). Of the 72 subsample stories, about a half (35 stories) mentioned the turnout rate, and of those, 26 stories stated or suggested that the turnout rate was much lower than what the Central Elections Committee announced officially, i.e. 82 per cent of the population showing up at the polling stations.

Table 1.4.3. Reporting of Turnout Rates

Independent variables	B	St. Error	t
Off-line impact potential	.029	.033	.870
Source type: online-print	-.044	.105	-.422
Source independence from state control	-.107**	.038	-2.852
Overall evaluation of government actions	.147***	.015	9.935
(Constant)	.056	.142	.392
Model summary	N = 35, R ² = .908, F = 73.604***		

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 1.4.3 shows that the reporting turnout rate is strongly predicted by the overall evaluation of the government actions and independence of the source from state control. Both variables' impact is in the expected direction, as turnout rate is coded reversely: as the source becomes more independent, the turnout rate moves away from the officially reported data by .107 units. At the same time, as the overall evaluation of the government actions moves from negative to positive by 1 unit, the turnout rate increases toward the officially reported data by .147 units. Neither the story source type

on the online/print dimension nor the off-line impact potential play a significant role in determining how the turnout rate is reported.

Proceeding to Hypothesis 2(b), 42 of the 72 stories in the subsample discussed the violations and irregularities during the Referendum. Among them, 18 reported the official data that the violations were insignificant and did not influence the referendum outcome, and 24 reported the violations observed during the referendum either by their own staff (2 stories) or documented by NGOs and independent observers (22 stories). Table 1.4.4 reports the results of OLS regression analysis for this dependent variable, coded as 0=no violations reported, 1=violations and irregularities reported.

Table 1.4.4. Reporting of Violations During the Referendum

Independent variables	B	St. Error	t
Off-line impact potential	-.034	.099	-.349
Source type: online-print	.085	.321	.264
Source independence from state control	.154	.129	1.190
Overall evaluation of government actions	-.096*	.041	-2.366
(Constant)	.585	.416	1.408
Model summary	N = 42, R ² = .351, F = 5.009**		

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

In this model, only one of the independent variables – overall evaluation of the government actions – is a significant predictor of whether the violations were reported or not. The relationship is also in the expected direction: as the overall evaluation of government actions moves from negative to positive by one unit, the reporting of violations decreases by .096 units.

As for the types of violations reported, 18 stories mentioned multiple voting by the same people, usually transported from one polling station to another by the local government bodies, mass stuffing of ballots by one person, usually a local government

representative in the precinct election commission; 10 stories mentioned abuse of the migrant voters (citizens of Kyrgyzstan who work in Russia and Kazakhstan) as well as pressure on those who work or study in government offices and institutions; and 12 stories mentioned threats to and obstructions for the work of independent observers.

As for the reporting of the use of administrative resource (Hypothesis 2(c)), a total of 30 stories reported that it was used in one degree or another. Various types of reported administrative resource violation varied from the poor voter lists with numerous “dead souls” whose vote was easily manipulated, to interference by the precinct election commission chairs, transportation of voters to the polling stations, and irregularities in counting results.

Table 1.4.5 presents the results from an OLS regression model where reporting of the use of administrative resource is a dependent variable, coded 0=no administrative resource use reported, 1=reported.

Table 1.4.5. Reporting of Use of Administrative Resource During the Referendum

Independent variables	B	St. Error	t
Off-line impact potential	-.202**	.068	-2.983
Source type: online-print	.723**	.228	3.175
Source independence from state control	.037	.077	.480
Overall evaluation of government actions	-.107***	.077	-4.263
(Constant)	.866***	.252	3.431
Model summary	N = 72, R ² = .377, F = 10.136***		

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

As the results show, in this regression model only one independent variable has no significant impact – independence of the source from the state control. All the other variables are significant and in the expected direction: as the source becomes online and its off-line impact potential decreases, the reporting of the use of administrative resource

increases by .723 and .202 units respectively. In addition, as the story's overall evaluation of the government's actions moves from negative to positive by one unit, its reporting of the use of administrative resource decreases by .107 units.

Thus, from all three regression models above it may be concluded that Hypothesis 2 is supported partially: a) source independence from government control is a better predictor for reporting lower turnout rates than whether the source is print or Internet-based as it was hypothesized; b) overall evaluation of the government action predicts whether the source reported the violations during the Referendum better than any "demographic" variable of the subsample; and c) as it was hypothesized, online media indeed reported use of administrative resource more often than print media, but two other variables – offline impact potential and overall evaluation of the government actions are strong predictors of reporting administrative resource as well.

Hypothesis 3 was formulated to see if there are differences in how the state print sources and independent Internet-based sources predict the future events and evaluate possible developments. Of the 212 stories in the sample, 124 made some kind of prediction as to how the events will develop in the future, and of them 59 (47.6 per cent) stories took the pessimistic tone, 26 – neutral, and 39 (31.5 per cent) – optimistic.

The results for the ordered logistic regression analysis for the evaluation of possible developments as pessimistic (coded 1), neutral (2) or optimistic (3) by source types are presented in Table 1.4.6. As the results in Model 1 show, independence of the source matters in presenting the future scenarios as pessimistic or optimistic. The state and conformist sources have an expected positive association with the evaluation of possible developments: as the source becomes state or conformist, the odds log ratio of the prediction becomes more optimistic compared to foreign sources, which serve as a base category in this model.

Even though the print or Internet-based character of the source does not have a significant effect, it is also in the expected direction. Besides, for the purpose of this project the first finding, i.e. the state and conformist sources producing more optimistic predictions, is more important as these sources have more influence due to their outreach capacity in the real world.

Table 1.4.6. Evaluation of Possible Developments as Optimistic or Pessimistic

Independent (location) variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	Estimate	SE	Wald	Estimate	SE	Wald
State-controlled sources	2.509**	.792	10.024	-.079	.947	.007
“Conformist” sources	1.597*	.729	4.806	-1.021	.964	1.122
Independent sources	.057	.500	.013	-.757	.580	1.701
Print source	-.166	.384	.186	.082	.487	.029
Strongly negative evaluation of government actions				-5.022***	.813	38.181
Negative evaluation of government actions				-3.112***	.745	17.439
Neutral evaluation of government actions				-2.360**	.762	9.602
Positive evaluation of government actions				-1.234^	.708	3.041
(Threshold 1)	.268	.461	.339	-3.551***	.874	16.504
(Threshold 2)	1.299**	.478	7.390	-1.985*	.818	5.890
Model summary	N = 124, Cox & Snell Pseudo R ² = .167, X ² = 22.663***			N = 124, Cox & Snell Pseudo R ² = .473, X ² = 79.382***		

^p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

When the overall evaluation of government actions is introduced as an independent variable in Model 2, source independence and online/print type variables are statistically not significant. However, since it was earlier established (see Table 1.4.2) that both these variables have a significant effect on the overall evaluation of government actions, they have indirect effects on the evaluation of possible future events as well. Compared to the strongly positive evaluation of government actions

(base category in the model), the remaining degrees of evaluation have a negative effect on prediction of future events as optimistic or pessimistic, which is expected.

To give an idea of how pessimistic and optimistic scenarios differ, two quotes below represent an independent and a conformist source's evaluation, respectively:

Two scenarios are possible. First, the opposition will give up and put up with the authoritarian stability, continuing economic stagnation and the "Asian mode of production" in its pure form. Second, the opposition will organize protests and resume the pseudo-democratic chaos that our NGOs and some political scientists are so proud of, but the normal people cannot live in. Two choices, one worse than the other.

Interview with political scientist Alexandr Knyazev, Sept.24, 2007, *Delo* #

It is doubtful, of course, that an average citizen will immediately feel all the advantages of leaving under new constitution. However I want to believe that we will be able to tell our main law 'good-bye' in our everyday life, and to bid farewell to demonstrations, protests, and Maidans. And in their turn our sky-dwellers will finally deal with the economy separately from politics.

"Time Will Not Wait," Oct.19, 2007, *MSN*

As the later qualitative content analysis will show, these quotes are representative of the general "authoritarianism – sole responsibility" and "uncertainty – better life" frames in relation to the key players: the president, the parliament, and the people.

Finally, Research Question 1 was formulated to see if the originality of material depends on the type of source. This question was prompted by the fact that online sources are often accused of simply reprinting materials that appeared in other media. In many cases they do indeed reprint material from other sources because they lack staff and resources, including the sources of information, to come up with their own, original, material. However, in many cases they add their own commentary and analysis to the borrowed material.

To answer Research Question 1, the two key "demographic" variables – source independence of the state control and being print or online – were used as independent

variables in the multinomial logistic regression model where the originality of material is a dependent variable, coded as 1=borrowed, reprinted material, 2=borrowed material with own comment or analysis, and 3=mostly original material. Borrowed, reprinted material serves as a base category in this multinomial regression.

The results of the regression model presented in Table 1.4.7 show that compared to the foreign sources, both conformist and independent sources are more likely to publish original stories. The source being state-controlled has no significant effect, but also has a positive association with the original material, while negative association – with borrowed material with commentary. The online sources are likely to publish both borrowed material with commentary and original material.

Table 1.4.7. Originality of Material by Key Sample Characteristics

Independent variables	Borrowed Material with Commentary			Original Material		
	B	SE	Wald	B	SE	Wald
State-controlled sources	-.075	.908	.007	.329	.755	.190
“Conformist” sources	.853	.886	.927	1.451*	.746	3.777
Independent sources	.741	.764	.941	2.261***	.630	12.858
Online sources	1.695**	.620	7.473	2.071***	.499	17.231
(Intercept)	-1.784**	.690	6.690	-1.442*	.593	5.917
Model summary	N = 212, Cox & Snell Pseudo R ² = .173, X ² = 40.382***					

^p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

These models suggest that all types of sources are likely to publish original material. Thus, originality of material used in stories may depend more on such factors as professionalism of the staff and access to data sources than independence from the state control or whether the source is print or Internet-based. Further exploration of this issue, which is beyond this project, requires classification of sources by their staff capacity and access to information sources.

1.4.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

Thematic clusters found in the three categories of qualitative frames under this study revealed that every frame the independent sources used in an attempt to make sense of what the government decisions, initiatives and actions meant for the key actors had its counterpart in the pro-government and conformist sources. This is clearly seen in the frames explaining what the Constitutional Court decision and the referendum meant for President Bakiev. Bek Orosaliev, *Kommersant's* stringer in Kyrgyzstan, presents a neutral stance that can serve as a reference point:

...in the fall [after the failed and suppressed opposition protests in April 2007], Kyrgyzstan's president decided to enforce his success by finishing off the current parliament that had acted many times against him. With a hint from the presidential administration, the Constitutional Court voided both Constitutions earlier adopted by the parliament. The head of the state has taken advantage of the authority returned to him under the old constitution by having initiated a referendum on constitutional amendments that would enforce the presidential authority and fully reform parliamentarianism in the country. Following the example of Russia and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz parliamentarians will now be elected exclusively by party lists and very few people doubt that the majority of seats will be taken by the presidential party.

“Kurmanbek Bakiev showed Kyrgyzstan a 'Bright Way',”⁴ Oct.16, 2007,
Kommersant

Here, the paper, given its foreign status, takes a detached and non-judgmental stance toward the events, however, making a clear hint that Bakiev's actions lead to a more authoritarian government system. The domestic independent sources are more open in stating that authoritarianism was looming over the country. They often do it indirectly, through the interviews and quotes from experts and public figures, which gives a certain credibility and ‘insurance’ in a political environment where alternative views can be persecuted by the government:

⁴ Play on words: in Kyrgyz, “Ak-Jol,” the name of the party Bakiev consolidated shortly before the referendum for the parliamentary elections, means “Bright/Clear Way.”

“The haste around the referendum is indicative of the fact that they [the authorities] simply want to get a super presidential constitution draft and secure their power. I am afraid that they will deceive only themselves, just like Akaev did in his time... With every passing day, we are shocked at how our authorities devolve, and this concerns the president himself. He says one thing, does the opposite, plans a third thing, and the outcome is always very complicated.”

Interview with an NGO leader Asiya Sasykbaeva, Sept.26, 2007, *BPC*

The authorities seem to have completely forgotten that the difference between the De Gaulle's referendum in France and a referendum a la-post-Soviet-Asian style is like the one between the ground and the sky. We are left with nothing but to see the proof of the wisdom "referendum is a dictator's tool." And this is why the outcome of the newly declared Kyrgyz referendum is predetermined.

“Under the Banner of Pack Leadership,” Oct.1, 2007, *Delo #*

The president's supporters and the opposition that switched camps are building with their own hands a regime of authoritarian power, destroying the future of their country and their people, depriving them of the prospect for truly democratic development.

"In Kyrgyzstan They Want to Use the Sweet Power," Oct.10, 2007, *Tazar.kg*

This frame's variations include the suggestions that Bakiev was building a monarchy, kingdom, dictatorship, or façade democracy (see Table 1.4.8 for the summary of frames relating to the president). Overall, this frame was most widely used by the regime opponents and is found in 32 stories.

The counter frame used by the president's supporters promoted the ideas that the president was moving toward “enlightened authoritarianism,” sovereign democracy similar to Russia and Kazakhstan, and strengthening of the state:

Kazakhstan's and Russia's realities, where the presidents head the strongest parties, show that this results into very good outcomes, both in economics and other areas. This is why I believe Kyrgyzstan needs a presidential party.

Interview with parliament member Keldibekov, Sept.21, 2007, *BPC*

Kurmanbek Bakiev is becoming a president by definition, acquiring the qualities and features of a leader, the main of which is the ability to take responsibility for everything happening in the country. Two years of uncertainty, extremes, doubts and confusion in mind and action have ended. A cold realization of the basics of history has come – the path from totalitarianism to democracy lies through strict authoritarianism... Enlightened authoritarianism is better than feudalism.

“Steps the Whole Country Was Waiting For,” Oct.5, 2007, *MSN*

The last quote is also illustrative of a complementary frame relating to the threat of authoritarianism. Where the president's opponents were concerned about him consolidating authority and usurping power, his supporters talked about consolidation of society and taking full responsibility into his hands for the reforms and everything that was happening in the country. Below are two quotes from both sides:

Parliamentarian Sariev commented [on the new Constitution draft], "If we adopt the Constitution offered by the President, we will receive a strong head of the state with consolidated powers, who may become a dictator as time passes. Today, the main task is to adopt a conciliatory Constitution that would satisfy the key political players of the country."

"New Constitution: Road to Dictatorship?" Oct.1, 2007, *Oasis* story on *Centrasia.ru*

The decision to conduct a referendum on the constitutional reform is the only correct one. Today the head of the state has taken full responsibility upon himself during this complicated stage for Kyrgyzstan when we found ourselves in the judicial dead-end... I hope that the people's vote will finally put a stop to the pulling of the rope, when the parliament, instead of adopting good laws, is involved in relationship management.

Interview with Issyk-Kul governor Isaev, Sept.21, 2007, *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*

This longing for sole responsibility is deeply rooted in the authoritarian rule and is the legacy of the Soviet style of governance. As *MSN's* editorial put it in an attempt to explain why Kyrgyzstan's citizens will vote for the president's version of Constitution, "The people will vote for one-person responsibility for what is happening in the country. The long historical memory and healthy instinct prompt to the people that the collective responsibility is just universal irresponsibility" ("Steps the Whole Country Was Waiting for," Oct.5, 2007).

However, what the president's proponents failed to mention is that such a responsibility is a heavy burden for a head of the state that has slowing economic growth and stalled reforms, complicated by high levels of corruption. Lawyer Gulnara

Iskakova, an expert in constitutional law and an active member of the Women in Politics network, has formulated this clearly:

The president does not understand that his political technologists, who are staying in the shadow, have put a heaviest historical burden on him. The society will know: Bakiev has taken responsibility for EVERYTHING upon himself, and the curtailing of democracy and violation of freedoms and rights from now on will be the responsibility of one person. Will he be able to carry this burden, including struggling economy, in an economically poor country? And what is the society left with, when it is deprived of an opportunity to influence the power through democratic means? - To either keep silent or ... resist in some other ways.

Interview with lawyer Gulnara Iskakova, Oct.24, 2007, *Delo* #

Another persistent frame that appeared in many stories relates to the connection between the politics and economy. The president and his proponents insisted that the 2.5 years of political struggles between the government and opposition after March 2005 had taken attention away from the economic problems. *MSN*, for example, as well as *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, quoted President Bakiev as he was voting in the referendum:

During the last two years of the political chaos we've accumulated a number of serious economic problems. Wherever we look, we have problems: we need to repair roads, to build schools in remote areas, to rehabilitate the factories, and to increase pensions and salaries. And when do we have time to deal with this all, if our dear bureaucrats are involved only in political speculations and useless debates? This is why I believe that the referendum will put a stop, and after the adoption of the main law, which no one will be able to tailor for themselves any more, will start working on the economy. There's no other way, we have already lost a lot of time... This is why pulling the rope should end with the adoption of the Constitution. Where can the economy be developed successfully? Only in the countries where there is political stability. We are about to realize a lot of major projects, but we can implement them only under the conditions of political calm.

“‘Yes’ from the People,” Oct. 23, 2007, *MSN*

Earlier, *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* published an interview with parliamentarian Tagaev, who formulated the same idea in more straightforward terms:

It is high time for the executive power to start working for development and, implementing the President's instructions, develop the economy not on paper, but in reality. We've had enough of it! Enough political games, it's time to work.

Quoted interview to *24.kg*, Sept.21, 2007, *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*

To this, the independent newspaper *Bely Parohod*'s chief editor Elena Avdeeva answered in a sarcastic and poignant way, addressing her appeal to President Bakiev:

Please do [deal with economy]! Our father, hope and foundation of the state, please deal with economy! This is the only thing we are praying for you to do. So why are you deviating again: declared a referendum, decided to dissolve the parliament and elect a new one. This is pure politics, is it not? Am I mistaken? – Oh, I am sorry. It was the president who said, "As soon as we conduct the referendum, the economy will rise." What does this mean? Is our economy a little trained doggy? It does everything on command, "Economy, sit! Economy, rise!" And if it does so, why didn't you command it to rise earlier? What have you been waiting for? – Ah, Referendum. Yes, mister president, you indeed should be dealing with the economy rather than politics...

"I am always thinking about my people," Oct.1, 2007, *Bely Parohod*

Here, a counter frame is expressed: the president's inability to handle the opposition, blaming it for everything wrong that is happening in the country, including the price rise and the shortage of food products, as well as the executive power's inability to improve the economy and people's well-being.

This frame also echoes another frame that is used to show that by the decision to conduct a referendum, the president has caught the opposition off guard and aims at weakening and eliminating his political opponents, as political analyst Ibraimov is quoted in a *Centrais.ru* story:

The president's last step is a well-planned action to strengthen his position when the opposition is split into fractions and unable to fight him back... Referenda were always used in Kyrgyzstan as a means to promote the [government's] interests under the pretext of the people's well-being.

"New Round of Constitutional Stand-off," Oct.1, 2007

To this, the president's proponents would answer that eliminating unconstructive radical opposition will create a better environment for coordination and cooperation with other branches of power, which ultimately will benefit the people of Kyrgyzstan. Parliamentarian Tagaev's quote is illustrative of this point of view:

Kyrgyzstan's president has finished with those who were involved in political plotting and created tensions between the branches of power... Submitting the Constitution issue to a referendum is a logical last step in a long-overdue solution of this important problem [constitutional reform]. Let the people decide how we will live in the future.

"The Plotting Will Finally End," Sept.21, 2007, Slovo Kyrgyzstana

Another persistent frame that is used intensively by the president's opponents relates to local governance and is constructed in response to the accusations that in the new Constitution draft the president is expanding his powers to appointing key national-level and local government officers, thus building a vertical power structure. Again, an *MSN's* editorial addressed this criticism in the following way:

...the constitutional changes offered by Kurmanbek Bakiev give us all a chance to develop not only a new attitude to local government, but also to make a serious step toward building a real (and not declared by some political parties) civil society. If we develop the interest in the actions of local government, the wish to control and ask of the local government, if every one of us knows that the local government is accountable to the people, there will be hope for developing genuine interest in big politics, and in the end – in participation of currently passive majority of our citizens in all the constructive political processes of the renewed Kyrgyzstan. And this, you have to agree, is one of the main features of a true rather than protest-driven democracy.

"Local Self-Government or Small-Place Kings? The Choice Is Near," Oct.12, 2007

This passage sheds some light on why the whole idea of the referendum could appeal to the people who lack information about democratic practices and who developed fatigue from the "protest-driven" democracy. The March 2005 Revolution was followed by a two-night large-scale looting of the capital city, which scared the Bishkek residents and ultimately devalued the meaning of the revolution itself. Looting became engraved in their memories to the extent that on the Internet political sites the Revolution Day, which was declared a national holiday in March 2008, is often referred to as "The Looter's Day." At the backdrop of this fear, any promise of stability and end to political battles would "buy" a concerned citizen's vote.

Another frame that needs to be mentioned is the president's confidence with his own people. The oppositional leaders such as parliamentarian and former Speaker Omurbek Tekebaev were sure that President Bakiev was rushing the referendum because he was losing the support base among the citizens:

"The president is losing people's support with every passing day. He wants to capitalize on his advantage before the New Year's and to secure his political future. If he receives the majority in the Parliament in one month, he will be able to avoid direct [presidential] election in 2010"

"New Constitution: Road to Dictatorship?" Oct.1, 2007, *Oasis story on Centrasia.ru*

The state and conformist sources responded to this by citing President Bakiev himself referring to the people's wishes and desires. The interview was taken when Bakiev was casting his vote in the referendum:

"...[in my trips around the country] I have seen that the people are tired of politics. They demand, sometimes with reproach, that the constitutional reform must be completed. But you know the situation that we had during these two years while we were discussing the draft. At present everyone understands that there is no reason to delay this process anymore, and I believe that Kyrgyzstanis will show what they think during the referendum. I am deeply grateful to the people for their support of the state policy."

"The Weather is Stable at the Referendum," Oct. 23, 2007, *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*

The president's proponents would also say Bakiev came forward with the referendum initiative because he cared for the people and wanted to fulfill the promise of the constitutional reform that will result into better democracy:

"When I meet the region citizens, they tell me that the referendum is a necessity. The participants of such meetings lay great hopes on parliamentary elections by party lists that will end tribalism and regionalism in the parliament, will make the electoral process more open and prevent taking the political conflicts into the streets."

Interview with Jalal-Abad governor Aidaraliev, Oct.5, 2007 *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*

Another claim made by the president's proponents in relation to his level of confidence with the people is that by putting the trust in the people through the

referendum President Bakiev in fact is confident that they will support his initiatives, which also shows his strength as the country's leader and strategist:

We've been waiting for the president to make these steps for a long time, and, having read the draft constitution, I cannot hide my satisfaction because the ideals of our Revolution have not been destroyed. The president has finally steered to the right path of democratization... After the Constitutional Court decision, we cannot just sit and wonder which constitution will govern our lives. We have found ourselves in a judicial vacuum, and this can cause various negative consequences. So I believe that the speedy referendum was an absolutely correct decision... The president becomes a growing, understanding person moving forward into the future. The last 2.5 years taught him a good political lesson and as I understand he wants to remain in history. He wants to introduce real changes toward development and democratization of the society.

Interview with Rosa Otunbaeva, Sept.20, 2007, *BPC*

This statement comes Rosa Otunbaeva, one of the March 2005 Revolution leaders, who was after the revolution appointed the Minister of Foreign Affairs but then parted ways with the president and became a co-leader of an opposition party. While some analysts were surprised by her favorable assessment of the Referendum initiative, others said that it was not totally unexpected. In December 2007 parliamentary elections Otunbaeva became a parliament member from the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK). The party used to be in opposition to the president but ultimately joined the ranks of parties that supported the idea of the referendum from the time it was announced.

Otunbaeva received her spot on the SDPK list after one of the party leaders was disqualified for allegedly having a double citizenship with Kazakhstan. As one of the newspaper's editors put it,⁵ "after all, Kyrgyz politics is more about deals and bargains rather than promoting true democratic values and principles."

⁵ Personal interview, December 17, 2007. The editor agreed to give an interview under the condition of confidentiality.

Table 1.4.8. Frames Relating to President Bakiev’s Actions and Motivations

#	Negative frame	Number of stories found in	Positive frame	Number of stories found in
1.	Aiming at creating a “pocket” parliament through (a) Creating own party that will get the majority of seats in the parliament and follow presidential orders	6 11	Creating a responsible, representative and supportive parliament through (a) Creating a party of and for the people, a party of supporters that will implement presidential policies and set up good order in society	4 5
2.	Creating authoritarianism, super-presidentialism, monarchy, dictatorship, or “façade” democracy	32	Moving to “enlightened authoritarianism,” “sovereign” democracy, strengthening the state, bringing security and stability	14
3.	Consolidating more power, usurping power	17	Consolidating the society, taking responsibility into one’s hands	18
4.	Tailoring the constitution for own needs	5	Completing the long-overdue constitutional reform	9
5.	Weakening and eliminating political opposition	8	Creating opportunities for better coordination and cooperation with other branches of power, eliminating unconstructive radical opposition	6
6.	Building vertical power structure, acquiring more control over local government	4	Improving local governance through stronger and more accountable local executive bodies that will meet the people’s needs	14
7.	Rushing events out of despair to stay in power in anticipation of harder economic times; losing support among people	4	Speeding up the reform to fulfill the promise to the people; growing as a leader and strategist	8
8.	Unable to tolerate and work with the opposition, to respond to criticism and to improve the people’s well-being	6	Putting an end to political conflicts so that attention and effort can be focused on economics	8
9.	Manipulating the trust of the people by asking to approve overly complex legislation	4	Soliciting support for initiatives and legitimization of the new Constitution draft from the people who elected him	6
10.	Game metaphor: preventive strike, distraction maneuver	2	Getting ahead in the game, making a quicker move, outwitting the opposition	3

Finally, one more frame that deserves a closer look is the opposition's projections that President Bakiev was going to create a "pocket," easy-to-manipulate parliament through establishing his own presidential party that would take the majority of seats in the new parliamentary elections. As the leader of the United Front Opposition Movement Felix Kulov stated at a press conference after the referendum,

The referendum and its preceding events showed that the presidential administration bet the bank. If they get less than 50 per cent of votes, the opposition forces in the new parliament will raise the issue of a pre-term presidential election, since the new Constitution expands the president's authority. This is why it is necessary [for the presidential party] to get the majority of votes, to block any decisions by the opposition if it gets to the parliament. Therefore, the issue of getting more than 50 per cent of votes for the executive power is the issue of life and death.

"Ar-Namys' Party Will Run for Parliament, Possibly with Another Party,"
Oct.23, 2007, *AKI-Press*

Political journalist Semetei Amanbekov also expressed the widely shared concern about the upcoming parliamentary elections, but went further to draw a parallel between President Bakiev's actions and the pre-revolutionary events in 2005:

The party in power will get the most seats in the new parliament. Those in the opposition who did not switch camps will not be let into the parliament. This means that in our time when everything is sold and bought, representatives of major businesses will get into the legislature (again!). This situation is similar to the parliamentary elections in 2005. At that time the experiment resulted into multitude of opposition protests and the March 24, 2005 coup with the complete failure of the previous regime. Will the situation repeat this time?

"Will Bakiev become his own party's general secretary and Kyrgyzbashi of all Kyrgyz people?" Sept 21, 2007, *Komsomolskaya Pravda in Kyrgyzstan*

The state and conformist newspapers dismissed these concerns again by quoting President Bakiev, this time from his program speech at the founding congress of the Ak-Jol party on October 15, 2007:

The party's name has two main meanings: first of all we created a party of the people and for the people. I see this as your role and mine. The second meaning is movement forward, aimed at development and future of Kyrgyzstan. I am sure that our path will be clear and bright and will lead our country to great prosperity.

We need a party exactly like this. You know that we have over 100 parties. But what of them? Among them, there are very few that would be brave enough to take responsibility for everything that happens.

"Clear Path You Are Taking, Comrades!" Oct.16, 2007, *MSN*

At best, everyone is simply criticizing the executive power and our mistakes. And who will and should make things happen? Until today, there was no political force in the country that would undertake the work, achieve the goals and meet the challenges the country faces. This is why I myself made a decision to create it as a new political force, a party of creation, responsibility and action.

"President's Speech at Ak-Jol Founding Congress," Oct.15, 2007, *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*

The message here is clear: a new party, of the people and for the people is needed to move the country forward. Given how the party was created, from the name announcement through founding congress to legal registration in one day, and how quickly it expanded its membership in less than a week before the Referendum, no one doubted that it would indeed take the majority of seats in the new parliament.

One peculiarity of Kyrgyzstan's journalism should help put all these various frames into a perspective. The concept of balanced stories has not taken root in local newspapers, and this is why the coverage usually presents only one side of the story. Moreover, as the analysis above shows, the newspapers prefer to quote directly the experts and public figures they interview or record at press conferences, without much elaboration or analysis of what is being said.

They do this because they operate in a highly sensitive political environment, under the constant pressure of libel law and accusations of inaccuracy. If they present the other side's viewpoint, they usually do it in a sarcastic and mocking tone. One last example of a frame relating to President Bakiev is illustrative of this misbalance. In an editorial, *MSN* attempted to summarize all the opposition's claims and concerns about the Constitution draft:

The most criticism is around the [draft constitution's] article on parliamentary elections and power of the executive and legislature, i.e. president and parliament.

The parliamentarians, already caught in the pre-election fever, maintain that the draft Constitution submitted to the Referendum will turn Kyrgyzstan toward dictatorship and away from democracy. To sum up all the claims and statements of the opposition, the following picture emerges: we are under a threat of a one-party state headed by an autocrat plus absolutely spineless government and "pocket" parliament.

Moreover, as they claim, we have such weak parties that they will not be able to compete meaningfully for the electorate's votes, and for prevalence in the parliament. This is why it is too early to form the parliament by party lists only. When such statements are uttered, and, as a rule, by the opposition that wanted to get everyone "down with," [from the power structures] it is extremely surprising.

"Uncertainty Does Not Work," Sept.28, 2007, MSN

Using a mocking and sarcastic tone, the editorial simply laundry lists the key concerns discussed in this framing analysis earlier, without giving them any due consideration or benefit of analysis, bluntly dismissing them as "surprising" and laughable. This journalistic "device" is widely used in Kyrgyzstan's journalism by both oppositional and pro-governmental sources, and the readers are left with their own judgment (or lop-sided information, in case when they have no access to alternative sources of view) to decide whose wit is on top of the situation.

As for the frames relating to the Parliament, here the most prevailing frame was neutral, simply stating that the Constitutional Court decision renders the parliament illegitimate. This frame was used by both the state and independent sources, and of 150 stories in the sample that tried to make sense of what the decision meant for the Parliament, 78 used the neutral frame (see Table 1.4.9).

In their analysis, all sources using the neutral frame were unanimous in the opinion that if the Referendum approved Bakiev's Constitution draft, the pre-term Parliament's dissolution and new parliamentary elections would be inevitable. To understand the neutrality of the frame, it is necessary to remember that this parliament had been elected under the first president, Askar Akaev, and in many ways was the reason for the March 2005 revolution. It was always referred to as "Akaev parliament"

and perceived as unconstructive and self-serving, comprised of businessmen⁶ and mafia who had bought their seats and manipulated the voting process. This also explains why six stories in the sample used a strongly negative frame stating that the parliament poorly represented the people and deserved to be dissolved. As one of the political activists of a younger generation and member of Social Democratic Party Edil Baisalov noted after the parliament was dissolved upon the results of the referendum,

The parliament's dissolution was absolutely predictable and did not come unexpected. To be honest, no one in Kyrgyzstan is crying about this parliament. Of course, I feel bad for some deputies, among them there were many of my good comrades, many a good parliamentary star, and I don't think all of them will come back to parliament. However this Parliament buried itself in December last year, and the fact that it was dissolved and not self-dissolved is the result of its actions last year. They should have announced pre-term parliamentary elections then or fought for the November constitution with everything they had. This disgraceful end was predicted last December. Already at that time people said that it [the parliament] was incompetent and morally and politically bankrupt.

Interview with Baislalov, Oct.22, 2007, *BPC*

What Baisalov means here is that when the Parliament bargained with the presidential administration under the threat of dissolution in December 2007, it gave in to the self-preservation instinct rather than the interests of the people it was supposed to represent. As a result, the parliament lost its trust and credibility with the people.

However, many analysts argued there were still groups in the parliament that actively opposed the president, and such opposition was valuable simply because it existed, if nothing else. As an opposition parliament member put it, the parliament's dissolution created political uncertainty and the situation where the president had unlimited power since he would perform the legislative function as well in the absence of a parliament:

⁶ This was also the only of four Kyrgyz parliaments since independence that had no women in it.

“Now our president is the tsar and God, because his decree will be the highest law in the land, superseding the Constitution. The actions and decision by the head of the state will fully depend on his whim, on what kind of mood he has in the morning or evening. Today, the president's options are limited only by his fantasies. We may see some totally unexpected actions...”

Interview with Parliament member Alymbekov, Oct.27, 2007, *BPC*

In response to this, the pro-presidential minds kept saying that the political uncertainty was only temporary and elimination of this uncertainty was the reason to conduct parliamentary elections as soon as possible. This situation was actually favorable, they would say, because it cleared the field for new political players, i.e. the parties that were going to run for parliament. Moreover, because after the Referendum's approval of the Election Code the parliamentary elections will be based on party lists, the country and the people now had a chance at better legislature:

Kyrgyzstanis now have a chance to change everything for the better. The recent unification of the political forces of the country and the upcoming elections by party lists will inevitably filter out "the political nutshells" and will bring into the Parliament (and local bodies) not the populists and dilettantes as it happened often before, but professionals aimed at a comprehensive reform of the economy.

"We've Made Our Choice, It's Time to Get to Work," Oct.24, 2007, *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*

Not everyone, however, shared this optimism. The reason largely was that with the use of the notorious administrative resource, the presidential Ak-Jol party expanded its membership aggressively, often by forcing government employees to join. It was also favored by all executive levels that had control over the parliamentary election campaign, starting from venues for meetings with the electorate and ending with air time on radio and TV and printing of party publications in state-run print shops.

Many president's critics said that the parties from the very beginning had an unequal start, and projected that Ak-Jol would take the majority of the seats in the parliament, with the help of the administrative resource:

Ak-Jol and other two or three pro-presidential parties may receive a majority in the parliament. At least, the executive power is sure it will achieve this. As you saw, the referendum showed 80 per cent turnout, but there are not that many people in Kyrgyzstan now. I thought they'd do 60-65 per cent, but they aimed higher and produced 80 per cent!

Interview with Ata-Meken party leader Chotonov, Oct.22, 2007, BPC

For the most part, the president's supporters would ignore these projections and shift focus to the new opportunities that the Electoral Code provided for the parties.

Table 1.4.9. Frames Explaining What Constitutional Court/Referendum Decisions Mean for the Parliament

#	Negative frame	Number of stories found in	Positive frame	Number of stories found in
1.	<u>Neutral frame</u> : the Constitutional Court and Referendum decisions make the current parliament illegitimate; pre-term dissolution and new elections are therefore inevitable			78
2.	Parliament becomes illegitimate, political uncertainty	4	Uncertainty is temporary, gives a chance for a better legislature	18
3.	Unequal conditions at start, one party will get it all	11	Competition among parties, party pluralism, stronger individual parties	8
4.	Elections will be even more rigged than the Referendum	3	End of tribalism and regionalism in parliament elections on individual tickets	5
5.	Parliament will lose its powers, will play by Bakiev's rules	12	Parliament will share responsibility, improve local governance	5
6.	Parliament poorly represented people in the first place, deserved to be dissolved	6	<i>Total stories with both negative and positive frames</i>	150

Since the elections will be proportionate and based on party lists, the president's supporters maintained, it will allow for better competition among parties, party pluralism, and strengthening and maturation of existing parties. As the Movement for Constitutional Reform and Development put it in its triumphant and optimistic address to the nation immediately after the Referendum,

October 21 Referendum and the constitutional reform have set the country's course for the future. Now we all together will be able to direct our abilities and energy for the development of the economy and the country's movement forward. We want and we need to create party pluralism, support the responsible and effective executive, achieve consolidation of all political forces and the society.

Oct.23, 2007, *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*

Again, the president's opponents did not share this optimism, concerned about the openness and transparency of the upcoming elections. As parliamentarian Baibolov warned, the power of administrative resource could create an even more authoritarian regime, unless all protest electorate united and voted against Ak-Jol:

Much depends on what kind of elections we will have. If the elections were democratic and open, the opposition would get 80 per cent of the parliament seats. But in our conditions, when a hammer is the authorities' main tool, the situation will develop differently. Most probably, the Kyrgyz tolerant mentality will allow the authoritarian regime to exist for some time. If the protest electorate does not unite to act as one front, we'll have problems.

Interview with parliamentarian Baibolov, Sept.21, 2007, *24.kg*

Another frame where both camps agreed is that electing parliamentarians by party lists would produce a better legislature. Several parties, both supporting and opposing the presidential policies, came together in the following statement:

Elections by a majority vote in single-ticket districts have resulted into flourishing of clan interests and strengthening of regionalism, unrestrained ambitions of certain politicians. Taking this into account, we, representatives of political parties, despite the diversity of opinions and views, are united in our support for the timely implementation of the Referendum and urgency of the issues it is to resolve.

"Several Political Parties Support the Idea of Referendum," Sept.25, 2007,
Fergana.ru

The party-lists proportionate representation seemed better than the previous single-mandate system with its wide-spread vote-buying, pressure on the members of the same clan, and regionalism. However, after the Referendum president's opponents doubted that the new electoral system will fix the election problems like a magic wand.

On the contrary, as an independent journalist Oleg Pankratov noted, with the extent of the administrative resource the executive power utilized to get the Referendum approval, it became clear that the opposition already lost the parliamentary elections:

This new 'success' of the president and his team should be a good lesson for the opposition. The opposition leaders' naïveté starts to bore already. All opposition parties let the referendum 'fly by' in the hope to retaliate at the parliamentary elections. However, the referendum was not only a way to legitimize authoritarianism. This was a rehearsal for the parliamentary elections. Obvious shortcomings visible even to unsophisticated ordinary people will be carefully polished. At the parliamentary elections the script will be more elaborate, the actors will hone their skills and roles, and the administrative resource at work will look like 'the triumph of democracy and truly authentic expression of the people's will.' So, dear opposition representatives, get ready for the next failure!

"Preliminary results of the referendum. Projections or...", Oct. 22, 07,
Centrasia.ru

This gloomy projection came true when the presidential Ak-Jol party took 71 (78 per cent) of the 90 seats in the new parliament as a result of December 16, 2007 elections.

The remaining frame listed in Table 1.4.9 (Item 5) closely relates to the "authoritarianism – sole responsibility" frame discussed earlier. The differences are that it is focused on the parliament rather than on the president and that in both the negative and positive frame the parliament is given a secondary role, whether it is to merely validate the president's policies or to share the responsibility with him.

To summarize, the frames relating to the parliament were not as strong, intense and polarized as the frames relating to the president. This is partly due to the fact that from the very beginning the parliament was thought of as the one the country was stuck with because of the legal complexities after the March 2005 Revolution, but it never represented the people well. This is why when the parliament was dissolved after the referendum, very few experts went beyond discussing the individual personalities and the parliament-president stand-off. One of such experts was a constitutional lawyer Gulnara Iskakova:

The parliament's dissolution is a result of a serious political crisis... and in our case – the power struggle against Bakiev and his political whim... Parliamentary elections by party lists will not be a step toward democratization and stability, but more tightening the screws... On the grand scale of things, all our constitutional struggles were about one dilemma: whether the president shares the access to power (i.e., to economic resources as well) or he does not share with anybody. He has chosen the second. But the people would have been better off with the first.

Interview with Gulanara Iskakova, Oct.24, 2007, *Delo* #

Iskakova correctly pointed out that the dissolution was a structural crisis that would effect the Kyrgyz democracy overall and a power-sharing agreement between the president and Ak-Jol party. Indeed, as the recent events show, the parliament simply performs the function of validating presidential administrations' decisions. For instance, on April 10, 2008, the Parliament ratified the border agreement with Kazakhstan, according to which some of the Kyrgyz lands will be given to the neighboring republic. This decision was made amidst protests from the non-Ak-Jol party members and was met with the indignation by many experts and citizens on various Internet forums.

Finally, the frames relating to the people and democracy were fewer to be found. Of the total 212 sample stories, 93 tried to make sense of what the referendum initiative meant for the people (see Table 1.4.9). Of the four frames, two (Items 3 and 4) were the variations of the frames discussed earlier in this analysis relating to authoritarianism and party pluralism. The most important two frames that were persistent in the stories and different from the frames discussed earlier were (1) the ability of the people to navigate in the complex political environment and make an intelligent, educated decision at the Referendum and (2) people's function as the ultimate carriers of democracy (see Items 1 and 2 in Table 1.4.10). These frames deserve closer analysis.

In the first case, the human rights activists were concerned that Kyrgyzstanis had neither enough time to study the draft legislation nor sufficient expertise to understand its complexities. A number of NGOs have put together an address to President Bakiev

with a request to postpone the referendum for a later date because "The people of the Kyrgyz Republic, as the only carrier of power, must have all opportunities to discuss the Constitution and the Election Code drafts and make a conscious and intelligent choice of the system of governance."⁷ As the Director of Citizens Against Corruption Center Ismailova stated, the rushed presidential decision threatened the entire democratic system in Kyrgyzstan, having put a heavy decision-making burden on the people:

How is it possible to have a referendum where the citizens of Kyrgyzstan are supposed to say literally 'yes' or 'no' on the entire new Constitution draft and Election Code? There's nothing like this in any country of the world. Of course the procedures are violated. A referendum with no democracy is a violation of the standards for honest, transparent procedures for adoption of the new constitution. Why is the highest power of the country not meeting its international obligations, ignores opinion of the public and does not consult with all interested parties, but simply imposes a referendum? This is a clear threat to the political pluralism, development of pluralism, democratic parliamentarianism and civil society.

"Deuche Welle: Kyrgyzstan is not ready for Referendum," Oct.4, 2007, *Centrasia.ru*

Again, the president's supporters responded to this with the trusted device – the use of sarcasm and mockery:

...perpetually disagreeing human rights advocates and some oppositionists who survived the political battles loudly maintain that it is not proper to make the people vote on the Constitution and Election Code. Allegedly, the ordinary people will not be able to understand the legal 'forest' and to find a way out of the constitutional maze, while even sophisticated scientists and legal experts are still lost among the three threes. And in general, this is not for the people to decide.

...But... as it turns out Kyrgyzstanis (the voters comprise about 3.5 million not taking into account the citizens of Kyrgyzstan who work and reside abroad), worn out by endless street Maidans, will be happy to go in neat lines to the Referendum and vote for the Constitution favored by the politicians, lest to be swept by the protest psychosis again.

"Constitution? There is no alternative," Oct.2, 2007, *MSN*

They also quoted President Bakiev to point out what was obvious to them but not to the president's opponents:

⁷ "Civil society requests to recall President Bakiev's Decree on Referendum," Sept.21, 2007, *24.kg*

This draft Constitution has been born in suffering, and there is enough time for the people to study it before the Referendum. We've been discussing this for two years now, people are already in the know

“Bakiev: I Will Not Stay President a Single Day Beyond My Term,” Sept.24, 2007, *Obschestvenny Rating*

This widely-shared belief by the president’s supporters that the people have been following the debate around the constitutional reform was, however, overestimated: as the exit polls at the Referendum showed, most people did not know what the changes in the Constitution were about, they simply voted “for” because they wanted peace and stability. As the OSCE/ODIHR report on the pre-term parliamentary election stated,

The conduct of the referendum was criticized by domestic observers and representatives of the international community in Bishkek. Observers also said that the contents of the documents adopted by referendum were largely unknown to citizens (OSCE/ODIHR, Nov. 2008, p.3).

However, the president’s supporters insisted a broad discussion of the constitution draft was not necessary because it had been discussed enough. More important, in their opinion, was that the people were given a chance to end the political battles and instability, as well as to participate in shaping the system of governance (Frame 2):

For the people, it is important to put a stop to the [political] arguments. They do not care who will be in power. They prefer one ruler, not the crowd that has so many varying opinions that it is impossible to reach a compromise. A citizen desires to get a law providing a mechanism for its realization. The people want to be sure that the authority they delegated to their government representatives can be revoked using the law rather than the street power. For example, currently the Kyrgyz representatives are simply impossible to recall. Only to take out by force. But to say good-bye to their representatives should be, just as Ostap Bender advised, similar to parting with money – easy and without moans. Especially because our life is such that the laws for the common good are written by one category of people while the others have to live by them.

“Law?-Here's the law! The country before the referendum,” Oct.1, 2007, *Kabar*

There is a subtle irony that this passage quotes Ostap Bender, a fictional character from a satirical Soviet novel, who was and is still considered to be an unsurpassed

master of elegant and refined charlatanism. Not to read too deep into the meaning, the question a critical reader would ask is to what extent the government is willing and able to fool, similarly to Ostap Bender, its own people. Another question is why the author is concerned about no mechanism to recall the parliament members, but fails to mention that no Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic had a mechanism to impeach the president.

Of course, the president's proponents also knew how to use the "correct" rhetoric of citizen participation, without evoking the double reading of what is being said. Here is an example from a report on the referendum process, where a very optimistic mayor of Bishkek Daniar Usenov happily reported no violations observed in the city and proceeded to make this up-beat statement:

This issue [constitutional reform] should have been resolved a long time ago. The constitutional process has been long overdue, and the main law of the country has been turned into a subject of political bargaining in the race for political scores. In the end, the people is the only source of the state power, not a handful of politicians, and only the people will decide which Constitution will govern and develop the country.

"'Yes' from the People," Oct.23, 2007, MSN

More sober independent journalists, however, correctly predicted that people will be used again as a toy in the political games and will be deceived by the endless promises of better life. As Elena Avdeeva, chief editor of *Bely Parohod*, noted in one of her editorials after the Referendum and in anticipation of the parliamentary elections, ultimately nothing will change, if not become worse because of the worsening economic situation and failed state policies:

Both you, my dear and much-suffering people, and I will have to wait just a little bit more [till parliamentary elections]. Well, we'll wait. Although you and I won't be asked about anything any more, they have already decided everything. The Parliamentary elections will be announced valid with 75 per cent turnout. And of course, you, my people, will vote in the 'overwhelming majority' for the presidential party. Who will suppress whom in this – the answer is clear... Presidential dictatorship will be declared the people's will.

And you, my people, will not be surprised, or at least you won't be thinking about that. Because in the winter there will be no gas and power in the country...
 “Migrating Eagles, or When Is the Abroad Going to Help Kyrgyzstan?” Oct.24, 2007, *Bely Parohod*

At the end of the article, Avdeeva concludes that the government of Kyrgyzstan had mismanaged the country so badly and drove it into such a serious crisis that only an immediate and urgent interference by the international community could help recover the situation (hence the title).

Table 1.4.10. Frames Explaining What Constitutional Court/Referendum Decisions Mean for the People and Democracy

#	Negative frame	Number of stories found in	Positive frame	Number of stories found in
1.	Not enough time to study the Constitution draft; no expertise to evaluate its advantages and shortcomings	9	People do not need much time, since the constitutional reform and the draft has been discussed for 2.5 years; expertise not needed as only approval in principle is solicited	4
2.	People are easy to manipulate, which showed in the rigged referendum; treated as a toy in political games; the government betrayed the people's trust, threw a direct challenge to them	26	People are given a chance to decide and participate in governance, to exercise their ultimate power as carries of democracy; thus the government shows the highest level of trust in the people	16
3.	After the referendum: worse life, increased poverty, increased displeasure with government	11	Improved life, stable political and economic development, unification of society	13
4.	Fatigued of uncertainty, political battles and stand-offs, people will vote for anything	6	End of political battles will bring better representation in parliament, people will make conscious choices of candidates from the political parties	8
<i>Total:</i>				93

While Avdeeva was criticized from all sides, including the opposition, that her appeal was undermining the sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan as an independent country, her

sharp observation on the power of manipulation (“presidential dictatorship will be declared the people’s will”) is valuable, especially because hers was the only newspaper that transmitted it into the open, off-line world of Kyrgyzstan’s politics and public life.

To summarize, this analysis of what a specific government decision (Referendum initiative) means for the key players – the president, the parliament, and the people – shows that the media coverage was extremely polarized and almost perfectly mirrored: for every negative frame from the president’s opponents, his supporters produced a rough equivalent on the positive side. The differences were in the emphasis and intensity of each frame, as well as in the message dominance and frequency of use.

To leave off this part of the analysis, I would like to conclude with a quote from a political analyst Tamerlan Ibraimov, who was among the very few able to maintain a detached and fair point of view on the Kyrgyz governments’ political short-sidedness:

...the proposed [Constitution] draft reflects the state of things in this very short period of time. It gives considerable powers to the president, creates obstacles for opposition and does not allow any of the branches of power to balance the others... It does not reflect the real composition and disposition of political forces, if we look into the country's future even half a year ahead. There are significant power forces disagreeing with the draft and they will fight for their position. Their opinion was not taken into account, and this is a source of future conflicts.

“Constitutional Reform in Kyrgyzstan Is a Crisis We Cannot Overcome,”
Oct.10, 2007 24.kg

Ibraimov’s predictions seem to be coming true: four months after the parliamentary elections, the government of Kyrgyzstan has not been able to resolve the energy crisis and to improve the economy, the parliament is simply ratifying the president’s decisions on border agreements and privatization of important infrastructural assets, and the opposition is gaining its momentum in gathering the largest organized congresses of people’s delegates from various regions of the country since before the March 2005 Revolution.

1.5 Conclusions

This chapter presented a content analysis of the media messages covering a decision of the president of Kyrgyzstan to enlist support of his nation in adopting a crucial piece of legislation. The new legislation – a new version of the Constitution and the Election Code – on the one hand effectively restored the parliamentary system through reinstating elections by party lists, but on the other hand expanded the president's authority to appoint key positions in the government and to form his own party that later became a majority party in the parliament. In a country like Kyrgyzstan, where democracy has not taken deep root yet, such decisions may result into negative consequences and a slide to authoritarianism.

The media, with their power to shape perceptions of such events for the people, play a crucial role in whether the president's decision will be supported. The government controls, directly or indirectly, most of the media space in Kyrgyzstan, and the logical assumption of this research project was that the online media, which remain largely free of government control, would be more critical in their evaluations of the president's initiatives in terms of good governance practices.

The findings from the analysis of 212 media stories covering the referendum and relating events have shown that the mode of production – print or online – defines how critically the media in general evaluated the government actions in terms of good governance, but not the evaluation of the Constitutional Court/Referendum decision. However, a much stronger predictor of both overall evaluation of government actions and specific assessment of the Constitutional Court/Referendum decision is the source independence from the government control. This is not surprising and does not contradict logic – an independent source, print or online, is expected to take a more critical stance towards the government by definition.

Another significant finding from this research project is that the state-controlled and conformist media were more likely to give positive evaluations of the president's initiatives, thus reinforcing the status quo, according to Ross & Bantimaroudis (2006) function of framing. This is extremely important in the environment where the independent media are cornered into a very small niche and have a much lower impact than the state and conformist sources that traditionally have larger readerships. It is, perhaps, these sources' visibility and domination in the public domain that at least partly explain why the citizens of Kyrgyzstan supported the president's initiative through the referendum – they were simply not exposed to alternative interpretations and explanations. And those who were, preferred not to vote at all, having given up their vote to the skillful use of the notorious administrative resource.

Interestingly enough, it is the reporting of the use of administrative resource, i.e. the ability of the executive bodies to influence the outcome of elections in various forms, that supported the initial hypotheses of this paper: the online sources and sources with lower off-line impact potential were more likely to report the administrative resource use. Since this is a most serious violation that took place during the referendum, it went largely unreported for the print media audiences. This means that the online media do demonstrate higher potential for critical evaluation of the government actions in light of good governance, especially when its principles are violated.

The key policy implication of this research is that independent media and independent media online in particular should be supported and developed in countries like Kyrgyzstan to provide alternative voices critically evaluating the government actions and initiatives in terms of good governance practices. Even though the online media impact is currently much lower than the print media, with the number of Internet users steadily growing this may be an effective way for the opposition to influence the

public, especially if the Internet users are willing to share the information they receive online with those who do not have access. Future research, however, should be conducted on to what extent the Internet users are interested in exerting such influence: many studies have shown that in general, the Internet users' motivation to participate in politics in post-Soviet emerging democracies is quite low.

The qualitative analysis of frames covering the referendum also confirmed that the state print newspapers that dominate the media market in Kyrgyzstan have constructed a totally opposite image of the decision to conduct the referendum and what it meant for good governance than the independent media, which mostly operate online. Thus, the alternative reality of the threats of authoritarianism constructed by the independent media was available mostly for those citizens who have the Internet access. This difference in the "realities" constructed by independent and state media is central to the thesis of this project (see Figure 2.2.2).

A limitation of this content analysis project is that it did not capture the coverage of the referendum and relating events and issues by the Kyrgyz-language press. Newspapers and websites in Kyrgyz are becoming more and more influential and visible, and their interpretation of events is not necessarily similar to the Russian-language press. A comparative analysis of media messages in Russian and Kyrgyz would be the next logical step for this study.

CHAPTER 2. PERCEPTIONS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AMONG THE TRADITIONAL AND INTERNET-BASED MEDIA USERS IN KYRGYZSTAN

2.1 Background and Definitions

After the breakdown of the Warsaw Pact and collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent post-communist countries had to choose a model for future development. All of them proclaimed that their goal was to build a democracy with the understanding that it would take several years of transition to liberalize the economy and set up the necessary political, social and judiciary institutions and practices.⁸ Almost 20 years later, only a handful of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the post-Soviet Baltic republics⁹ can claim that they have achieved this goal, having consolidated their democracies. Others, including the countries of interest for this research project, are still in the period of transition with varying degrees of democratic reforms and successes.

For the purposes of this study, the classical definitions of democracy and consolidated democracy will be used, even though the latter has been recently contested (but not refuted) on two grounds. First, the critics of consolidation maintain, there may be different varieties of consolidated democracies that do not fit one definition. Second, the accepted definitions of consolidation have created certain “illusions” about the process without providing clear theoretical and practical policy mechanisms for an

⁸ Freedom House, a US-based NGO, evaluates freedom in all countries of the world on several dimensions, including political rights, civil liberties, development of civil society and independent press, corruption, etc. It issues an annual report, Nations in Transit, specifically designated to the countries in transition, i.e. 29 countries that appeared on the world map after the collapse of the Soviet Union and breakdown of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. According to the report, which provides a careful analysis of the countries’ legal and governance systems, all 29 are proclaimed constitutional democracies.

⁹ These countries’ achievements in democratization were recognized with the European Union membership: Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

institutionalized electoral democracy to become a consolidated democracy (O'Donnell, 2001, pp.124-125). This debate, however, is beyond the scope of this project for which the notion of consolidation is still useful.

2.1.1. Definitions

The definition of *democracy* that this study is based upon was formulated by one of the leading modern theorists of democracy Juan Linz, who adopted Robert Dahl's classical attributes of polyarchy¹⁰ and incorporated complex ideas and realities of modern democratic regimes. According to this definition, a regime can be regarded democratic when

... it allows for free formulation of political preferences, through the use of basic freedoms of association, information and communication, for the purpose of free competition between leaders to validate at regular intervals by nonviolent means their claim to rule... without excluding any effective political office from that competition or prohibiting any members of the political community from expressing their preference (1975, pp.182-83).

This demanding definition of democracy was developed shortly before the third wave of global democratization, which started in the last quarter of the 20th century in Latin America, and before the democratic theory caught up on the fact that even seemingly established and institutionalized democracies (Chile and Brasil, for example) can break down and experience enduring crises.

To close the gap, the younger generation of transitologists (i.e., theorists and scholars of democratic transition) took Linz's definition further, having added the consolidation dimension. *Consolidation* refers to stabilization, routinization, institutionalization, and legitimization of such political behavior patterns that would

¹⁰ The essential six attributes of polyarchy, as refined in Dalh's most recent work "On Democracy," include the following: 1) elected representatives, 2) free, fair and frequent elections, 3) freedom of expression, 4) alternative information, 5) associational autonomy, and 6) inclusive citizenship. (1998, p.93).

prevent internal breakdowns of democracies and their reversals to an authoritarian rule.

Specifically, a democratic regime is considered consolidated when

...all politically significant groups regard its key political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political contestation, and adhere to the democratic rules of the game (Cunther, Diamondouros, & Puhle, 2001, p.133).

The concept of consolidation became so widely accepted in the modern democratic theory that it provided a key dimension for the typology of political systems ranging from consolidated autocracies to consolidated democracies. This typology is used for international assessments of the status of democracy in the world by organizations like Freedom House and United Nations (see Figure 2.2.1 below).

The typology implies that the ideal movement of any country in transition from a totalitarian or authoritarian rule should be toward a consolidated democracy. As it was already pointed out, most of the countries of the former Soviet Union, except for the Baltic states, have made little progress in this direction. Moreover, countries like Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus have slid into authoritarian modes. Their leaders have been using the concept of a managed democracy as a justification for their undemocratic practices. However, the conviction that a managed democracy is a viable temporary option for a country in transition has produced less impression on the outside observers than on these governments' own citizens.¹¹ Belarus, for instance, often referred to as the last dictatorship in Europe,¹² has not managed to convince its European neighbors that it has established an electoral democracy even with its institution of regular popular

¹¹ Kazakhstan and Belarus have been consistently ranked as "not free" in the Freedom House report *Freedom in the World* since 1994 and 1996 respectively and categorized as consolidated autocracies. Russia has been downgraded from a long-term "partly free" status (it has been characterized as a semi-consolidated autocracy since 1999) to a "not free" consolidated autocracy in 2005.

¹² For an illustration, see country reports on Belarus from the French NGO "Reporters without Borders" at <http://www.rsf.org>.

elections. And in Russia, the Public Chamber called upon the government to establish Russia's own monitoring system to evaluate the state of freedom in Western countries after Freedom House downgraded the country to the "not free" status in 2005.

To understand how and why managed democracy works in the post-Soviet space, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the concept and its definition.

2.1.2. Managed Democracy for Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes?

The origin of the term "managed democracy" is difficult to trace, but it is most widely associated with Indonesia's Gen. Suharno, to whom the concept is often attributed.¹³ In essence, managed democracy is a regime with all formally attributable democratic institutions, such as separate legislative, judiciary, and executive powers; regular contested elections and other forms of participation like referenda; diverse and private press; developed civil liberties such as freedom to travel, etc. At the same time, this type of regime is authoritarian at the core as it allows only limited and carefully controlled autonomy of democratic institutions (Pribylovsky, 2005). The public sphere in managed democracies is controlled through ownership and guidance of media.

Russia, which still determines and influences many political and economic processes in the former Soviet republics, revived the concept of managed democracy with President Putin's rise to power in 2000. It was subsequently embraced by other countries' long-term leaders who had solidified their super-presidential regimes – President Lukashenka of Belarus, President Kuchma of the Ukraine, President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan, President Shevardnadze of Georgia, President Aliev of Azerbaijan, and President Akaev of Kyrgyzstan.

¹³ A series of analytical articles on the Russian website "Democracy under Siege" (<http://osada.sova-center.ru/>) explain the term's etymology and provide a good overview of the history and principles of managed ("guided" in some other references) democracy.

The popular rationale behind managed democracy is that people in the post-Soviet countries, who had been suppressed under the totalitarian rule for over 70 years, are incapable of quickly changing their dependent mentality and becoming mature and responsible, self-governing citizens. Therefore, someone who legitimately represents them should have the temporary authority to guide the citizens in the process of democratic decision-making and to manage effective development of the fragile democratic institutions.¹⁴

It should be noted that consolidation of power under the executive in these countries started much earlier than Putin's rise to power. President Akaev, for example, started to change the Constitution to shift more powers from the legislature to the executive as early as in 1994. As Nichol (2007) points out, Akaev complained in 1994 that the first post-independence Constitution with extensive human rights protections and provided countervailing legislative powers "was too 'idealistic' since the Kyrgyz people are not prepared for democracy and said that a 'transitional period' was needed. He decreed referendums in 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2003 that whittled away legislative power" (p.2). However, it was with Putin's election as Russian president that the managed democracy came to use as a term. Lipman and McFaul explained well the managed democracy Russian style for Western readers:

...Putin seeks to undermine Russia's fragile and weak democratic institutions. Putin's spin doctors call the project 'managed democracy.' The system they seek to create will have all the formal institutions of democracy: elections, parties, media, civil society, and so on. But the real autonomy of these institutions and, therefore, their real capacity to influence the actions of the state will be severely limited. (2001, p.116)

¹⁴ Papp (2005) suggests that Chair of Effective Politics Foundation Gleb Pavlovsky, the Kremlin's key political strategist, and Director of the Political Research Institute Sergei Markov are the main ideologists of the managed democracy in Russia. They also often serve as political consultants to other post-Soviet quasi-democratic regimes.

Shevardnadze's Georgia before 2003 and Kyrgyzstan of the later Akaev's tenure in 2001-2005 represent examples of the managed democracy model. The 2006 *Countries at the Crossroads* report describes typical processes in these countries the for the case of Kyrgyzstan:

During the last five years of his rule [2000-05], Akaev steadily consolidated power and misused it to neutralize rivals, intimidate independent media, and manipulate the judiciary. As the international spotlight moved to Central Asia in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, both the United States and Russia established airbases in Kyrgyzstan as responses to the war on terrorism. These developments raised Akaev's profile on the world stage and emboldened him to clamp down on his domestic opposition still further. Meanwhile corruption, nepotism and graft flourished, blurring the boundaries between government and organized crime. The president's family and allies took control of many of the country's prime economic resources, hiding assets through dozens of shell companies, but their rapacity was growing blatant and their support was dwindling. Rigged elections, in which two of Akaev's children won seats in parliament, hinting the possibility of a dynastic succession, were the last straw [causing the revolution].

Freedom House, *Countries at the Crossroads*, 2006

Similar processes took place in the other two revolutionary countries – Georgia and Ukraine, and their leaders were using the democratic rhetoric and institutions in a similar way to cover up their pseudo-democratic practices. Indeed, the elections in all the three countries were regular and contested but manipulated so skillfully that even outside observers experienced trouble in collecting the evidence of fraud. Political parties existed and proliferated, but either had little effect in the legislature because the candidates preferred to run on a single-mandate rather than party-list tickets like in Kyrgyzstan, or represented a deal-lock, confrontational parliamentary oppositions in Ukraine and Georgia. The local media in all three countries were allowed certain degrees of freedom, but the national media were tightly controlled either through direct ownership or through state subsidies and harassment of independent media. The civil societies were represented by numerous and diverse NGOs, many of which were quasi-

NGOs created by pro-government circles to channel the grant money. At the same time, the citizens were free in their consciousness (religion), thinking, expression, and travel within and outside the country. In short, what was promoted as a democratic political system was in essence a weakened, semi-consolidated authoritarian rule.

2.2 Beyond Managed Democracy and Toward Consolidated Democracy

According to the classical democratic theory, the obvious discrepancy between what is allowed to individual citizens in terms of civil liberties and the abridged political rights, as well as the gap between the formal political systems with democratic rights and the actual political practices will inevitably result into internal tensions (Dahl, 1971, 1998). In the three “revolutionary” countries, these tensions and frustration with the manipulated parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia and presidential election in the Ukraine resulted into popular uprisings.

First was the 2003 “Rose Revolution” in Georgia, followed by the 2004 Ukrainian “Orange Revolution,” and, finally, the 2005 “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan. Again, an evaluation of the Ukrainian revolution by Freedom House provides a good illustration of how these changes were welcomed in the democratic world: “The extraordinary return of Ukraine to the path of freedom in 2004 may have opened the door to a new democratic spring in the 12 non-Baltic post-Soviet states” (NIT 2005, p.6). In Russia, the fear of “the orange plague,” as the leadership refers to the three revolutions cumulatively, was so strong that the Kremlin ideologists dropped the usage of the compromised term “managed democracy” and started to use more and more the term “sovereign democracy,” emphasizing Russia’s right to a unique democratic path and independence from democratic standards imposed by Western democracies.

It is widely believed now that the color revolutions represented the second way of democratization in the post-Soviet space, where the impoverished, disillusioned and

frustrated citizens lead by opposition toppled the semi-authoritarian and authoritarian rulers in the desire to change the regime toward building a true democracy. Currently, numerous questions and doubts are raised about the progress of these countries in the second democratization attempts.

In particular, concerns were raised by the “divorce” of the two revolution leaders in Ukraine in 2006 – President Yuschenko and Prime-Minister Timoshenko, who subsequently became a parliament member and one of the most active opponents to Yuschenko. Even though Timoshenko eventually became the prime-minister again through a power-sharing agreement, the obvious tensions between her cabinet and President Yuschenko over the stalling economic reforms and privatization of infrastructure do not add to strengthening of the Ukrainian democracy.

In Georgia, theorists and practitioners of democracy were concerned about the transparency of the 2007 presidential election that re-elected President Saakashvili amidst massive opposition protests. Additional concerns are raised by the fact that most of the seats in the parliament elected in May 2008 were taken by the ruling pro-presidential party, effectively shifting the political system from the parliamentary to a presidential one.

Finally, in Kyrgyzstan, the fight over the constitutional reform resulted into a violation of the power-sharing agreement between President Bakiev and Prime-minister Kulov (both had been elected to power on a united ticket in July 2005) as the latter resigned in 2006. The recent events with the October 2007 Referendum and pre-term parliamentary elections also raised concerns about the direction the Kyrgyzstan’s leadership is taking. More and more analysts today agree that Kyrgyzstan under the President Bakiev is farther from a true democracy than it ever was under the weak authoritarian leadership of President Akaev.

Figure 2.2.1 below is designed to demonstrate the chronological movement of the three countries on the democratic path in three stages: 1) toward democracy through a transitional order in 1991-1996, as a result of independence and rigorous democratic developments; 2) back to authoritarianism between 1996-2003, when the leaders in those countries usurped the power, amended the constitutions and manipulated elections; and 3) back to the democratic transitional order after the color revolutions starting in 2003 till present. To reflect the concerns formulated above, the projected movement toward consolidated democracy is shown with a dotted line and a question mark.

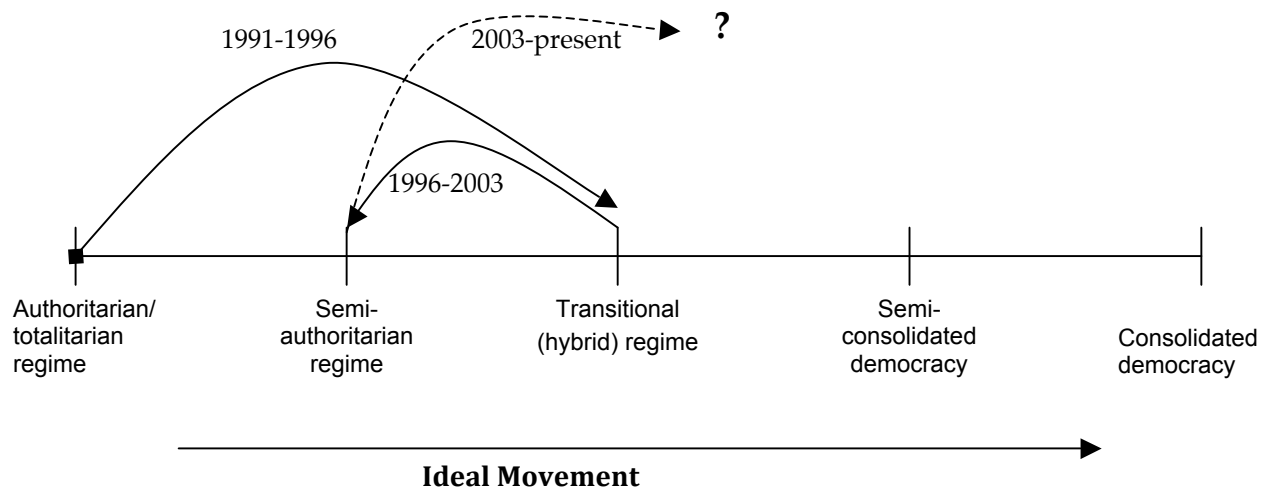


Figure 2.2.1. Actual Movement of Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan on Democratization Path

Despite considerations and concerns about the recent developments in the political arena, the rhetoric of revolutionary achievements and democratic reforms in all three countries is still strong and the governments continue to express their commitment to building a true democracy. As the content analysis of the Constitutional Referendum in Kyrgyzstan presented in Chapter 1 shows, such rhetoric can be quite effective in achieving the government's goals.

2.2.1. Government, Citizens and Reality Gaps

One helpful explanation of why managed democracy fails to work is a combination of the cognitive dissonance theory and Albert Hirschman's theory of response to declines in firms, organizations, and states. In a pseudo-democratic, semi-authoritarian regime the gap between the reality that people experience and the desired reality that the government projects with its democratic rhetoric is so large that it creates a mental discomfort, or cognitive dissonance, in citizens' minds (Festinger, 1947). The people know what is real as they have to face corruption, disrespect and violations of their rights and freedoms by the government on a daily basis, so the government-imposed view of reality does not settle with them well. Thus, the citizens may employ one of the three available options to remove the source of discomfort, in this case the government's lies and promises.

One of the options is to ignore the government-projected reality, which is only a temporary solution as what the government says defines so many societal processes that cannot be mentally put away, and sooner or later the people will have to either accept or reject this reality imposed on them. To accept the projected reality is an option exercised by many citizens hoping that life will become better if not with the current government, then with the one that will come to power in the next elections. It can be argued that it is this dashed hope caused by the governments' manipulation of elections that took many citizens to the street protests, thus turning to the third option for removal of dissonance – rejection of its source, i.e. false reality.

These options roughly correspond to Hirschman's responses to declining states – exit, voice and loyalty. Hirschman's theory is derived from economics, and exit is best understood as a metaphor for consumers' stopping to buy the product or service when its quality declines and there is competition in the market. Voice is exercised when the

consumers are so accustomed to the product and value it so much that they are ready to express their dissatisfaction in the hope that it will result into an improvement. If competition stimulates diversity of the products in the market, it is much easier for the consumers to exercise exit rather than voice – they simply start buying a better product and stop using the declining one. As Hirschman (1971) puts it, “the presence of exit option can sharply reduce the probability that the voice option will be taken up widely and effectively” (p.76).

Since a country is not a supermarket, the exit from it is more limited than an exit from a simple buying and selling relationship: “exit is ordinarily unthinkable, though not wholly impossible, from such primordial human groupings as family, tribe, church, and state” (Hirschman, 1971, p.76). However, such an exit is easier for ethnic minorities in a multi-ethnic state that have a “mother” country in which they can resettle. The fact that between 1992-2005 more than 400,000 Russians left Kyrgyzstan for Russia, about 40,000 Germans left for Germany and 27,000 Jews immigrated to Israel suggests that people do exercise this option. In Georgia, where the population is much more homogeneous, the exit option was exercised only by ethnic Russians, who always comprised less than 10 percent of the entire population and the separatist minorities – Osetins and Abkhaz, and in smaller numbers.

What decreases the possibility of exit and increases the possibility of voice is loyalty, or the feeling of attachment and affection, and in case of the states – patriotism. Loyalty and voice are interdependent, Hirschman argues, as a member loyal to the organization or the state

will often search for ways to make himself influential, especially when the organization moves in what he believes is the wrong direction; conversely, a member who wields (or thinks he wields) considerable power in an organization and is therefore convinced that he can get it ‘back on the track’ is likely to develop a strong affection for the organization in which he is powerful. (1971, p.78)

Hirschman further argues that loyalty is an extremely important element for a state as it not only holds exit constant and facilitates voice, but also because it can limit the tendency of the most quality-conscious citizens to be the first to exit. As a result of loyalty, these potentially most influential citizens

will stay on longer than they would ordinarily, in the hope or, rather, reasoned expectation that improvement or reform can be achieved “from within.” This loyalty, far from being irrational, can serve the socially useful purpose of preventing deterioration from becoming cumulative, as it so often does when there is no barrier to exit. (1971, p.79)

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, it can be argued, the massive exodus of ethnic minorities in 1992-2005, the brain drain of the most talented and capable youth and migration of laborers to the neighboring Kazakhstan and Russia testifies to the fact that loyalty in an impoverished and corrupt state can keep citizens at bay only temporarily, especially when the exit is not restricted by the state.

Thus, Hirschman’s explanation for the revolutions that took place in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan would be that the citizens’ loyalty activated massive voicing of dissatisfaction as a result of broken hopes for the change of power elites through honest elections and therefore any improvement of their experienced reality. The popular dissatisfaction was strong and significant enough to drive the entrenched presidents out of power, and in the case of Kyrgyzstan – out of the country.

2.2.2. Importance of Good Governance in a Democracy

A brief overview of the contemporary democratic consolidation theory presented above equips this research project with at least one useful assumption about the democratic and communicative processes in the post-Soviet countries that recently went through the second wave of democratization. This assumption is that shaking off the authoritarian rulers is not enough to become a democracy and the color revolutions

marked at best a return to the transitional phase rather than a step toward consolidated democracy.

If the three post-revolution countries – Georgia, the Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan – want to consolidate democracy, they must meet the three minimal conditions for an institutionalized electoral democracy, as suggested by Linz and Stepan (2001). First, they must establish and enforce true “*stateness*,” expressed in a strong, confident government resting on the majority’s support and rule of law. Second, they must *complete the democratic transition* by establishing fair and contested elections and efficient and separated executive, judicial, and legislative powers. Finally, they must develop a high level of *culture of democratic governance*, wherein the governing elites observe the constitution and rights of individuals and minorities, respect the legislature, tolerate criticism and pluralism of opinions, etc. (Linz & Stepan, 2001, p.94-95).

A considerable body of research in political science in general and transitology in particular focuses on the first two conditions – stateness and completed democratic transition – by analyzing the electoral and other political processes, development of democratic institutions and agents and their interrelations with the state, evolution and enforcement of rights and freedoms for individuals, etc. Volumes have written on the problems of democratic transition, comparative democratic progress and democratization in general through the prism of development of the state and civil society institutions (e.g, Vanhanen, 2003; Doorkenspleet, 2005; Lane & Ersson, 2003; Pinkney, 2005; O’Kane, 2004).

These studies of processes and political institutions provide useful insights into why most of the former Soviet republics found themselves “lost in transition.” However, they pay little attention to the culture of democratic governance, partly perhaps because this element is less quantifiable, not easily measurable and more

subjective. Based on the theoretical assumption that democratic consolidation is impossible without a high culture of democratic governance, or in simpler terms, good governance practices, the proposed study will focus on this last minimal condition for democracy as it requires the perceptual, attitudinal and behavioral changes that are the subject of interest for political communication researchers.

Some scholars and post-Soviet experts argue that the high level of culture of democratic governance may require a generational change in power elites, i.e. replacement of old “partocrats” with new democratically minded leaders.¹⁵ However, it is also reasonable to believe that good governance requires a shift in mentality and behavior on the part of not only the governing elites, who should strive for better performance and accountability, but also the governed themselves, who need to develop the sense of what good governance is and what kind of demands it puts on the power elites. Therefore, probing and monitoring of good governance perceptions among citizens is essential for new democracies so that the governments know how their citizens evaluate their performance and take corrective actions as necessary.

Based on the foundational concept of culture of democratic governance developed by Linz and Stepan and described above, as well as in consultations with the advisors for this project, the following elements of good governance have been identified as important in the post-Soviet context and essential for this study:

- Understanding, by both the power elites and the citizens, that the government in a democratic system is to serve rather than to rule the people;
- Accountability, transparency and openness of undertaken actions and initiatives;

¹⁵ Among the three color revolution countries, the generational change in power elites took place only in Georgia, where President Mikhael Saakashvili, a lawyer by education with a degree from Columbia University, brought in a team of young democratically-minded Western-educated and reform-oriented professionals to the highest government structures of the country.

- Observation of the Constitution and rights of individuals and minorities;
- Trust with the governed;
- Commitment to fight corruption;
- Tolerance to criticism from the media, civic groups and individuals;
- Fair and speedy treatment of citizens' grievances; and
- Public scrutiny of performance and campaign promises (usually translated into approval ratings in established democracies).

Obviously, many of these elements are interconnected and interrelated. For example, effective accountability is impossible without transparency and openness and has to deal with the trust by the governed. By the same token, commitment to fight corruption is useless without tolerance to criticism and public scrutiny of the government's performance, etc. None of these elements, however, is fully replaceable with another element as they all provide a unique dimension to good governance. Therefore, all of these elements were incorporated into good governance scales and indexes of the survey instrument to be used in this study (see Appendix C).

2.2.4. Role of Internet-Based Media in Democratization

The debate about the role of the Internet in democracy is ongoing. Some analysts suggest that by providing the virtually unlimited space for any information, the Internet encourages users to be researchers of information who have access to diverse and opposing points of view, thus encouraging the public debate on issues of importance (Burnett & Marshall, 2003, pp.159-161). Others object that the central features of the Internet such as anonymity and dispersion over time and space undermine the sort of the public sphere and political interaction that is required for genuine democratic participation and deliberation (Shapiro, 1999; Sunstein, 2001). Lasch, for example,

argues that it is exactly because of the vast and unlimited nature of the Internet that the content most important for public debates – news – is the least sought for, and since the Internet provides mostly raw, unprocessed, and often unverified news, it impedes rather than encourages the public debate (cited in Burnett & Marshall, 2003, p.160).

In this respect, it is useful to draw on Bohman's distinction between the intrinsic features and qualities of the Internet (hardware) and the space of publics, or people's uses and goals for the Internet (software). The hardware itself may be more conducive for the public debate compared to other media, but it will be a dead network of wired computers if the people do not fill it with meaning and actually engage in the debate (cited in Bucy & Newhagen, 2004, pp.131-132). In this sense, the researchers arguing that Internet has a potential for mobilizing people's agency in building strong communities, fostering civic participation through secure networks and even undermining the authoritarian regimes, are right (Davis et al., 2002; Kalathil & Boas, 2003). Further, it is reasonable to argue that where the governments control the traditional media through direct ownership, third persons or other means such as subsidies, but encourage or at least do not impede the development of Internet technologies, Internet-based media and their audiences may become a viable source of alternative information contrasting the official view transmitted by the government through the controlled media.

In the context of Kyrgyzstan, there is documented evidence that the websites of political movements, an opposition newspaper *Gazeta.kg* and advocacy blog *Akaevu.net* played a significant role in the March 2005 Revolution (Kulikova & Perlmutter, 2007). For the country with the Internet penetration rate of about 10-15 per cent,¹⁶ this impact

¹⁶ Internet World Statistics (<http://www.internetworldstats.com>), Freedom House, and CIA World Factbook report the 2005 Internet penetration rates in Georgia at 4%, in Kyrgyzstan – 5%. However, for Kyrgyzstan the reports by the major national ISPs such as KyrgyzTelecom and Asiainfo estimate the penetration rate of 10-15%.

may seem overestimated. However, the materials published on these oppositional sites were circulated in print and re-inserted into the off-line world, which makes the estimation of the true impact complicated.

With the Internet penetration rates in Kyrgyzstan slowly growing and the democratic rhetoric still a significant part of the public debate, it is reasonable to expect that the Internet will be playing an increasingly important role in constructing a reality alternative to the one projected by the government and closer to the reality actually experienced by the citizens. This understanding of the Internet media is key for the design and implementation of this project.

2.2.5. Synthesis: A Model of Governance, Realities and Options for Actors

The theoretical foundations from political science, mass communication and psychology presented in the literature review allow to synthesize the theories of good democratic governance, cognitive dissonance, information seeking, and citizens' behavioral options in a declining state into a single model. The model as applied to Kyrgyzstan is presented in Figure 2.2.2.

The government, whose goal is to stay in power and govern rather than resign before the term (the bracketed option), imposes its view of reality on the citizens. It does so with the help of the traditional media it controls through direct ownership, shield companies, subsidies, and unofficial agreements with the media managers. This imposed view of reality is molded by the normative understanding of good governance in a democratic system and the government's desire to appear as serving the needs and tending to expectations of the citizens. Since the government and its media are quite trained and experienced in democratic rhetoric, this constructed reality may in fact hold for some time until the citizens start to contrast it with their own experienced reality and alternative sources of information.

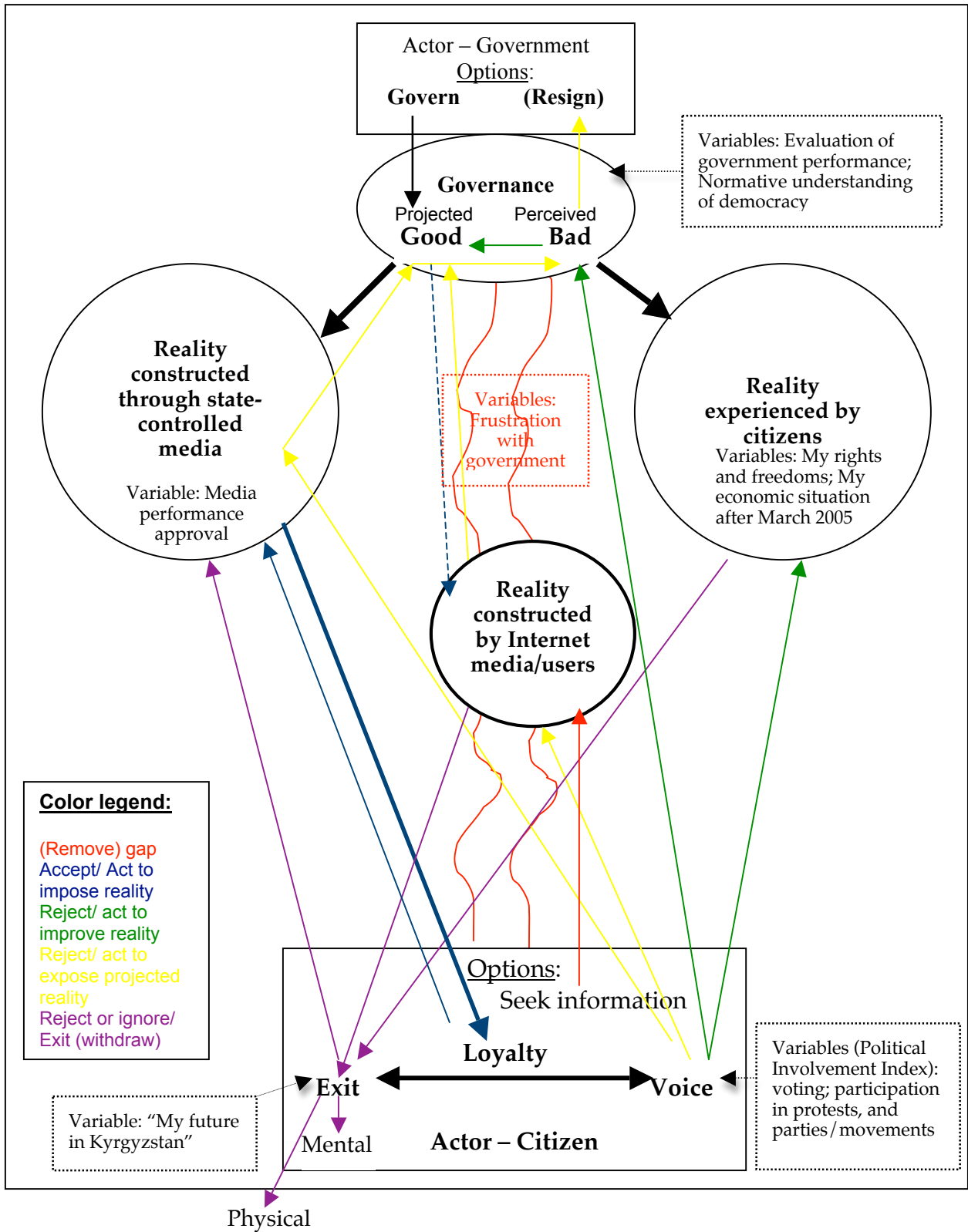


Figure 2.2.2. Reality, Governance and Options for Actors: Theoretical Model

In constructing the good governance reality, the government appeals to the citizens' loyalty, often blaming the previous regime, and evoking the feelings of patriotism and hope for a better future: 'the Akaevs have left the country in a mess. We are going through tough times, but this is our land and we need to overcome obstacles. We also need to be patient because any revolutionary change takes time to yield improvements.' A thick blue line in the model represents this relationship.

The government-constructed view of reality conflicts with the reality the citizens experience daily, as they continue facing pervasive corruption, decreasing living standards, rising consumer prices and unemployment rate, and other deteriorating conditions caused by bad governance practices. Many Internet forum commentators point out that the current government has not learned the lessons from the previous regime and continues doing what the Akaevs were doing, but with more greed and the heightened fear of being overthrown. However, they still use the rhetoric of the revolution and democracy as a shield and often appeal to citizens' feeling of loyalty and their own legitimacy ("the people have elected us in 2005, so we are a legitimate power acting in the interests of the people"). The two red wavy lines in the model symbolize the gap between the two realities, which creates a cognitive dissonance, or mental discomfort, in the citizens' minds. According to the cognitive dissonance theory, one of the three behavioral possibilities can help remove the dissonance.

The first one is to accept the view of reality imposed by the government (thin blue line in the model). This is the activated loyalty option, often taken up by those coming from the same clan as the ruling elite or having a relative in the government structure. This is not to say that this option is only for those who have some sort of personal stake in the government. Some people may activate the loyalty option because they believe in the government's good intentions (albeit accompanied by inexperience and inability to

govern) and the need to give it some time. Activating loyalty is probably the easiest way to remove the dissonance, as it only requires a mental effort of bridging the two realities together through self-persuasion.

The second option, represented by the purple lines in the model, is to reject the projected reality by exiting the system either physically by leaving the country or mentally by withdrawing into one's own life-world or focusing on something else, like education, family or making money. The real exit is more difficult both psychologically and physically as people are deeply rooted in the country's traditions, culture, language, and are reluctant to leave behind their family and networks. Nonetheless, the ethnic minorities still exercise this option: after March 2005 revolution, 45,000 ethnic Russians left for Russia – the second largest wave after 1991-93 exodus of over 200,000 Russians. In addition, an estimated 500-800,000 ethnic Kyrgyz are migrant workers in Kazakhstan and Russia. Even though for them it is a temporary exit from the system, it is an exit nonetheless, perhaps even better testifying to the country's economic problems.

Individuals with high income, high levels of education and foreign language skills often exercise the option of mental exit. They usually are relatively unaffected by the realities and hardships other people face. Such individuals either construct their own, more cosmopolitan reality with access to the outside world through the Internet and BBC and CNN in their cable package or withdraw from public affairs because they are completely disinterested in politics or simply too cynical about it. As citizens, such individuals have little value because they do not participate in many societal processes. They are effectively equal to those who exited physically, and many of them eventually leave the country when opportunity presents itself. The mental exit is equal to the option of ignoring the projected reality, which is the third behavioral option according to the cognitive dissonance theory.

Rejection of the government-constructed reality may result into the third option for citizens who cannot or will not leave the country and are not able to ignore or put up with the problems they face in their daily lives. This option is to voice dissatisfaction with either the experienced reality (green lines in the model) or the projected reality (yellow lines in the model), or both. The voice option is the most time- and effort-consuming and requires a certain degree of activism and courage to go against the entrenched and unforgiving government. Therefore, not many individuals pursue this option. Before such citizens voice their dissatisfaction or frustration with the current state of affairs, they seek more information to understand where the gap is coming from, to find facts supporting their view of reality and to establish contacts with other truth-seeking individuals. This active form of gap closure, represented by a red line in the model, is rooted in the uses and gratifications theory that views audiences as active seekers of information rather than in the cognitive dissonance theory per se, whose selective exposure, attention and perception suggest that people simply avoid or tailor the information causing dissonance. For this reason, uses and gratification approach proposed by Kaye (2007) will be adopted to explore the Internet media users' motivations in Kyrgyzstan.

This is where the Internet with its uncontrolled and uncensored information is coming into play. Several political sites in Kyrgyzstan, such as news agency www.24.kg, opposition newspaper *Bely Parohod* www.parohod.kg, non-profit Institute for Public Policy www.ipp.kg, Bishkek Press Club www.bpc.kg, and Diesel political forums on public platform www.diesel.elcat.kg extensively publish analytical information on political events and the government's policies and actions. These sites usually serve as sources of alternative information and often support readers' forums with unedited comments from the participants.

Most of these sites are not reaching wide audiences: their counters usually show 30-50 visitors at a time and up to 3,000 hits a day. However, the government understands their importance and significance as they reach the most educated and advanced audiences and tries to impose its view on the virtual world as well (thin dotted blue line in the model suggests that these efforts are not as successful as in the offline world). It is widely known in Kyrgyzstan's web space that the presidential administration appointed dozens of "monitors" who follow the information on these sites and write comments as if they were ordinary citizens. In their comments, they always voice support for the government and often use dirty tricks such as personal insults and attacks on the journalists and other users who criticize the government.

One recent example is illustrative of the significance the government attaches to the information published on the Internet sites. On March 15, 2007 one of the commentators on Bely Parohod online newspaper presented himself as a clerk at a major Kyrgyz bank that is known to serve all businesspeople and famous individuals, including the first family. He wrote that in two previous days, he personally had processed two transfers – one of \$10 million and one of \$20 million to a Swiss bank and suggested that the president's son transferred the money in store of the anti-government demonstrations scheduled by the opposition for April 2007. "They are afraid of another revolution and are getting ready to flee the country," the commentator concluded.

This comment was copied on many other political websites the same day and the next day and became a subject of heated discussions. In the evening of the next day, AKI-press website published an extensive and detailed press-release from the National Bank, titled "National Bank on 'runaway' capital." Its whole purpose was to explain that in the country where the annual budget is a little over \$720 million, huge money transfers would inevitably plummet the foreign exchange rate and cause major troubles

in the market. Since no dip like that took place in the recent days, the article concluded, the major transfers to foreign banks could not have happened. The press-release never referred to the rumored amounts of the alleged transfers and their origin. However, those users who followed the discussion immediately understood why the press-release came out and dismissed it as a cover-up technique.

It should be noted that the eye-opening information available on the Internet can push people who are frustrated with their experienced reality to use the exit option, especially when the Internet also provides an opportunity for contact with the outside world. It is not rare to see comments from people like “I quietly lived my comfortable life until I walked into your chat room. Now I can’t sleep because I know we are being ruled and robbed by a clique of kleptomaniacs. It’s time to leave the country.”

Kyrgyzstanis residing abroad often post notes such as “I am now studying in Europe and a year ago I couldn’t wait to go home and help out the revolutionaries but now I can see that they are even worse than the Akaev clan. I need to find a way to stay here as Kyrgyzstan has no future with the ‘elites’ that are at power now.”

However, when people use the voice option, they have two tracks available for them. The first one is represented by the yellow lines in Figure 2 and may be referred to as “destructive” as its main goal is to expose the government’s lies and bad governance practices. This track usually results into the demands for the government to resign. An example of activity that represents this track through the media-constructed world would be writing a letter to the editor in response to false or distorted information or participating in a demonstration demanding the government’s resignation. The exposure track has more potential for impact on the Internet, as it has no gatekeepers who decide which letters get published and the readers’ comments usually remain intact. However, the Internet information exposing the government lies and distortions

can only be effective when it spills over into the off-line world, i.e. when the Internet users share what they learned from online media with non-users. Otherwise the information is relatively ineffective because it can reach at best only 10-15 per cent of the country's population who have the Internet access.

The second voice track is represented by the green lines in the model and can be referred to as "constructive" because its main goal is to improve the experienced reality or the bad government practices. Civic groups working within the law use this track. An example of activity representing this track would be participation in a peaceful demonstration demanding reforms or working with civic groups to help the disadvantaged. Since this form of voicing the dissatisfaction is less confrontational than the destructive exposure and is an integral part of any system claiming to be a democracy, it often happens in the open, real world. However, such enlightened and advanced civic groups and individuals still use the Internet to share the information, mobilize their base, and foster connections, especially with the outside world. For instance, Edil Baisalov, the leader of the NGO Coalition, maintains his personal blog read by many of his supporters and adversaries both inside and outside Kyrgyzstan.

The main focus of this project is the red and yellow lines as they present the most interest for the formation of public sphere on the Internet and its realization in the off-line world. The green line representing voice in the form of political involvement will be explored as well. The methodology section below spells out how these relationships will be operationalized in the study. It is necessary to note at the outset that the quality of governance will be measured by the variables evaluating government performance and understanding of democratic norms. Experienced reality will be tapped by the perceptions of the changes in individual economic situation and political rights and liberties after March 2005, while media approval variable is a proxy for the attitudes

toward the constructed reality. On the exit-voice dimension, civic activity index will be a proxy for voice, and the variable “Your future in Kyrgyzstan” with several leave-stay options will serve as a measure of readiness to exit. Finally, the variables tapping into frustration with the government performance and system of governance will serve as a measure of the gap between the constructed and experienced reality (see Figure 2.2.2).

Based on this theoretical model of government-citizen interaction as well as the view of the Internet as a facilitator of the public sphere, the following hypotheses and research questions are formulated:

Hypothesis 1: Compared to traditional media users, Internet-based media users will have: (a) higher political interest, and (b) higher levels of political knowledge.

Hypothesis 2: Compared to traditional media users, Internet-based media users will have more negative evaluations of traditional media performance (a proxy for constructed reality).

Hypothesis 3: Government performance controlled for demographics, especially such as income and employment, will predict the respondents’ experienced reality, expressed in satisfaction with a change in (a) current economic situation and (b) the political rights and freedoms after March 2005.

Hypothesis 4: Internet-based media users will have (a) lower evaluations of government performance, and (b) higher levels of frustration with the current government of Kyrgyzstan than the traditional media users.

Hypothesis 5: Given the high levels of frustration with the government, two options: (a) Internet-based media users will show higher levels of civic activity (“voice”) than traditional media users, or, alternatively (b) when considering their own future in Kyrgyzstan, Internet-based media users will be more oriented to leaving the country (“exit”) than the traditional media users.

Research Question 1: What are the patterns (if any) of sharing information between Internet-media users and those who have no Internet access?

2.3 Methods and Instruments

To test the hypotheses and answer the research questions formulated above, both qualitative and quantitative research methods and techniques were employed.

Specifically, the set of research methods implemented included the following:

1. *Observation* of Internet-users in their natural environment (Internet cafés and university computer labs) allowed determining their use patterns, skills, and habits. A total over 300 hours of observation was completed in June-November 2007. Some of the observed participants were interviewed in the Internet cafés, but follow-up interviews were not a necessary element of the research design.

2. *Semi-structured focus groups* with Internet users and traditional media users. A total of 10 focus groups, seven with Internet users and three with non-users with 3-8 participants in each, were conducted in October-December 2007. The participants were recruited among the respondents in the face-to-face survey, as well as through flyers posted at universities and Internet-café.

3. *Face-to-face survey* of 176 Bishkek residents and group surveys of 124 students of American University – Central Asia (AUCA), Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University (KTMU), Kyrgyz-Russian Slavonic University (KRSU), and Kyrgyz Technical University (KTU) on elements of good governance and assessment of the government performance. The survey was designed to identify the respondents' level of political knowledge, behavioral options for coping with reality and media and Internet use patterns (see Appendix C, also presenting the variables' coding scheme). With no donor funding available, the face-to-face survey was conducted by a group of 12 trained student volunteers from AUCA and KTMU. They have made a total of 489 approaches, and in

313 cases were turned down for the reasons of lack of time, unwillingness to participate in political surveys, or the length of the survey (on average, it took 25-30 minutes to complete one interview). The following data were collected on non-respondents: gender, approximate age, and ethnicity. Thus, the response rate of the face-to-face survey was 36 per cent.

A mail and phone surveys were also attempted, with the response rate of .03 and .05 per cent respectively (400 phone calls yielded 20 completed interviews and 500-letter mailing – 14 filled out questionnaires). The mail survey was based on a sampling frame provided by the National Statistics Committee from the latest available 1999 census, and 58 letters returned as undeliverable, which testifies to the problems with the sample addresses. In general, mail surveys in Kyrgyzstan are not common practice and it is inevitable that the addressees were suspicious about the political nature of the survey.

The phone survey had similar problems: the first question the many hostile and unwilling respondents always asked was an angry “Where did you get my number?” or “I am not interested in politics,” followed sometimes by insults. In many cases, people said they didn’t have time to answer questions or directly stated they were not going to discuss government and politics. Due to the low response rates, the results of these surveys were not included into the final dataset.

4. *Internet survey* of web-based media users using the same instrument as in the face-to-face survey, with some questions replaced to measure Internet use patterns (see Appendix C). The survey employed a snowball self-selected sample initiated on the online political forums and sites of the leading on-line media and passed on by the respondents to their friends and acquaintances. A total of 115 people started the survey, and 10 responses were excluded because they answered only 3-7 questions of the questionnaire. Thus, the total N for the online survey is 105. The online survey has

produced the largest proportion of missing demographics data: 19 respondents dropped the survey as they reached the demographics section. These responses were still included into the final data set since the substantive questions had been answered and the demographics had been skipped perhaps for the fear of possible identification.

With the three modes of collection combined, the total number of responses in the final dataset of the survey is 405. While not representative, the survey still reflects accurately the opinions of younger Bishkek residents, especially students, and allows for comparisons between the users and non-users of Internet.

2.3.1. Survey Instrument

Some of the items in the questionnaire in Appendix C were designed specifically for the purpose of this research and therefore are original. Other items, such as demographics, government performance approval, and media use, were formulated based on commonly used formats in Pew and other surveys, especially surveys that had been conducted in the post-Soviet environment. The following subscales were borrowed from Gibson, Duch, and Tedin (1992):

Support for the Norms of Democracy Subscale

1. No matter what a person's political beliefs are, he/she is entitled to the same legal rights and protections as anyone else
2. It is necessary that everyone, regardless of their views, can express themselves freely

Support for the Value of Dissent Subscale

1. Kyrgyzstan's government should become much more open to the public
2. If an unjust law is passed, I could do nothing about it
3. People should be able to participate in any organization even if this activity opposes some current laws
4. We are more likely to have a healthy economy if the government allows more freedom for individuals to do as they wish

Support for Independent Media Subscale

1. The press should be protected by the law from persecution by the government
2. Private radios, television, and newspapers should exist alongside state-owned media.

In addition, the following scale was borrowed from Olsen (1969):

Political Incapability Scale

1. The public officials do not care much about what people like me think of their performance
2. There is no way other than voting that people like me can influence actions of the government
3. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that I can't really understand what's going on
4. People like me don't have much say about what the government does.

These scales were selected because they have been reported to have high validity and because they have been earlier used in surveys conducted in Russia and other post-Soviet republics, which are similar to Kyrgyzstan in terms of political systems and the characteristics of the population.

The questionnaire was pretested in two focus groups with senior AUCA and KTMU journalism students, where they filled out the questionnaire and asked questions about the wording and meaning of the items. Several adjustments to the questionnaire were made based on their comments, mostly in terms of the wording and better rendering of concepts in Russian.

As a second step, a pre-test survey of 112 AUCA students was conducted in groups of 12-22 students at the end of classes. The dataset produced by this pre-test was used to conduct factor analysis to make sure that the borrowed indexes worked correctly and to construct new indexes. The preliminary factor analysis alerted to some differences with the original scaled borrowed for this project, as well as to the existence of the overall frustration with government index.

After all the data were collected, another factor analysis was run on Items 10-38 of the final questionnaire presented in Appendix C. The analysis produced 29 components, with nine components explaining 53 per cent of variance and Eigen values of higher

than 1.00. On all 29 components, Eigen values range from the highest of 3.912 to the lowest of .388. Such a disparity can be due to the fact that the variables measured various issues relating to good governance, tapping into both normative understanding and subjective perceptions, and at different points of time.

For the purposes of constructing the indexes for this project, only the first three components were selected. These components produced the following indexes: 1) level of frustration with the government, 2) support for norms of democracy, including free expression and independent media, and 3) understanding of own political incapacity (see Table 2.3.1.1). Although these three components explain cumulatively only 28% of the variance in the data, they loaded most of the variables from the original indexes borrowed for this project and the new variables of interest.

As Table 2.3.1.1 shows, not all items from the original indexes loaded on the three extracted components for this study's sample as it was expected.

First, the original Value of Dissent Scale did not come out as a separate component. Two of its items (8 and 9 in the Table) loaded heavily on the Norms of Democracy component, which is logical because democratic norms include requirement for the government's transparency and support for dissent. Item 18, originally the second one from the Value of Dissent Scale, loaded better on Political Incapacity component, while Item 23 (third in the original scale) has low coefficients on all three components.

This was the item that raised most questions in the pre-tests, focus groups, and group interviews, and many respondents pointed out that it went against their beliefs that law-abiding citizens cannot oppose the current laws, so such activity is illegal by definition. In future surveys to be conducted in the post-Soviet space, this item should be reworded more clearly to tap at the concept of dissent or freedom of association. For the purpose of this paper, the item was left out from all scales.

Table 2.3.1.1. Principal Component Factor Analysis

#	Questionnaire Item/Original Scale	Frustration with Govt	Norms of democracy	Political Incapacity
1. 23.	Q.38. I believe my parliament representative would follow up on my concern if I express it	.576		
2. 5.	Q.18. The current government of Kyrgyzstan is committed to fight corruption	.572		
3. 4.	Q.17. Generally, the government can be trusted to implement policies that will improve people's situation	.552		
4. 17.	Q.31. Those who are in power today understand that they were elected to serve rather than to rule the people	.482		
5.	Q.33. The courts in Kyrgyzstan make decisions independently, without government officials' interference	.518		
6.	Q.32. I feel that if I had to seek a court's protection I would receive a speedy and fair trial	.515		
7.	Q.25. Anyone with appropriate skills and qualifications can enter a government agency and work for it	.415		
8.	Q.22. Kyrgyzstan's government should become much more open to the public/ Value of Dissent Scale, Item 1		.487	
9.	Q.16. We are more likely to have a healthy economy if the government allows more freedom for individuals to do as they wish/ Value of Dissent Scale, Item 4		.425	
10.	Q.11. No matter what a person's political beliefs are, he/she is entitled to the same legal rights and protections as anyone else/ Norms of Democracy Scale, Item 1		.400	
11.	Q.34. It is necessary that everyone, regardless of their views, can express themselves freely/ Norms of Democracy Scale, Item 2		.593	
12.	Q.30. Private media should exist alongside state-owned ones/ Independent Media Scale, Item 2		.480	
13.	Q.20. The press should be protected by the law from persecution by the government/ Ind. Media Scale, Item 1		.318	
14.	Q.21. Today it is less dangerous for individuals to criticize the government than before March 2005		.267	
15.	Q.29. In Kyrgyzstan, demonstrations and protests are effective in influencing a government decision		.241	
16.	Q.19. Generally, the government is tolerant to criticism from opposition and media		.221	
17.	Q.36. People like me don't have much say about what the government does/ Political Incapacity Scale, Item 4			.575
18.	Q.23. If an unjust law is passed, I could do nothing about it/ Value of Dissent Scale, Item 2		.049	.523
19.	Q.35. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that I can't really understand what's going on / Political Incapacity Scale, Item 3			.409
20.	Q.10. There is no way other than voting that people like me can influence the actions of the government/ Political Incapacity Scale, Item 2			.348
21.	Q.27. As an individual, I can do something to improve the current situation in Kyrgyzstan for the better	.369		-.395
22.	Q.28. The public officials do not care much about what people like me think of their performance/ Political Incapacity scale, Item 1	-.369		.158
23.	Q.26. People should be able to participate in any organization even if this activity opposes some current laws/ Value of Dissent Scale, Item 3	-.029	.061	.126
Eigen Value		3.912	2.243	1.858

Second, Item 22 (originally from the Political Incapacity Scale) loaded much better on Frustration with Government component, where it is a negative equivalent of Item 21 (measure of individual political capacity). It was ultimately left out from the final Political Incapacity Index, which included four items (Items 17-20 in the Table).

The Norms of Democracy component was subdivided into three 3-item indexes: Support for Norms of Democracy (Items 8-10), Independent Media and Free Expression (Items 11-13), and Tolerance of Dissent (Items 14-16).

Finally, the Frustration with Government component was divided into two subscales: Frustration with Performance (Items 1-4) and Frustration with the System (Items 5-7). These two subscales were also combined into one Overall Frustration with Government Index and used in subsequent regression models.

In addition to these scales, three composite indexes were created to capture political knowledge (five items, Questions 4-8 in Appendix C), media use (five items, dummy variables in Question 53), and citizen activity, or political involvement (three items, Questions 63-65 in Appendix C). For the variables, indexes and their coding schemes see Appendix D.

2.3.2. Sample Characteristics

The samples for the three methods used in this study were slightly different. The observations, naturally, allowed for no sample selection techniques, and only estimated guesses could be made about the observed users' age and ethnic origin. The level of comfort and observed speed of working on the Internet allowed to estimate how experienced the users are, however, no visible association was observed between the skill level and types of Internet activities the users were involved in. It was observed that there was no dominance of a particular ethnicity among the users: Kyrgyz, Russians

and other ethnic minorities were represented in the observed sample. There were slightly more men than women in the observation sample, and males tended to populate the Internet cafés more than females in the evenings. Younger people were clearly dominating the Internet cafés compared to older people.

Since the focus groups were aimed at understanding how the Internet users process and share information, the participants were mostly students and staff (ages 18-25) of American University – Central Asia, Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, Kyrgyz-Russian Slavonic University, Kyrgyz Technical University, Bishkek Humanitarian University, and Kyrgyz National University. Females dominated the sample: in 7 focus groups of 3-8 participants, a total of 28 females participated and 15 males. In terms of ethnic composition, the focus groups were diverse (with Russians, Koreans, Uzbeks, and Tatars in the sample), although there were more Kyrgyz (20 of 42) than other ethnic group representatives. The three focus groups with non-users of the Internet included 13 participants (five males and eight females) and were more diverse in terms of age (ranging from early 20s to mid-50s), and ethnicity, with Russians, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tatars represented.

As for the survey sample, it includes a total of 405 respondents. In terms of the gender composition, it is roughly reflective of Kyrgyzstan's general population, where females comprise about 53 per cent. In the sample, of 385 respondents, whose gender was identified or indicated (20 cases with missing gender data come from the online survey), 164 (42.6 per cent) are males, and 221 (57.4 per cent) – females.

A total of 373 respondents in the sample identified their ethnicity. Of them, 243 (65.1 per cent) are Kyrgyz, 85 (22.8 per cent) – Russians, 6 (1.6 per cent) – Uzbeks, and 39 (10.5 per cent) identify with other ethnic groups, such as Kazakhs, Ukrainians, Tatars, Uigurs, Dungans, Jews, and Germans. According to the recent National Statistics

Committee estimates, Kyrgyzstan's population currently consists of about 52 per cent Kyrgyz, 30 per cent Uzbeks, 12 per cent Russian, and the rest – other ethnic minorities. The sample for this study, then, slightly over-represents Kyrgyz and Russians and substantially under-represents Uzbeks. However, given that the sample was drawn in Bishkek, the capital city in the north, while most Uzbek population is concentrated in the southern regions of the country, the sample actually reflects accurately the ethnic composition of the capital city, where Russians are estimated to comprise about 25 per cent and Kyrgyz – about 60 per cent, with the remaining 15 per cent represented by other ethnic minorities.

Due to the subject availability, the sample over represents young people: a total of 233 respondents (60.1 per cent of 388 who reported the age) are within the first two categories of 25 and younger. The other age groups are distributed more or less evenly, from 2.1 to 9.8 per cent of respondents in each category. This variation still allows for meaningful age comparisons, especially when it comes to comparisons between the traditional and Internet-based media users, who are generally younger than those who do not use the Internet.

The two largest income groups lay on both extremes of the sample: of 337 people who indicated income, 65 (19.3 per cent) reported income of \$700 or more, while 63 respondents (18.7 per cent) - \$100-199. Twenty-nine of 65 high-income respondents filled out the online survey from higher-income countries like the USA, Great Britain, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Kazakhstan, thus skewing the sample considerably.

Overall, the income variable presents significant problems with 68 (16.8 per cent) cases with missing data and cumulative percent of the three lowest categories of about 47. In a country like Kyrgyzstan, which is a cash economy with many economic activities "in the shadow," it is inevitable that income will be under-reported or not

reported at all. This is also indirectly confirmed by the fact that in many personal interviews respondents asked if the data on income would be reported to the government. Even with these problems, however, the income variable reflects the general tendency that there is no middle class majority in Kyrgyzstan, and most people fall on either of the two ends – poor or well-off. This is why the concept of “average” income does not make substantive sense and creates difficulties for statistical analysis.¹⁷ When the missing values are substituted with the mean in the regression models, many variables that were significant lose statistical significance.

Related to income, 177 respondents, or 46.5 per cent of those who reported their employment status are students, and another 46.4 percent – employed at least part-time, with 4.7 and 2.4 per cent of unemployed and pensioners respectively. Finally, the sample over represents educated people, with 47.8 per cent reporting incomplete higher education (this category includes student respondents), 34.3 per cent – completed higher education, and 6.8 per cent – an advanced academic degree.

Proceeding to political interest, the largest category of the respondents – 135, or 34.8 per cent of 388 who answered this question – indicated that they had a moderate interest in politics. Those whose interest is at the two lower levels comprise 20.6 per cent, and those with higher levels of political interest – combined 44.6 per cent. This, in fact, is congruent with the actual levels of political knowledge: those who answered correctly three questions of the 5-item scale comprise 22.5 per cent of the sample, while those with high and highest levels of knowledge combined make up 54.6 per cent of the sample. Only two respondents (.5 per cent) did not answer a single question correctly.

¹⁷ The National Statistics Committee of Kyrgyzstan reported that the average salary at the end of February 2007 was 2.869 som, or about \$80, and as of February 2008 – 4.407 som, or \$115 (24.kg, Economic news (April 22, 2008), <http://eng.24.kg/business/2008/04/22/5197.html>).

The distribution of the media consumption falls mostly on the lower end: 46.7 per cent of respondents identified that they use only one or two media outlets as a source of political information, 25.4 per cent – three media sources, and 12.6 and 7.9 per cent – four and five media respectively. However, this is at least partly compensated by the Internet use: out of 271 (66.9 per cent of the total sample) Internet users, 260 reported that they use Internet-based media to obtain information on politics and public affairs. In subsequent analyses, both variables – Internet use in general and Internet-based media use will be used, depending on the purpose of the model.

2.4 Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of various regression models based on the relationships identified in Figure 2.2.2, as well as results of focus groups and observations to provide depth and detail on the survey findings. The models will correspond to the key elements in Figure 2.2.2, starting with evaluation of government performance, evaluation of media performance, perception of the respondents' economic situation and rights and liberties after March 2005, and ending with the respondents' political involvement and perceptions of their future in Kyrgyzstan. However, it is necessary to start with the understanding of the factors driving the political interest and political knowledge since they are key for understanding differences between various media users.

2.4.1 Political Interest and Political Knowledge

These two variables are key to understanding of people's perceptions of good governance. Thus, the analysis will start with exploration of what demographic variables drive them in the sample of this study. Many earlier research studies showed that political interest is driven by such demographic factors as age, gender and education, as well as income and media use patterns.

For the purposes of this study, it is reasonable to assume that the political interest may be a function of how satisfied the citizens are with their economic situation and rights and liberties because higher levels of frustration with own current situation can lead to either higher political interest and involvement out of protest or higher levels of alienation from politics. Political interest, in its turn, should determine political knowledge, which is key to understanding of good governance.

To test Hypothesis 1, I started with political interest, coded from 1=not interested at all to 5=extremely interested. Table 2.4.1.1 presents the regression analyses results. It should be noted that the demographic variables explain only about 13 and 17 per cent of the variance in political interest in Models 1 and 2 respectively, which means that there must be something else, most probably on the experiential side, that influences to what extent people are interested in the political matters. In the focus groups, however, it consistently came out that those who struggle economically are more alienated from politics. One participant, pensioner Elena¹⁸, for example, stated the following:

When you have to... uh, always think about how to put bread on your table and uh... not to become a burden for your children, you think about politics the last. I am happy when I live through the day without thinking what I will eat tomorrow or... how to pay the utility bills that eat up one third of my pension... And you are talking about politics... our politicians don't care about us, why should I think about them?

Another participant, a part-time saleswoman at a struggling cosmetic store, also noted that the government's indifference deters her from paying attention to politics:

I work only because my pension is miserable. I would be much happier, at my age, to sit at home and babysit my grandkids. But if I don't work, I will die of hunger – no one can survive on 765 som [about \$18] a month... I wish our politicians tried to live on such a pension. They are either clueless or don't care.

¹⁸ Names of focus group participants are changed for confidentiality reasons.

I am OK, though, because I still can work. Many people my age and older have to live on their pension. I have a neighbor, baba Valya, whose children left for Russia... she refused to go, and now she is alone. She literally survives on bread, milk, and water, tea on a good day. When I think about people like her... and she had worked all her life, her husband got killed in World War II and this is how the government now is paying her back, when she is old and sick... it makes me really angry. Why should I care about politics when the government couldn't care less about people? I simply stopped reading or listening to them... I read newspapers for crossword puzzles only...

Income catches some of this relationship between the economic situation and political interest, showing that indeed as income increases by one unit, the interest in politics increases by .06 units (Model 2).

Table 2.4.1.1. Determinants of Political Interest

Independent variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
(Constant)	2.177***	.247	7.959	2.056***	.288	7.139	2.338	.400	5.846
1. Media Use	.199***	.044	7.959	.236***	.045	5.207	.240***	.046	5.221
2. Education	.151*	.082	2.118	.093	.085	1.092	.068	.087	.782
3. Age	.018	.029	.609	.029	.030	.328	.042	.031	1.390
4. Gender	-.255**	.116	-2.206	-.288**	.119	-2.418	-.305**	.120	-2.533
5. Internet use	.362**	.143	2.282	.317**	.159	1.999	.355**	.162	2.191
6. Kyrgyz	.424**	.164	2.585	.294*	.167	2.060	.320*	.168	2.187
7. Russians	-.044	.191	-.016	-.103	.195	-.525	-.123	.196	-.628
8. Income				.055**	.024	2.272	.052**	.025	2.120
9. Government works for people							.025	.054	.466
10. Public officials are indifferent							-.002	.053	-.030
11. Perceptions of rights and liberties							-.115*	.065	-2.045
12. Perceptions of economic situation							-.042	.053	-.782
Model summary	N=382, R ² =.127, F=7.752***			N=334, R ² =.165, F=8.029***			N=333, R ² =.177, F=5.741***		

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Since the income variable is problematic in the sample, three perceptual variables were introduced in Model 3 to see if perceptions of the government's indifference as well as perceptions of own economic reality and political rights may play a role in political interest. However, this did not increase the explained variance in political interest significantly and of the four variables, only the perception of rights and liberties turned out significant, indicating, as it was hypothesized, that the higher levels of frustration with own economic situation results into lower levels of political interest (alienation from political matters).

The findings from this analysis are significant for this project, as they show that using the Internet media is strongly and positively associated with the political interest: being an Internet media user increases the political interest by .362.

Thus, the data from this sample fully supports Hypothesis 1 (a) that use of the Internet-based media increases political interest. Moreover, several participants in focus groups pointed out that their political interest was stimulated by the use of Internet. The following is what one of the students described:

Zulfiya: "I didn't care about politics until I was given a task for my polisci class – to make a presentation on the system of governance in Kyrgyzstan... basic stuff: who is the president, what his authorities are, how the balance of powers works, something like that... Before that assignment, I didn't even know that my country was a presidential republic. So, I started to do the Internet search and stumbled upon a discussion about President Bakiev on Diesel forum. I got hooked and now am totally addicted. There are so many people on that forum, and they all know so much more, it is amazing. I always go there when I don't understand something about politics... or just want to learn something new."

Another participant, a Turkish University student, had a similar experience with an Internet-based newspaper:

Maria: "I wanted to find "Bely Parohod," Chingiz Aitmatov's novel, on the Internet. The first link Google gave me was... the *Bely Parohod* newspaper. I never heard about it before and, uh..., as a student of journalism I got interested and decided to have a look. Oh, the comments the people leave there for each article!..

It is like a micro cosmos of our entire society – those who love the president and those who hate him, and they fight all the time. Sometimes they leave offensive comments, but I think this is exactly what attracts other readers, as well as the rumors they spread and discuss there. It's like the gossip column on politics run by the people themselves... I now start my day by reading this site, and when I share it with my friends, they always ask now if I read this on *Bely Parohod*..."

Several more participants pointed out that their political interest was stimulated by links to stories and political analyses that friends had sent to them by email. Thus, both the survey and the focus groups show that Internet use is strongly and positively associated with political interest.

In addition, the survey shows that, consistent with many other studies, being a woman decreases political interest, persistently in all three models in Table 2.4.1.2. Media Use Index is also highly significant in all models, showing that with every new type of medium added to the user's mix, political interest increases by .199, .236 and .238 in the three models respectively.

Another interesting finding is that being a Kyrgyz matters for political interest. Being Russian, on the other hand, decreases political interest, although this relationship is not statistically significant. This may be explained by the fact that as a titular nation Kyrgyz have more vested interest in the political matters. Russians, on the other hand, are becoming more and more excluded from the governance system, and therefore feel alienated and lose interest to the political matters and public affairs.

Surprisingly, education has a statistically significant effect only in Model 1 and no effect in Models 2 and 3, while age has no effect in any of the three models. This can be explained by the homogeneity in the variables: perhaps they behave this way because they do not vary much due to dominating students in the sample.

However, in the focus groups it often came up that age matters for political interest and younger people are less interested in politics than older and more mature citizens.

As an example, consider this exchange between AUCA students in a focus group:

Aida: "I think young people are simply not interested in politics."

Moderator: "Hmm... Why do you think this is the case?"

Aida: "I don't know... being young we are not burdened by children, families and other responsibilities, I guess... When you have those responsibilities, uh, you start thinking about the government in a different way. I look at my sister who has a baby, and she is now totally different. She is concerned about the health care because the baby gets sick, and is thinking about quality of education. I guess the next step for her will be thinking, like, 'what does the government do to improve these things?' Yeah, I am far from this, personally."

Olga: "A-ha, at this point we think more about how to study well..."

Bermet, interrupting: "and how to party well." [laughs]

Olga: "Yes, exactly... we all have friends we want to hang out with, and honestly, we rarely talk about politics..."

In another focus group with non-users of Internet, and older participant reiterated the same idea:

Ainagul, accountant, 45: "My daughter is a student, and she studies so hard she has no time to take a break... When I start talking with her about politics and government, she... she knows a lot because she has access to Internet and they discuss things in their classes, but she is not interested at all. She thinks politics is boring... I guess I am not like that – I always go to vote and want to know what is going on... She just wants to have fun, and sometimes it is frustrating how indifferent she is..."

Sergei, high school sports coach, 26: "Do you remember yourself at that age? Were you interested in politics then?"

Ainagul, pausing: "Hmm... Good question. I guess, not. I also wanted to spend time with my friends and, uh, have fun more than anything else. But those were different times [Soviet Union]. The government took good care of us... now everything is so uncertain... I think about my job, my family, my country all the time... I hope my daughter will come around and grow up as well... It is impossible not to be concerned when life is so hard..."

Sergei: "Yeah, but right now she is not concerned because she has you... You as parents take care of her, feed her, clothe her, so why should she be concerned? Give her some time... or kick her out of the house [laughs]. Then she'll definitely start looking at everything from a different angle, when she is independent."

Natalia, Sergei's girlfriend: "Someone speaking from his own experience..."

Sergei, smiling: "Yeah, I moved in with you two years ago, remember?"

The theme that young people are not mature and responsible enough to be deeply interested in politics came up in the focus groups again and again. However, during debriefing at the end of the focus groups, when asked whether they learned something

new and useful, many of the younger participants emphasized that their interest in politics was renewed. One of the participants formulated her feelings this way:

Aigul, a KRSU student: "This was really refreshing. I didn't know what focus groups were, so I came only out of curiosity... and it wasn't a time wasted. Usually, the teachers ask us questions only to test our knowledge, and are interested in what we say only as long as it is a correct answer in their minds, to put it nicely. Here, it felt like, uh, you were genuinely interested in our opinions, and wanted us to discuss things... I liked the discussion, and, uh, that we all had such different opinions and views and didn't fight about them, but simply talked... I will think about politics in a different way now, and will be more curious about the government and governance issues..."

Returning to the survey results, they should be considered with caution in terms of the causal direction. Even though the results show that the political interest is driven by Internet use, it may be also that the people who are more interested in political matters move to the Internet because they cannot find sufficient information in the traditional media and are attracted by the Internet resources and communities where the discussions are much more open. Indeed, as Table 2.4.1.1a below shows, the regression models with the same variables as in Table 2.4.1.1 with the exception that the dependent variable (political interest) becomes an independent one, and the Internet Use variable is the variable of interest, have higher levels of explained variance and much higher F-values than the models with political interest as a dependent variable.

As the table shows, political interest indeed determines Internet use. Internet use is also driven by education, income, and age: higher educated respondents, respondents with higher levels of income, and younger people use Internet more. Finally, Internet use is also determined by the respondents' perceptions of their economic situation and rights and liberties: those people who disagree more that their situation improved after March 2005 use Internet in contrast to non-users, who are associated with lower levels of frustration with the personal economic situation and rights and liberties.

Table 2.4.1.1a. Determinants of Internet Use

Independent variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	T
(Constant)	.490***	.103	4.748	.288**	.106	2.701	.033	.147	.226
1. Media Use	-.010	.016	-.587	.004	.016	.228	-.001	.016	-.090
2. Education	.155***	.029	5.410	.109***	.029	3.754	.117***	.029	4.004
3. Age	-.109***	.009	-12.394	-.099***	.009	-11.384	-.098***	.009	-10.920
4. Gender	.014	.042	.343	.003	.042	.082	.017	.042	.405
5. Political interest	.042*	.018	2.282	.038*	.019	1.999	.040*	.019	2.095
6. Kyrgyz	-.033	.059	-.547	-.003	.058	-.056	-.007	.058	-.116
7. Russians	.032	.069	.465	.063	.068	.929	.070	.067	1.033
8. Income				.054***	.008	6.730	.051***	.008	6.348
9. Government works for people							-.002	.018	-.105
10. Public officials are indifferent							.020	.018	1.101
11. Perceptions of rights and liberties							.037*	.022	1.985
12. Perceptions of economic situation							.034*	.016	2.202
Model summary	N=382, R ² =.310, F=24.030***			N=334, R ² =.421, F=29.582***			N=333, R ² =.440, F=20.921***		

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

These results suggest that the causality between the political interest and Internet use is two-directional, but this study does not provide sufficient data to test it further. One of the recommendations for future research is to conduct the same survey at different points of time so that the true causality could be established through the dynamic statistical models.

Returning to the relationships central for this study, political interest should influence political knowledge. Indeed, the two variables have a meaningful correlation coefficient of .21, significant at .01 level. As the results of multiple regression analysis

show, a one-unit change in political interest indeed increases political knowledge by .113 units (see Table 2.4.1.2). To explore what other variable are associated with political knowledge and to test Hypothesis 1 (b), the same demographic and perceptual variables as in Table 2.4.1.1 were included into regression models as independent variables.

Table 2.4.1.2. Determinants of Political Knowledge

Independent variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
(Constant)	2.159***	.309	6.961	2.585***	.450	5.741	2.474***	.412	6.003
1. Media Use	.100**	.047	2.119	.084*	.051	1.634	.114**	.047	2.415
2. Education	.137	.087	1.587	.191*	.093	2.047	.152^	.087	1.749
3. Age	.071**	.031	2.340	.061^	.033	1.869	.073**	.031	2.378
4. Gender	-.202^	.122	-1.657	-.116	.130	-.894	-.167	.121	-1.375
5. Internet Media Use	.416**	.150	2.769	.438**	.175	2.510	.426**	.151	2.833
6. Kyrgyz	.107	.173	.043	.112	.181	.619	.103	.172	.596
7. Russians	-.253	.200	-1.265	-.234	.210	-1.116	-.254	.198	-1.285
8. Income				-.016	.026	-.623			
9. Government works for people				.090	.058	1.558	.093^	.054	1.720
10. Public officials are Indifferent				-.132*	.056	-2.351	-.128*	.052	-2.454
11. Perceptions of rights & liberties				-.133*	.070	-1.897	-.146*	.065	-2.224
12. Perceptions of econ. situation				.066	.057	1.150	.074	.054	1.373
13. Political Interest	.113**	.054	2.095	.096^	.060	1.597	.109*	.054	2.038
Model Summary	N=382, R ² =.105, F=5.457***			N=333, R ² =.125, F=3.508***			N=381, R ² =.141, F=5.032***		

^p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

In this set of models, income behaves differently than in the models with political interest as a dependent variable. When added in Model 2, due to missing cases, income drives the proportion of explained variance down compared to Model 3 with the same

variables where it was excluded. In addition, it is not statistically significant, therefore I will focus on Models 1 and 3.

In these models, there are tendencies similar to the determinants of political interest: again, media use index and Internet media use are positively and significantly associated with political knowledge, providing support for Hypothesis 1 (b). Some differences are present as well: in contrast to political interest, political knowledge is not driven by either ethnic origin or gender. Another difference is that age becomes highly significant: as age moves up one unit (five years), the political knowledge increases by .073 units (Model 3). Also, education is positively associated with political knowledge, although this relationship is only marginally statistically significant.

The most intriguing findings in this model are that political knowledge is determined by the belief that public officials do not care about what people think of their performance and by the perception of current political rights and liberties. As the regression coefficients show, the more people agree that their rights and liberties are better than before March 2005, and the more the respondents disagree that public officials are indifferent, the less is their political knowledge. In other words, less knowledgeable and rights-conscious citizens have a stronger belief that the government actually cares about what they think of its performance (ignorance is bliss?). It is logical to assume that if the government does not perform well, the relationship will also run in the opposite direction: the higher political knowledge will enforce the belief that the government does not care about what citizens think of its work. This model will be considered later in the section on perceptions of government performance.

To sum up, by providing strong support to Hypotheses 1 (a) and (b), the findings that both the media use index and Internet use are strong predictors of political interest and political knowledge allow for further exploration of other variables central for this

study, namely, respondents' perceptions of experienced and imposed reality, evaluation of government performance, and their future in Kyrgyzstan.

We will start by exploring how the respondents assess the imposed reality constructed by the traditional media and how they evaluate their rights and economic situation after March 2005 (experienced reality). Then we will move to how the respondents evaluate the government performance from various angles. Finally, we will conclude with how the respondents see their future in Kyrgyzstan ("exit" options) and whether civic activity plays the role of "voice."

2.4.2 Perceptions of Constructed Reality

The content analysis of referendum coverage presented in Chapter 1 earlier has shown that different types of media create different realities of good governance for the citizens. It is important to understand how the citizens on the receiving end evaluate these constructed realities. To measure the evaluations of the "imposed" reality, or reality constructed by the traditional media, I selected the variable "Do you believe that the TV channels, radio and newspapers you use do a decent job in covering national politics?" assuming that the high levels of disapproval will be serving as a proxy for negative evaluation of constructed reality.

A logical assumption here, based on the theoretical model in Figure 2.2.2 is that if through the use of the traditional media and Internet-based media people are exposed to both constructed realities – those that promote the official point of view and those that provide an alternative view – they will have more negative evaluations of the officially imposed reality because they have an opportunity to compare and contrast information. Political interest and political knowledge should also play the role in this process: more politically interested and knowledgeable citizens should be more critical of the reality constructed by the state-controlled media.

The results of regression analysis for the media performance evaluation presented in Table 2.4.2.1 show that the model is quite weak. It explains only eight per cent of variance in the media approval variable and has an F value significant at $p=.013$. There must be some other independent variables, not available for this sample, which would explain the media performance better. One factor explaining the difficulties with this variable may be relating to self-esteem: people would most probably have hard time admitting that they consume the media performing their job poorly. For future studies, better variables should be designed to measure the perceptions of reality constructed by the traditional media.

Table 2.4.2.1. Approval of Media Performance

Independent Variables	B	SE	t
(Constant)	-.018	.184	-.097
1. Internet media use	-.057	.073	-.778
2. Media Use Index	.013	.021	.619
3. Complexity of Politics and Political Incapacity	-.025	.021	-1.186
4. Education	.048	.038	1.249
5. Age	-.005	.014	-.364
6. Income	-.009	.011	-.856
7. Gender	.009	.054	.166
8. Political Knowledge	-.007	.022	-.303
9. Political Interest	-.002	.025	-.067
10. Kyrgyz	.272***	.075	3.637
11. Russians	.167*	.086	1.929
12. Civic Activity Index	.039	.039	.999
13. Governments' tolerance to criticism from opposition and media	.059**	.023	2.595
Model summary	N= 326, $R^2=.081$, $F= 2.114^*$		

[^]p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

However, even this weak model shows that the relationship between the Internet media use and media job approval is negative, albeit statistically insignificant. That is, as

it was suggested in Hypothesis 2, Internet media users are more critical of traditional media's performance. A strongly significant factor in this model is ethnic origin: both Russians and Kyrgyz evaluate the media they consume positively. Another significant predictor is the government's tolerance to criticism from opposition and media: those who agree that the government is tolerant approve of media performance.

In short, this analysis provides no support for Hypothesis 2 that Internet media users would have more critical and negative evaluations of media performance than the traditional media users.

At least a partial explanation was provided by focus groups with non-users of Internet. The exchanges there showed that when the difference between the official, constructed reality and experienced reality is big, the people do not need a referent alternative reality constructed by independent online media to make negative evaluations. One of the focus groups illustrates this very well in this exchange:

Moderator: There is so much information on the Internet about the government and politics that is not available in the traditional media... aren't you interested?

Sergei: Not really. I don't need the Internet to understand that the government lies. A simple example: Bakiev may tell me all he wants that, uh, the school education improved because... uh, if you can believe it, he now provides free milk and cookies to the pupils, like in Soviet times (scoffs). My niece is in the second grade... I know how much my sister pays every month for her "free" education: for school repairs, textbooks, contribution to teachers' salaries, mentors, and what not...

Ainagul: And the hospitals? Bribes to the doctors and nurses, meals for the patients, medicine and, uh, tools that you need to bring in for any simple treatment... and they are talking about free health care...

Sergei: Exactly! Wherever you look – corruption, decay and lies everywhere... Of course newspapers, they... will not write about this... or if they do, they always blame some small-time bureaucrat, a scapegoat. I am not a fool, I can see through the government's lies. I just feel powerless to do anything about it...

Moderator: Why?

Sergei: How do you talk to the people who are sitting so high above you, you can't just knock on their door... and even if you could, how do you explain to the people who tell you that this is white when it is indeed black? Sometimes I think they convinced themselves that black is white...

This conversation illustrates not only that people are capable of contrasting their realities with the lies the government feeds them, but also that they are highly skeptical about their own capacity to change anything. Another example from a focus group also shows that people maintain a certain sense of humor about the situation:

Ivan, martial arts coach, early 20s: You know, I don't believe the government tales. I heard that people in Uzbekistan now call their country... "Karimov's fairytale land" because the tales he tells are so different from the reality people live in... we are not far from this... I guess our country can be called a "field of miracles," like in that famous song from childhood, "field of miracles in the country of fools..." except that we are in the country of no fools. Only our government thinks we are fools and continues to feed us bullsh... I don't think I am a fool, and I don't buy the government's lies, I am just tired of them and don't believe them...

Moderator: Do you think you can do anything about it?

Ivan: Like what? Protest, participate in the demonstrations, you mean (scoffs)?

Moderator: Why not?

Ivan: We all know what the March 2005 protests led too...

Elmira, state employee, mid-50s: Yeah, Bishkek residents were really scared then, especially when looting started... that alone would prevent reasonable people from participation in any demonstrations, even for May 1 [Labor Day celebrations with famous workers' parades in the Soviet Union]...

Tatiana, music teacher, early 20s: I guess people are just tired of all these political actions and protests, and are afraid that there will be violence again... all these spring and fall 'side effects' of democracy [most of protest activity in Kyrgyzstan between 2005 and 2007 fell for spring and fall] are just too much for the people...

Moderator: All right, how about voting?

Ivan: Yeah, that's like what... uh, once in four years? What can the voting change? Those who want to stay in power will find a way without my vote...

Thus, as these exchanges show, people with an ability to think critically can deconstruct the reality created by the government and the media it controls by contrasting it with what they see and experience every day. It should be noted that in focus groups it was usually the people with higher levels of education and more life experiences (older respondents) who demonstrated this ability.

It is important now to understand what determines the perceptions of the reality people experience in their daily lives, which will be considered in the next section.

2.4.3 Perceptions of Experienced Reality

Perceptions of the respondents' current reality were measured with two questions: "My economic situation today is better than before March 2005" and "As an individual I have more rights and freedoms today than before March 2005," both with answer options ranging from 1 = "strongly agree" to 5 = "strongly disagree."

While it is more difficult to assess the changes in personal rights and liberties, the economic situation is something that the people were more comfortable with evaluating. Kyrgyzstan's economic situation worsened after the March 2005 Tulip Revolution: there is no improvement in economic growth, the country's external debt is increasing, and for the first time in 17 years of independence the country with abundant hydro energy resources is facing a deep energy crisis. It is important to explore whether the citizens of Kyrgyzstan understand how this overall situation affects their individual life by measuring their perception of economic wellbeing and rights as citizens.

According to the model in Figure 2.2.2, the perceptions of experienced reality will be shaped by the government's performance, including the approval ratings for the president and the parliament, spread of corruption and to what extent citizens are involved in it, directly and indirectly, as well as normative understanding of democracy and the key demographic variables.

The first set of regression analyses presented in Table 2.4.3.1 looks at how satisfied the citizens of Kyrgyzstan are with their current economic situation. At the outset it should be noted that the majority of the respondents – 260, or 64.2 per cent – disagreed (39.5 per cent) or strongly disagreed (24.7 per cent) that their economic situation improved after March 2005. By the same pattern, 317 (78.3 per cent) of respondents strongly disagreed (31.1 per cent) or disagreed (47.2 per cent) that their rights and liberties improved after the March 2005 Revolution.

As Table 2.4.3.1 shows, the extent to which the respondents think their economic situation today is better than before March 2005 is indeed determined by several demographic variables and the factors related to government performance (Model 1).

The first one of such factors is the spread of corruption: as people's evaluation of corruption moves from "corruption is pervasive" toward "corruption is rare" by one unit, the agreement that their current economic situation is better than before March 2005 increases by .230 units. This means that lower levels of corruption are associated with better economic situation, which is logical.

The second variable relating to government performance that affects perceptions of current economic situation is the evaluation of the government's effort to solve current problems the country is facing (coded from 1=they do everything possible, to 5=they don't care). As the values of this variable move from positive to negative by 1 unit, the satisfaction with the current economic situation decreases by .157 units, which is also logical and expected.

The third variable behaves similarly: as President Bakiev's approval rating (0=disapprove, 1=50/50, 2=approve) moves from negative to positive, the evaluation of the respondents' own current economic situation increases by .292. It is interesting that even though marginally significant at $p=.103$, the parliament approval rating has the negative effect on agreement about improved economic situation, perhaps because the Parliament was considered to be in opposition to the president.

Surprisingly, income is not statistically significant in this model, although it is considered to be one of the major factors, along with education, which drives the satisfaction with the economic situation. Education behaves in the expected direction: its association with the perception of current economic situation is positive, i.e. higher educated people agree that their economic situation after March 2005 improved.

Table 2.4.3.1. Satisfaction with Current Economic Situation

Independent Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
(Constant)	2.439***	.583	4.186	1.980***	.585	3.386
1. Appropriateness of democracy for Kyrgyzstan	.003	.151	.019	-.021	.148	-.143
2. State function is to serve people	.016	.106	.154	.023	.104	.217
3. Spread of corruption	.230*	.112	2.057	.184^	.110	1.671
4. Relatives and friends gave bribes in the last 3 months	-.087	.148	-.588	-.043	.145	-.298
5. You personally gave bribes in the last 3 months?	.113	.175	.647	.080	.172	.464
6. Government's effort to solve current problems	-.157*	.062	-2.533	-.141*	.061	-2.318
7. President Bakiev's approval rating	.292***	.086	3.385	.223**	.087	2.583
8. Parliament's approval rating	-.163^	.100	-1.635	-.170^	.098	-1.739
9. Political interest	-.071	.061	-1.152	-.050	.060	-.836
10. Political knowledge index	.074	.057	1.285	.086	.056	1.524
11. Media use index	-.026	.051	-.509	-.046	.051	-.908
12. Civic activity index	-.025	.098	-.250	-.033	.096	-.347
13. Internet use	.500**	.185	2.698	.434*	.183	2.377
14. Education	-.226*	.098	-2.305	-.197*	.097	-2.044
16. Age	.036	.038	.950	.013	.038	.339
17. Employment status	.049	.071	.693	.043	.069	.619
18. Income	-.006	.028	-.215	-.001	.028	-.053
19. Gender	-.238^	.134	-1.782	-.221^	.131	-1.687
20. Kyrgyz	.381*	.187	2.040	.301^	.184	1.633
21. Russians	.052	.219	.240	.093	.215	.436
22. Perceptions of rights and liberties				.251***	.068	3.663
Model Summary	N = 325, R ² = .157, F = 2.828***			N = 325, R ² = .193, F = 3.442***		

^p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Among other demographic characteristics, gender is associated with perceived economic situation only marginally, at p=.076, indicating that women are more satisfied with their economic situation than men are. Another variable that is of interest is ethnic origin: being Kyrgyz significantly increases the satisfaction with the current economic

situation, perhaps reflecting the loyalty to the idea that revolution was all about the people and improvement of their lives.

Finally, the variable of most interest for this study, Internet media use, came out not significant at all in the model not shown here, but Internet use in general is significant. Internet use is positively and significantly associated with the respondent's perception of economic situation: the users agree that their economic situation has improved since March 2005 more. This is most probably explained by the fact that Internet users generally have higher-paying jobs and other opportunities that make their economic situation better compared to non-users.

Even more interesting is that the satisfaction with the economic situation is strongly connected with perceptions of individual rights and freedoms. When this variable is introduced in Model 2, the explained variance in "my economic situation today is better than before March 2005" increases by 3.6 per cent. The political rights and freedoms variable shows a high level of statistical significance, although decreases significance of some variables, such as the spread of corruption and being Kyrgyz. It also takes away some of the significance from the president's approval ratings and Internet use, but these variables still stay highly significant and in the same direction. It is important, however, that the perception of rights and liberties drives the perception of economic situation: as the satisfaction with individual rights and freedoms increases by one unit, so does the satisfaction with economic situation by .251 units.

In their turn, respondents' perceptions of their rights and liberties after 2005 also strongly depend on President Bakiev's approval ratings: president's approval is associated with higher levels of respondent's agreement that the situation with the rights and liberties improved. However, neither the government performance in general, nor the parliament approval ratings affect the perception of rights (see Table

2.4.3.2). Spread of corruption has the same negative effect on perception of rights and liberties as on the perception of economic situation described above, but in the second model it loses significance with the introduction of perception of economic rights as an independent variable.

Table 2.4.3.2. Satisfaction with Political Rights and Freedoms

Independent Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	T
(Constant)	1.831	.478	3.828	1.418	.482	2.942
1. Is democracy appropriate for Kyrgyzstan?	.096	.124	.777	.096	.121	.789
2. State function is to serve people	-.025	.087	-.286	-.028	.085	-.324
3. Spread of corruption	.182*	.092	1.984	.143	.091	1.581
4. Relatives and friends give bribes in the last 3 months	-.174	.121	-1.432	-.159	.119	-1.336
5. You personally gave bribes in the last 3 months	.133	.144	.927	.114	.141	.810
6. Government's effort to solve current problems	-.063	.051	-1.241	-.037	.050	-.726
7. President Bakiev's approval rating	.272***	.071	3.849	.223**	.071	3.157
8. Parliament's approval rating	.028	.082	.341	.055	.080	.688
9. Political interest	-.081	.050	-1.601	-.069	.049	-1.388
10. Political knowledge scale	-.048	.047	-1.026	-.061	.046	-1.313
11. Media use index	.079^	.042	1.874	.083*	.041	2.018
12. Civic activity index	.035	.081	.438	.040	.079	.500
13. Internet use	.264^	.152	1.732	.179	.151	1.186
14. Education	-.116	.081	-1.434	-.077	.080	-.970
16. Age	.093**	.031	2.975	.087**	.031	2.831
17. Employment status?	.024	.058	.420	.016	.057	.283
18. Income	-.018	.023	-.792	-.017	.023	-.763
19. Gender	-.068	.110	-.620	-.028	.108	-.257
20. Kyrgyz	.318*	.153	2.080	.254^	.151	1.682
21. Russians	-.164	.179	-.912	-.172	.176	-.981
22. Perceptions of economic situation				.169***	.046	3.663
Model Summary	N = 325, R ² = .184, F = 3.424***			N = 325, R ² = .218, F = 4.033***		

^p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

In contrast to Table 2.4.3.1, in these models media use and some demographic variables are playing a significant role. First, as age increases, respondents agree more that their rights and freedoms are better than before March 2005, but this is, perhaps, due to overrepresentation of young people (students) in the sample. Second, the more media people add to their media use mix, the more satisfied they are with the status of their political rights and freedoms, and this variable is more significant in Model 2.

This finding is difficult to explain by anything but the propaganda effect aimed at enforcing the loyalty: most of the local media in Kyrgyzstan are government-controlled and if people are not capable of thinking critically and are not exposed to other sources of information, they may support the government's point of view, as it was shown in the content analysis chapter. However, to test for the propaganda effect, a more refined media use variable is needed to differentiate between the state and independent media consumption, which was not available for this study.

As in the previous model, being Kyrgyz again increases the level of satisfaction with the rights and freedoms, but loses statistical significance with the introduction of perceptions of economic situation as an independent variable in Model 2.

In contrast to the perceptions of economic situation, Internet use has only a marginal positive effect on the perceptions of the political rights and freedoms in Model 1 and becomes insignificant in Model 2.

Finally, Model 2 in Table 2.4.3.2 shows again the connection between the satisfaction with the status of individual rights and freedoms and the respondents' economic situation: as the agreement with the statement that the economic situation improved after March 2005 grows, the satisfaction with the status of individual political rights and freedoms increases by .169 units. The interconnectedness of the perception of rights and liberties and economic situation may be an indicator that these variables are

endogenous, but as it was pointed out earlier, this particular sample lacks the data to address the potential questions of endogeneity properly.

Overall, the models testing the relationship between the respondents' perceptions of their current situation on the one hand and the variables assessing government performance on the other hand, when controlling for demographic factors, show that individual perceptions of experienced reality depend strongly on evaluation of the government's performance, thus providing support for Hypothesis 3.

Therefore, the subject of the next section is what factors determine the evaluation of government performance.

2.4.4 Perceptions of Government Performance

Perceptions of government performance have been demonstrated to influence the individual perceptions of reality, or status of rights and economic situation after March 2005. It is important now to test what drives the perceptions of government performance, and whether use of Internet media plays a role here (Hypothesis 4).

Three different variables were designed to measure the perceptions of government performance. The first one is the belief that the "government officials do not care much about what people think of their performance" (ranging from 1="strongly agree" to 5="strongly disagree"), the second is the direct question, "Does the government make enough effort to solve current problems?" (varying from 1="yes, they are doing everything possible" to 5="no, they don't care about how people live"), and the third – the Overall Frustration with Government index derived from the factor analysis, with values ranging from 7 – the highest level to 29 – the lowest level of frustration.

The theoretical assumption behind all these models is that the evaluation of government performance will be determined by the appropriateness of democracy, approval ratings of the executive and legislature, spread of corruption as a measure of

the government's capacity, and perceptions of citizens experienced reality, in addition to the demographic variables.

Table 2.4.4.1. Belief that Public Officials Are Indifferent to What People Think of Their Performance

Independent Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
(Constant)	3.396***	.356	9.551	3.677***	.502	7.321
1. Political interest	.023	.060	.383	.018	.058	.309
2. Political Knowledge	-.140**	.055	-2.560	-.160**	.054	-2.987
3. Civic Activity Index	.017	.095	.183	.106	.092	1.151
4. Media Use Index	.106**	.051	2.099	.109**	.049	2.231
5. Internet Media Use	.214	.173	1.236	.202	.174	1.164
6. Education	.131	.093	1.414	.084	.090	.927
7. Age	-.033	.033	-.993	-.032	.033	-.949
8. Gender	.154	.129	1.201	.126	.125	1.010
9. Income	.016	.026	.617	.010	.025	.378
10. Kyrgyz	.101	.181	.559	.001	.177	.003
11. Russians	.168	.209	.802	.098	.204	.481
12. Appropriateness of Democracy for Kyrgyzstan				.017	.140	.121
13. Perception of rights and liberties				-.031	.068	-.465
14. Perception of economic situation				-.010	.056	-.184
15. Spread of corruption				-.215**	.105	-2.044
16. Government's effort to solve current problems				.159**	.059	2.707
17. President Bakiev's approval rating				-.165**	.083	-1.995
18. Parliament's approval rating				-.336***	.095	-3.519
Model summary	N= 333, R ² =.067, F= 2.086*			N=328, R ² =.186, F= 3.913***		

^p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Results presented in Table 2.4.4.1 demonstrate that among sample demographic characteristics, only the political knowledge and media use affect the belief that the

public officials do not care about what people think of their performance. As the respondents add more media to their mix, they disagree more that the public officials are indifferent to people's evaluation of their performance. This may seem to contradict logic, however it should be kept in mind that the media use index measures the use of traditional media, so with adding more media, the users add to the quantity rather than to the quality or diversity of information they receive. This is also supported by the finding from the same model that people who demonstrate higher levels of political knowledge agree with the statement more, suggesting that it is the quality of knowledge rather than the quantity of it that determines how critical the respondents are of government's attitudes toward the people's opinions.

Adding variables relating to government evaluation increases the explained variance in the dependent variable (citizens' perceptions of how much the government cares about their evaluations) by almost 12 percent. Model 2 shows that the respondents' perceptions of government officials' indifference are driven by other measures evaluating the government's performance. These relationships are all in the expected direction: as the respondents' evaluations of President Bakiev's and Parliament's performance moves from approval to disapproval, the belief that the government officials do not care about what people think of their performance only enforces. By the same token, as the spread of corruption moves from "corruption is pervasive" to "corruption is rare" by one unit, the belief that the government officials do not care about the people's evaluation of their performance increases by .215 units.

Finally, as the evaluation of the government's effort to solve current problems moves from "yes, they are doing everything possible" to "no, because they don't care how the people live," by one unit, the belief that the government officials are indifferent to the people's opinions about their performance reinforces again by .159 units.

The regression analysis of the second variable “Does the government make enough effort to solve current problems?” is presented in Table 2.4.4.2.

Table 2.4.4.2. Evaluation of Government’s Effort to Solve Current Problems

Independent Variables	B	SE	t
(Constant)	3.994***	.740	5.394
1. Political interest	.117*	.057	2.068
2. Political Knowledge	-.031	.052	-.594
3. Civic Activity Index	-.088	.090	-.979
4. Media Use Index	-.028	.047	-.592
5. Internet Media Use	-.226	.169	-1.336
6. Education	-.139	.086	-1.612
7. Age	.030	.032	.916
8. Gender	.173	.123	1.414
9. Income	-.037	.025	-1.460
10. Kyrgyz	.006	.169	.038
11. Russians	.079	.199	.398
12. Appropriateness of democracy for Kyrgyzstan	-.158	.140	-1.130
13. Perception of rights and liberties	-.010	.079	-.129
14. Perception of economic situation	-.174**	.062	-2.805
15. Spread of corruption	-.171	.104	-1.644
16. President Bakiev’s approval rating	-.113	.083	-1.366
17. Parliament’s approval rating	-.172^	.094	-1.834
18. Individual political capacity	.064	.052	1.244
19. Norms of Democracy Index	.056	.037	1.530
20. Tolerance of Dissent Index	-.042	.028	-1.503
21. Independent Media and Free Expression Index	.007	.038	.179
22. Political Incapacity Index	.022	.021	1.091
23. Overall Frustration with Government	-.032^	.017	-1.896
24. State function is to serve people	.047	.097	.479
Model summary	N= 323, R ² =.166, F= 2.471***		

^p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

The results of this regression analysis show that the strongest predictors of how the government performance is evaluated are the people's political interest and perception of economic situation. A one-unit change in the political interest results into a .117-change in negative evaluation of the government performance, while stronger agreement that the respondent's economic situation improved after March 2005 results into a better evaluation of government performance.

It should be noted that introduction of the indexes relating to normative understanding of democracy, as well as the variable measuring individual political capacity and normative expectation of the state function did add about 4 percentage points to the explained variance in the model, but remained not statistically significant.

The parliament approval rating and overall frustration with the government have a marginally significant negative affect on the evaluation of government performance, indicating that the lower levels of frustration and higher levels of approval of parliament's performance are associated with higher levels of government performance evaluation. Internet media use is in the expected direction: those who use Internet-based media are more critical of the government performance, but the relationship is not statistically significant, thus providing no support for Hypothesis 4 (a).

Finally, the third variable relating to government performance is frustration with the government, a composite index constructed from the seven items that loaded heavily on the first component in the factor analysis. The index runs from 7 – highest level of frustration to 29 – the lowest level of frustration. Conceptually, the frustration with government is a proxy for the gap that exists between the constructed and experienced reality (see Figure 2.2.2), the depth of which will define the options available for citizens, namely exit and voice.

From the outset it should be noted that the respondents in this sample were highly frustrated with government performance and the system. Of the 400 scores in the index (five respondents did not answer at least one question, resulting into missing data in the entire index), 351 (87.8 per cent) fell below the mid-point of 21, and only 32 (eight per cent) scores were above the mid-point, i.e. lower levels of frustration with government.

Table 2.4.4.3 presents the results of the regression analysis where Overall Frustration with Government is a dependent variable. This model is most robust in the entire analysis: the independent variables explain almost 44 per cent of variance in the Overall Frustration with Government and nine variables in the model are highly significant statistically, with two more marginally significant, while all of the variables show the expected direction of relationship.

The strongest predictors of frustration with government are spread of corruption, Norms of Democracy Index, and Independent Media and Free Expression Index. The relationship between the spread of corruption and frustration is positive, i.e. with every one-unit change in perception of corruption spread from “pervasive” to “rare” the frustration with government decreases by 1.347 units. With Norms of Democracy, however, the relationship is negative: as the respondents answer more that they agree with the normative statements regarding democracy, their frustration with the government increases by .455, which is reflective of the government’s poor performance discussed above. The Independent Media and Free Expression Index runs in the opposite direction: as the respondents agree stronger that the media and expression should be free, their frustration with the government decreases by .566.

This relationship is in the same direction as Tolerance of Dissent Index, which is significant at a slightly lower but still high level of $p=.011$: the agreement that the government tolerates criticism and dissent is associated with lower levels of frustration.

Table 2.4.4.3. Overall Frustration with Government

Independent Variables	B	SE	t
(Constant)	11.880***	2.664	4.460
1. Is Democracy Appropriate for Kyrgyzstan?	-.327	.479	-.682
2. State Function is to Serve the People	-.619*	.333	-2.170
3. Perception of Rights and Liberties	.547*	.231	2.371
4. Perception of Economic Situation	.089	.184	.484
5. Norms of Democracy Index	-.455***	.124	-3.668
6. Tolerance of Dissent Index	.246*	.096	2.551
7. Independent Media and Free Expression Index	.566***	.128	4.436
8. Political Incapacity Index	.012	.071	.167
9. Spread of Corruption	1.347***	.360	3.742
10. Relatives gave bribe in last three months	-.451	.466	-.967
11. Yourself gave bribe in last three months	.015	.548	.027
12. Government's effort to solve current problems	-.309	.200	-1.547
13. President Bakiev's Approval Rating	.703*	.286	2.457
14. Parliament's Approval Rating	.760*	.321	2.367
15. Individual Political Capacity	.485**	.177	2.743
16. Political Interest	.168	.196	.855
17. Political Knowledge Index	.116	.181	.638
18. Media Use Index	-.167	.164	-1.021
19. Civic Activity Index	.079	.311	.255
20. Internet Media Use	-1.856**	.592	-3.137
21. Education	.079	.313	.251
22. Age	.005	.123	.041
23. Employment Status	-.106	.224	-.472
24. Income	-.138	.090	-1.533
25. Gender	-.064	.432	-.149
26. Kyrgyz	-.102	.591	-.173
27. Russians	-1.256*	.688	-2.126
Model summary	N= 319, R ² =.437, F= 8.368***		

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

This is indeed reflective of the current situation in Kyrgyzstan as it is still considered to be one of the most permissive and tolerant states in Central Asia in terms of democratic norms of free expression and dissent. In laws, freedom of expression and

dissent is guaranteed and the government always uses it as a trump card when it is accused of becoming more authoritarian. In practice, however, the government found a better way to suppress the media freedom through ownership and other forms of control but is still unable to control dissent effectively, which is confirmed by the 2.5 years of demonstrations and protests after March 2005 Revolution.¹⁹

Other highly significant variables in the model include individual capacity and perception of own rights and liberties: people who agree more that they can improve the situation in the country for the better and those who believe more that their rights and liberties improved after March 2005 have lower levels of frustration. The same is true for the government approval ratings, as the respondents who approve President Bakiev's and Parliaments' performance are less frustrated with the government.

Two more significant variables are indicative of interesting relationships. The first one is the understanding of the state's function: as the variable moves from "to rule" to "to serve," the level of frustration with the government increases. This is similar to the Norms of Democracy Index discussed above, indicating that there is a gap between the normative understanding of the state's function and the actual government's performance. The second variable indicates that Russians have higher levels of frustration with the government, which may have negative implications for Kyrgyzstan if the level of frustration translates into Russians' leaving the country, given, of course, that the government of Kyrgyzstan wants to preserve its ethnic heterogeneity.²⁰

¹⁹ The frequency of protests and demonstrations decreased in 2007-2008, after the police forces used tear gas to disperse the mass protests demanding to speed up the Constitutional reform in April 2007.

²⁰ Russian-speaking population has been leaving the country steadily since Kyrgyzstan acquired independence. Before the Soviet Union fell, Russian speakers comprised about 25 per cent of the population. The peak of immigration was in 1993-94, when in one year about 100,000 Russians left the country. After the 2005 Revolution, the immigration varies at the level of 30,000-45,000 people a year, having shrunk the estimated level of Russian-speaking population in Kyrgyzstan to about 12-15 per cent.

Finally, the variable of most interest for this study, Internet Media Use, is significantly and negatively associated with the overall frustration with government, indicating that those who use Internet-based media have higher levels of frustration. Thus Hypothesis 4 (b) is fully supported by this model.

To sum up, the level of frustration with the government is greatly affected by the factors relating to government performance (the poorer the performance, the higher the frustration) and normative understanding of how the democracy should work, where the Kyrgyz government performance does not meet the respondents' expectations.

According to the main theoretical model of this project presented in Figure 2.2.2, frustration should result in either higher orientation toward leaving the country, or exit option for the citizens, or higher civic activity, whereby they voice their dissatisfaction with the current situation (Hypothesis 5). The next portion of the analysis is to explore whether the levels of frustration with government and Internet media use are determinant factors in these two options available for the citizens of Kyrgyzstan.

2.4.5 Respondents' Civic Activity and Perceptions of Future in Kyrgyzstan

According to the project's theoretical model presented in Figure 2.2.2, the civic activity (voice) should be the function of not only the demographic characteristics such as age, gender, political interest and knowledge, but also such factors as satisfaction with experienced reality, government performance, own capacity to change things for the better, and in particular frustration with the government, that may move people to express their protest energy.

However, as the results of multiple regression analysis for civic activity index presented in Table 2.4.5.1 show, most of these relationships are statistically insignificant for this sample. First, Hypothesis 5 (a) is not supported: Internet media use has no significant effect on the respondents' civic activity. Moreover, it runs in the opposite

direction, similarly to Overall Frustration with Government Index, indicating that civic activity decreases with higher levels of frustration and use of the Internet media, perhaps testifying for the “exit” option.

Table 2.4.5.1. Determinants of Civic Activity

Independent Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
(Constant)	-.299	.208	-1.439	-.470	.381	-1.232
1. Media Use Index	.020	.030	.668	.012	.030	.407
2. Education	.079	.056	1.395	.083	.058	1.430
3. Age	.088***	.021	4.259	.087***	.022	3.948
4. Gender	.018	.076	.239	.040	.078	.519
5. Internet Media Use	-.006	.103	-.060	-.033	.109	-.301
6. Kyrgyz	.185^	.107	1.734	.200^	.108	1.846
7. Russians	.093	.124	.747	.104	.128	.809
8. Income	-.017	.016	-1.064	-.015	.017	-.896
9. Employment Status	.053	.040	1.331	.053	.041	1.300
10. Political Interest	.054	.035	1.524	.047	.036	1.312
11. Perceptions of Rights and Liberties				.033	.043	.776
12. Perceptions of Economic Situation				-.012	.034	-.350
13. Political Knowledge Index				.028	.033	.848
14. State Function is to Serve People				.028	.062	.452
15. President Bakiev’s Approval Rating				.102*	.053	1.936
16. Parliament’s Approval Rating				.030	.060	.508
17. Government’s Effort to Solve Current Problems				-.042	.037	-1.151
18. Appropriateness of Democracy for Kyrgyzstan				-.083	.089	-.933
19. Individual Political Capacity				.063^	.032	1.929
20. Overall Frustration with Government Index				-.005	.010	-.484
Model summary	N=330, R ² =.174, F=6.715***			N=371, R ² =.195, F=4.479***		

^p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Another problematic variable is the marginally significant (at $p=.054$) President Bakiev's approval rating indicating that as the approval increases, so does the civic activity. There may be two explanations for this. One is that those who support Bakiev's policies are more politically active than his opponents, especially in 2005 presidential elections when Bakiev ran as a revolutionary leader. Second, a simpler explanation, is that the civic activity index itself is problematic due to the respondents who were not eligible to vote in 2005 presidential election, which is the first item in the scale.

In both models, age is the strongest statistically significant demographic predictor of civic activity. This can be at least partly explained by the fact that many student respondents in the sample were not of age during the 2005 presidential election, which would bring their entire civic activity index score down. However, this finding again is consistent with other studies reporting that young people are usually detached from politics and public affairs and are not as actively involved as older people.

The variables approaching significance in Table 2.4.2.3 are ethnic origin (being Kyrgyz increases activity by .200) and belief in own political capacity: as people agree more that they can do something to improve the situation in the country better, their civic activity index increases.

Focus groups also showed that older citizens are generally more conscientious about being involved in public affairs and performing their civic duty, especially when it comes to voting. Consistently with patterns of voting in other countries, in Kyrgyzstan the most active voters are those who are older than 40. They also try to encourage younger people to vote and even influence for whom they will vote. Consider this exchange from a focus group with those who do not use the Internet:

Moderator: "Where do you usually get the information on important political events? To be more specific, for example, the parliamentary elections are coming soon, as you know. How will you decide for whom you will vote?"

Elmira, mid-50s, state agency employee: "I mostly look at the party members, who the leaders are. If I like the leaders, if I know them and trust them, I will vote for the party... We have heated debates about this in our family, my daughter has a totally different opinion about this, and it is very bad when your own child goes against you. For example, I am going to vote for the communists, because they are... what's the word I am looking for? uh, predictable?, and I know what they are about. My daughter will never vote for them because she is from the new generation and she does not trust communists at all."

Ivan, early 20s, martial arts coach: "I trust communists. They are very well known, and predictable, as you said. So I support them. But I don't know if I will vote for them. I don't know if I will vote at all."

Elmira: "Oh, but you should... It is important to vote, otherwise your vote will be used by someone else."

Tatiana, music teacher, early 20s: "Exactly, it is important to vote."

Ivan: "I am perhaps prejudiced, but I believe that my vote will not change anything."

Elmira: "It won't if you don't use it. Because by not voting, you give your vote to someone else."

Tatiana: "Yes, we have this... uh, perhaps the only, opportunity to change things once in four years, so we really must use it. This is why you should vote..."

Ivan: "Well, I don't know... I'll think about it...there is still time to decide..."

This exchange illustrates not only the generational differences, but also that young people vary greatly in their understanding of civic duty and actual civic activity. Below is another illustrative example from a focus group with Internet users (KTMU students):

Ainura: "I just don't see any point in voting. No matter how you vote the government always comes up with the numbers they need."

Bakhtiyar: "But this is exactly why they get the numbers they need – because a lot of people think like you and don't vote."

Ainura: "What do you mean?"

Bakhtiyar: "Have you ever heard of the administrative resource?"

Ainura: "Of course I have. That's ...uh, when the state manipulates the vote with the resources they have... like making students from state schools vote the way the government needs. This isn't a state university, I will vote any way I want to, so I just don't understand how the administrative resource can use my vote..."

Bakhtiyar: "It's very simple, really. You are on the voter list, right? [Ainura nods]. So you don't come to vote and closer to the end of the voting day they, uh, just put a signature across your name and stuff the ballot on your behalf."

Ainura: "But what about the observers who are supposed to... uh, prevent this stuff from happening?"

Almaz: "I worked as an observer once. This is exactly how they do it. But they do it so quickly and skillfully that it is really difficult to catch them in the act. Besides, uh, as an observer you cannot really 'prevent' anything... you can report the violations, but who would pay attention? Many observers, especially local ones, were also threatened to write the 'needed' reports."

Ainura: "But what if, as a citizen, I want to check how my vote was used? Can I see the lists with the voters' signatures to verify that one of them is really mine?"

Almaz: "As an individual, I doubt it. You can get together with other citizens who feel their votes were abused and put in a court claim, but, uh, as far as I know, you have to have the evidence... and no one will show you the voters' lists once they are done, without a court decision... so it is like a vicious circle..."

Baktiyar: "So, as a citizen you'd better vote so that your vote is not used against your will. The best abused vote is an uncast one..."

This exchange also indicates that civic activity may increase with negative personal experiences: when asked later how he came to work as an observer, Almaz said that as a first-time voter in 2005 parliamentary elections he saw some things he "was not supposed to see," as he put it, and joined a political party "to work with like-minded people for the betterment of our society."

Overall, the range of opinions on voting expressed in focus groups varied from "I don't vote because my vote does not matter" to "I vote because it's my duty as a citizen," but mostly revolving around "the last two years showed that the government does not listen any way, so why bother?" Disillusionment with the governance and frustration with the voting process were the factors most often cited in response to the question "Why do you think young people are reluctant to vote?" When the results of the focus groups and survey are considered together, it may be concluded that voicing dissatisfaction through increased civic activity is not an appealing option for this particular sample, even though for the reasons of young age.

As for the second, "exit" option (see Table 2.4.5.2), in the model it pulls together influences from most other elements: perceptions of experienced reality and constructed reality, government performance and normative understanding of democracy, as well as the overall frustration with government and demographics. From the model it can be seen that the exit option seems to be more appealing for those with lower employment status, those who have lower income, and the Internet media users, thus supporting

Hypothesis 5 (b). All these variables have a negative association with the respondents' future in Kyrgyzstan, which is expected and logical.

Table 2.4.5.2. Respondents' Perceptions of Their Own Future in Kyrgyzstan

Independent Variables	B	SE	t
(Constant)	1.925	1.452	1.325
1. Appropriateness of Democracy for Kyrgyzstan	.105	.255	.411
2. State Function is to Serve the People	-.158	.179	-.882
3. Perception of Rights and Liberties	-.135	.123	-1.097
4. Perception of Economic Situation	.221*	.099	2.229
5. Norms of Democracy Index	-.042	.067	-.628
6. Tolerance of Dissent Index	-.119	.052	-2.295
7. Independent Media and Free Expression Index	.046	.070	.657
8. Political Incapacity Index	.041	.038	1.071
9. Overall Frustration with Government	.052*	.031	2.231
10. Media Performance Approval	.527*	.254	2.077
11. Spread of Corruption	.035	.195	.180
12. Government's Effort to Solve Current Problems	-.146	.106	-1.378
13. President Bakiev's Approval Rating	-.047	.155	-.303
14. Parliament's Approval Rating	.240	.171	1.400
15. Individual Political Capacity	.357***	.096	3.729
16. Political Interest	.228*	.105	2.181
17. Political Knowledge Index	.231*	.095	2.423
18. Media Use Index	.214*	.086	2.482
19. Civic Activity Index	-.092	.164	-.561
20. Internet Media Use	-.603*	.320	-2.283
21. Education	.042	.168	.252
22. Age	.079	.065	1.204
23. Employment Status	-.208*	.119	-2.041
24. Gender	.215	.227	.945
25. Income	-.085*	.048	-2.077
26. Kyrgyz	.443	.327	1.355
27. Russians	-.482	.372	-1.295
Model summary	N= 314, R ² =.248, F= 4.833***		

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Overall Frustration with Government index is also significant in a one-tail test at $p=.046$ and indicates a negative relationship (the higher the frustration, the stronger the intent to leave). This may mean that such respondents' intent to leave is associated with the hopelessness of their situation in Kyrgyzstan and the hope for better opportunities elsewhere.

In addition to these variables, higher levels of agreement that the government of Kyrgyzstan is tolerant of dissent are also associated with intent to leave the country, which is more difficult to explain by anything else but the association of dissent with anarchy and disorder and respondent's fatigue of protests and demonstrations over the 2.5 years after the 2005 Revolution.

On the positive end of the scale, the option to stay in the country and make contribution to its development is more appealing for those with higher political interest, higher political knowledge, more diversified media use, and the respondents believing that they can do something to improve the situation in the country for the better. Those who agree that their economic situation has improved since March 2005 also tend to associate with higher levels of intent to stay in Kyrgyzstan.

Not surprisingly, those respondents who agree that the traditional media are performing a decent job in covering the politics and public affairs (i.e. positively assess the constructed reality), also have higher intent to stay in the country. Finally, being Kyrgyz enforced the intent to stay in the country, while being Russian on the contrary adds to the desire to leave, but these variables are not statistically significant.

Such a neat distribution of expected relationships in the "your future in Kyrgyzstan" variable alerts one to the possibility of social desirability bias affecting the responses, especially given the fact that an estimated 500,000-800,000 Kyrgyz currently

reside in Russia and Kazakhstan as migrant workers. However, the distribution of the “your future in Kyrgyzstan” variable shows that about a half (54 per cent) of 390 respondents who answered the question opted for the socially desirable and patriotic higher end of the scale, while 180 (46.2 per cent) checked the exit option. Thus, this distribution, although perhaps still not reflecting the true picture of the exit intentions, is not as skewed toward the socially desirable answers as it could have been.

In summary, this part of the analysis provides partial support for Hypothesis 5: Internet media use does not affect the civic activity index, or political involvement, for this sample, but it does increase the exit moods when it comes to the respondents’ potential to stay in Kyrgyzstan.

2.4.6 Internet Use and Information Sharing Patterns

One of the major goals of this project was to see whether the view of alternative reality constructed by independent online media has the potential to be transferred by the Internet media users into the off-line world through their sharing the information with those who have no Internet access. To answer this question, we first need to understand what activities the Internet users actually are involved in and whether they indeed share the information with non-users. The final part of analysis will explore whether and how the citizens seek the information online and share it with those who have no access to the Internet through three methods: observation of Internet users, survey results and focus group discussions.

Observations of Internet users at the public Internet cafés showed that political news consumption is not high on their list of priorities. They mostly came to the cafés to check their email, chat in various social utility networks such as Odnoklassniki.ru (a rough equivalent of FaceBook in Russian), and conduct Internet research on various topics. Younger users download music and movies and play computer games.

Computer video games are particularly popular among adolescents and teenagers, and when they come to the Internet cafés to play in teams they tend to oust other users who cannot tolerate their noisy presence. In such cases, Internet café owners and managers do not mind other more serious users leaving – teens spend hours playing the videogames, and sometimes a group of nine playing in three teams can bring a profit equivalent to a day's income in just a couple of hours.

It should be mentioned that Internet use is quite affordable in Kyrgyzstan: the average fee in 2007 was 25 som (\$.65) per hour during the day and 40 som (\$1.05) for the whole night starting from 11 pm to 7 am. The number of Internet cafés in proper downtown Bishkek (nearly 30 cafés serving the area of about eight blocks long and six blocks wide) is growing and they compete so much that some of them started to merge into chains. However, as the Internet café managers admit, a lions' share of their income comes from IP phone services and computer games rather than Internet services per se.

Coming back to the use patterns, college and university students often work on their class assignments and term papers in Internet cafés. Occasionally, they also conduct research for their professors – a female graduate student was observed to do the online search while talking with her advisor on the cell phone and asking if that was the information he needed. From time to time, users came in for services such as printing, copying and scanning of documents, without spending any time on the Internet at all. Occasionally, people were observed to have come to the Internet cafés to fill out paperwork for visa applications to German and US Embassies.

On several occasions, a couple of people were sharing one computer, obviously for the reason of one being more skilled in Internet use than the other. In two of such cases, the person using the computer was also serving as a translator on match-making websites, putting up a personal ad for her counterpart. On another occasion, two young

males were having fun on a “meet other singles” website, coming up with fake identities, much older and more attractive than they were in real life. One of them was the “creative director” while the other served as a typist and commentator.

One of the most popular activities of Internet users in Kyrgyzstan is downloading fiction and other literature. Russian websites are extremely generous in providing and sharing the electronic versions of newly released novels and classics for free, and over the period of six months of observation, 74 users were observed downloading books, and sometimes reading novels by popular Russian writers such as Davlatov, Pelevin, and Akunin off the screen. Very rarely users were observed to add to the shared knowledge online – only once a young male was working on a Kyrgyzstan-related entry in Wikipedia.

For a cash-based economy like Kyrgyzstan online shopping is not only a novelty but also an opportunity accessible only for those people who have studied or lived abroad and maintained a western credit card or for Kyrgyz residents who can afford to use the expensive services of local banks issuing mostly debit cards. This is why it was surprising on several occasions to see people browsing online book stores and merchandise websites, but in any case they would not complete the transaction in the Internet café, most probably for security reasons. One young man was observed spending more than two hours on the websites selling used cars, which is also an unusual online activity in Kyrgyzstan.

In general, it was observed that only a handful of the users in public Internet cafés browsed through the news. Only on two occasions the users were observed to leave comments in political forums – one male on *Diesel.elcat.kg* and a female on *24.kg* when it still had its forum open for comments. On one occasion, two young males were observed reading the news from *24.kg* news agency from one computer, but they left

five minutes later. On one occasion, a male user in his early 30s was observed to read *Bely Parohod* newspaper website. He struck a conversation when he saw me bringing up the same site and said that not many people know about this website, unfortunately, and he is always curious about who reads it. He admitted he was an avid consumer who couldn't go a day without reading the website and to my question "why?" responded that this was the only website that "wrote the truth about the current affairs" and because "the forum there is very interesting to read." When I told I was doing research on coverage of politics and invited him to participate in a focus group, he politely declined, citing lack of time.

The survey results also show that using political news is not the first item on the list of online activities. Consistent with numerous uses and gratifications studies of Internet users, number one activity is still email (selected as such by 260 of 271 Internet users who answered this question), followed by general 180 people who marked "news" (often specified "non-political") as their first priority, information search in the third place with 119 preferences, and entertainment, with 92 respondents ranking it as number one – in the fourth. Political news is in the sixth place, selected by 39 respondents as their number one activity. The same patterns were confirmed by the focus groups with the Internet users, except for one focus group with trainees of the Bishkek Press Club, who are much more knowledgeable and politically aware than other student users. They listed political news as the second on their list, still after email.

The results of the survey show that on average, respondents spend about 2.5 hours on the Internet per day, with the majority of 80.2 percent (207 of 258 respondents who answered this question) in the first three categories: less than an hour – 57, or 14.1 percent; 1-2 hours – 101 people, or 39.1 percent, which is the largest category; and 49 respondents, or 19 percent – up to three hours a day. Heavy users of the Internet are

quite rare in Kyrgyzstan: only 6 respondents, or 1.5 per cent, indicated that they spend on the Internet more than 6 hours a day, and two of them were a web designer and a computer programmer, and the other four – students in western universities.

As it was described earlier, 260 of 271 Internet users in the sample indicated that they used Internet-based media to obtain information about politics and public affairs. The survey results also showed that both the users and non-users of the Internet agreed for the most part that Internet users know more about politics and public affairs: of the total 364 respondents who answered this question, 262 (68.2 per cent) agreed that the Internet users know more.

Table 2.4.6.1. Agreement that Internet Users Know More About Politics

Independent variables	B	St. Error	Wald
Media Performance Approval	.216	.294	.541
Political Interest	.108	.126	.731
Political Knowledge Index	.005	.115	.002
Media Use Index	-.288**	.106	7.361
Civic Activity Index	.872***	.243	12.855
Internet Media Use	.663*	.372	4.207
Education	.011	.206	.003
Age	.056	.078	.527
Employment Status	.045	.148	.092
Gender	-.558*	.276	4.091
Income	.052	.058	.804
Kyrgyz	.469	.374	1.573
Russians	.333	.428	.605
(Constant)	-.360	.777	.215
Model summary	N =320, Cox & Snell Pseudo R ² =.124, X ² =42.293***		

^p<.10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

This agreement, of course, can be the result of Internet users thinking that being the Internet users they know more. The results of a one-tail bivariate logistical regression

presented in Table 2.4.6.1 show that it is indeed the case: Internet users are more likely to think that those who use the Internet do know more about politics.

The interesting finding here is that the more media people add to their media use index, the less likely they are to agree that Internet users are more knowledgeable than non-users about politics. This is quite logical because the respondents feel that having diverse sources of information may broaden the knowledge. The agreement that Internet users are more knowledgeable is also driven by the civic activity index: more politically involved citizens are more inclined to agree that the Internet users are more knowledgeable, as well as by gender: females are less likely to agree that Internet users know more about politics than non-users.

Earlier it was established that political knowledge is preceded by political interest. Surprisingly, in focus groups, the participants often pointed out that they are not really interested in politics and that they sought political news on the Internet only when something extraordinary or “interesting” was happening. Here is one example:

Olga, senior journalism student: I am not really interested in politics, so I mostly use the Internet to get general news, like what’s going on, in like... economics, sports – I am a big sports fan, and celebrity gossip (giggles).

Moderator: But you just mentioned that you use the Internet media to get the political news. How do these go together?

Olga: Oh, I mean, I use the political news only when something interesting or extraordinary happens. For example, the Constitutional referendum is not something of interest for me...

Irina, senior journalism student, interrupting: But this one is important... it should define what constitution we will live with...

Olga: Not really, it has already been decided for us. You’ll see, we will get the Bakiev constitution one way or another...

Asia, senior political science student: But you can vote against it...

Olga: Ye-aah, but it won’t change anything, they will still get the numbers they need for the approval. We all know how it works, we’ve had these referenda a dime a dozen.

Moderator: OK then, what would be an important political event for you then?

Olga: Well, I don’t know... I remember I was following the Shanghai 5 [Shanghai Organization for Cooperation, that includes Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan] summits for quite some time because I was curious: will they be able to force Bakiev to kick out the Manas [US military] base...

Asia: For me, referendum is still important, especially because it will, uh, most surely precede the parliamentary elections. I am particularly interested in the development of political parties because... uh my thesis is about political parties in Kyrgyzstan. So I will definitely watch what happens...

Irina: I also follow the referendum, especially this standoff between the parliament and the Constitutional Court. But for me it is more like, uh, watching a ... circus performance, if you will, – it's so funny how all these clowns cling to power and pretend to be civilized...

Moderator: Would you agree that the Internet has more information about these events than the traditional media?

All in agreement: Oh, yeah.

Irina: I forgot when I opened the real newspaper last time. Everything is online these days, and even more than anyone needs or can catch up with...

This exchange shows that even though the students admit they have no or moderate interest in politics, they still have enough background information and critical skills to be skeptical and sober about the government practices and performance. This may also suggest that the participants have a higher interest in politics and public affairs than they give themselves credit for. When asked how they make judgments about the government performance if they don't actively consume political news, the focus group participants would again cite common sense and their experienced reality. One of the economics students, Andrey, said the following:

Bakiev and his team try to convince everyone, and especially, uh, the ordinary people, that after the Revolution we started to live better: the economy improved, the GDP grows 7-10 per cent a year, the industry is developing, the investments are coming in, uh, and all this blah-blah-blah... As an economist, I can tell this is bogus... first, because the numbers do not mean anything when you adjust them for the inflation, second, because I see how the people, uh, including my family, lose in the value of the som because their income is eaten up by inflation and rising prices for everything.

Another student of public relations echoed the same idea in simpler, every-day terms and observations:

Marina: I walk to school every day, and I see how many beggars and disabled people we have now in the city streets... and those heartbreaking old babushkas [ladies], always neat and clean, who are even ashamed to rise their eyes at you when you give them money because they have to beg – can't survive on their

pensions... and another thing – Bishkek used to be so green and clean, and now... you'll never find a trashcan and the entire city is simply trashed, like a big dumpster... the other day on my way from school I saw a fat big rat kind of, uh, leisurely strolling across the road– a RAT! Even three years ago this would be rare, but now they feel, uh, so safe and comfortable in this dirty and, uh, contaminated environment that they come out to the surface. RATS in my capital city! And municipality does nothing about this, a zilch!

Moderator: Can you do something about it as a citizen?

Marina: Well, I don't know... the municipality always complains that they have no money in the budget... as a student, I am not making any money, but my parents have a small-scale business and they pay their taxes... I just don't know... where all these taxes go and why the municipal services are not doing their job... we know they are all corrupt, but they should do at least something, otherwise why do they exist?

Moderator: How about expressing your displeasure about the situation?

Marina, puzzled: Well...

Aida, advertising student: You mean, like, uh, protests and demonstrations?
(scoffs)

Moderator: Not necessarily. Filing a complaint with the municipality about the rats and trash might be an option...

Aida, sarcastically: Oh, yeah, and the municipality would rush to follow up and send an exterminator and a dumpster truck...

Moderator: Perhaps, if they got enough complaints they WOULD follow up...

Aida, laughing: With all due respect, are you from this planet? ... I bet they already have more complaints than they care to read...

This interaction shows that the participants are not only acutely aware of the worsening situation and poor government performance, they are also quite disillusioned about the citizen power, which in most cases is immediately associated with protests and demonstrations. This is, perhaps, a result of the 2.5-year standoff between the government and the protestors that ultimately resolved nothing. In most cases, protests and demonstrations now are the least desirable or respected forms of political involvement.

At the same time, the power of such mild forms of citizens' collective power as filing a complaint is greatly underappreciated, and the citizens thus truly believe that they cannot do anything in terms of citizenry beyond paying taxes and simply expecting that the government would perform at the minimum expected level.

These findings of high awareness of the situation, low awareness of rights and options as well as the diminished belief in individual political incapacity are distressing, given that the sample of this study consisted mostly of people who are on the higher end of the educational scale and therefore should be more aware of their rights and options as citizens, especially in the light of the hope that they would play the role of opinion leaders for the other citizens, less fortunate to have advanced education and Internet access, for that matter.

Nonetheless, there are also Internet users with high political interest, knowledge and awareness of their citizen rights and duties. Here is one participant of a focus group, an active member of a youth wing of a political party and a participant of such political forums as Diesel, talking about the importance of Internet in the political life of the oppositional parties:

Almaz: Internet is very important these days, especially for political parties in opposition. For us, this is a way to communicate, to send messages to members and even to plan actions. For example, we organize political flash mobs through our website's blog accessible only to the party members... and of course we place our party documents for the public to see on our website... this would have been impossible to do in the traditional media controlled by the state...

Moderator: What if tomorrow the government decides to close or block oppositional websites, hypothetically?

Almaz: I don't see why they would do it. They think that the impact of political parties' websites is so small they don't really care...

Moderator: What about the oppositional media and networking websites that have large audiences, like Diesel?

Almaz: Diesel appeared from nowhere, it is controlled by no one and belongs to no one. If for some stupid reason the government decides to crack down on it, it will just move to another domain, probably outside Kyrgyzstan, but I am sure it will maintain all its users – it is a very strong network now with a high sense of community and self-worth. As for the online media, they are also free to move to any other domain. This is the beauty of the Internet – no government in the world can completely close it.

Nazgul: The Chinese government is quite successful in blocking dissident sites...

Almaz: Our government has neither the capacity nor the determination of China to do this... And even if they do, they will not be able to stop the political parties' activities anyway. They squeeze us out of the Internet – we will use text messages and cell phones. In the age of high communication technologies it is impossible to shut everyone up...

Young people like Almaz are rare in Kyrgyzstan, but they are extremely active in building the networks of influences through the web. In addition to them, there may be still hope if the educated citizens with the Internet access share their knowledge with their friends, relatives, and acquaintances without Internet access. The results of the survey show that there is sharing of information, recognized by the users and non-users of Internet on both end. On the one hand, 53 (20 per cent) of the 271 Internet users in the sample admitted that they participated in political discussions and forums and of those, 46 (86.8 per cent) said they share the information they obtain there with their friends, relatives and acquaintances with no access.

On the other hand, of 134 non-users, 93 (75 per cent) said they had friends and relatives who use the Internet, and of them 63 (64 per cent) acknowledged that these users shared the information with them, which for 46 non-users (73 per cent) was different from the information they receive from the traditional media. These results lack the data quantity to test for statistical significance, but the flow of information is obvious here: both the users and non-users state that the more knowledgeable Internet users share the information with non-users.

The theoretical model of government-citizen interaction in Figure 2.2.2 can hint at what motivates the users to do so. First, the users should have a relatively high interest in politics to seek information from the alternative reality available to them in online media and to contrast it with their experienced reality. Second, they should realize that the alternative reality is different from the reality constructed by state-controlled media and it is not fair in relation to non-users that they do not have the access to it.

Third, there should be a certain level of frustration with the government that would be an additional motivator to share the information with others, as people do not

like to be miserable alone. Fourth, people should also know that they could do something to change the situation, i.e. believe in their political capacity, otherwise why bother? Finally, certain demographic characteristics such as media use, education, age and employment may also be contributing factors to the desire to share the information.

The results of a bivariate logistical analysis reflecting these relationships are presented in Table 2.4.6.2. The model has only 46 cases in the dependent variable and statistically not significant Chi-sq value; therefore it has only limited capacity. However, it has a relatively high Cox & Snell Pseudo R-sq, which testifies to its potential for explained variance. Even in this model, political interest is again a strong predictor of whether the Internet users are likely to share the information with non-users.

Table 2.4.6.2. Sharing of Information between Internet Users and Non-Users

Independent variables	B	St. Error	Wald
Political Interest	2.187*	1.138	3.791
Political Knowledge Index	-.534	.993	.289
Media Use Index	1.740	1.318	1.745
Civic Activity Index	-.779	1.238	.396
Education	-.214	1.190	.032
Age	-.822	.596	1.903
Employment Status	-.055	.788	.005
Gender	4.303^	2.319	3.444
Income	.218	.384	.324
Kyrgyz	-4.134	5.021	.678
Russians	16.914	11442.823	.000
Media Performance Approval	-.943	2.219	.181
Individual Political Capacity	.261	.701	.139
Overall Frustration with Government Index	.371	.296	1.571
Perceptions of Rights and Economic Situation Index	.482	.470	1.052
(Constant)	-10.911	8.554	1.627
Model summary	N =46, Cox & Snell Pseudo R ² =.351, X ² =20.354		

^p<.10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Gender is another variable approaching significance at $p=.063$, indicating that women are more likely to share information obtained on the Internet than men. The overall frustration with government is significant at $p=.114$, and media use index – at $p=.134$, so in a model with more cases they could become more significant.

In the focus groups, participants admitted that some of them shared information with non-users and some did not. There was no obvious pattern to why people shared or did not share information, it seemed to mostly depend on the participants' individual characteristics such as the networks of friends and relatives, communicability, and availability of time. On a couple of occasions, generational difference came up again. Below is one example of an exchange with journalism students illustrating this:

Moderator: Do you ever share the information you find on the Internet with your friends and relatives who have no access?

All participants: Oh, yeah...

Bermet: I usually send a link with something I find interesting to my friends by email...

Moderator: Actually, I meant those who have no Internet access...

Bermet: Ah, well, no, because I don't really have friends who have no access.

Elena: Neither do I. May be some high school friends, who do not go to university, but I don't really interact with them that much now...

Asel: Yeah, these days everyone seems to be online... it's great, especially when the friends leave the city and email is the only way to keep in touch...

Natalia: I have some friends with no access, but we usually don't talk politics...

Moderator: Why is that?

Natalia: Don't know... they are not that really interested in politics and have totally different problems.

Moderator: How about your parents or older relatives like aunts and uncles who have no access? Do you share the information with them?

Bermet: No. My parents have a totally different world of problems. We just don't take about stuff like politics. I can't, for example, even imagine that I will be talking with my father about politics.

Moderator: Why?

Bermet: Because he thinks he knows everything he needs to know... and he does know a lot, but he mostly talks about it in the context of how much better everything was 20 years ago and how everything is bad now...

Elena: Right, people of the older generation have this nostalgia about the Soviet times I cannot understand. Talking about politics with them makes me really mad and impatient – they cannot be convinced...

This exchange illustrates that young people are also aware of the generational differences that break the communication down. However, in another focus group with Turkish University students, the participants said that they talked about politics with their parents, in an attempt to “enlighten them little by little and try to change their political views” (Azamat, communications student). Thus, from the focus groups there is no conclusive evidence of how and why people share the information they obtain from online sources, and it seems that in most cases it depends more on individual traits and social networks than on particular trends across groups of people.

2.5 Conclusions

What this chapter has shown is that in a fragile and new democracy, the government of which fails more often than performs according to the citizens’ expectations, the citizens develop high levels of frustration with the government system and performance despite what the government communicates to the citizens through the state-controlled media. At the same time, disillusionment about the March 2005 Revolution and its undelivered promise, as well as fatigue from the overly long protests against the government that did not bring any visible results translate into low political involvement and alienation of the citizens from the entire governance system.

This chapter also provided support for an important, non-deterministic view of mass communication: a media technology is what the people make of it. The theorists of democracy may argue all they want about whether the Internet facilitates or impedes the democratic processes and the development of a public sphere, but it is ultimately the users who shape and mold what the medium will become and what promises it can deliver. In a country like Kyrgyzstan, where the government controls most traditional media, Internet indeed has a great potential and promise as a free and open medium.

However, if the citizens in the first place have a low political interest and motivation to participate in public life, the most wonderful and inviting medium will stay an uninhabited land with unfulfilled promise, albeit full of various sorts of information.

As the observations, surveys, and focus groups under this research show, in today's Kyrgyzstan, the Internet users vary greatly in terms of their use goals and political involvement. On the one hand, there are users who are completely alienated from the public life and use the Internet to explore other country's immigration programs and educational opportunities. On the other hand, there are users who live in the virtual world of political forums and organize flash mobs for the young members of political parties. Somewhere in the middle there are the users who "peek" the political forums without active participation, but spend a lot of time downloading music, movies, and novels. This survey seem to have produced the estimates that the first and the middle group dominate in Kyrgyzstan, but in such a highly sensitive political environment many politically savvy Internet users may opt to stay anonymous and in the shadow, so their true number is difficult to estimate.

It is clear that such politically savvy and involved citizens are crucial for a viable democracy. However, for this group to grow in numbers, there must be support coming from not only the civil society but also from the government, if not in the form of encouragement then at least through non-interference. Unfortunately, at this time such good will on the part of the government is lacking. So the hope is still with the civil society, both domestic and international, that would develop and maintain a necessary level of citizen awareness and involvement.

CONCLUSIONS

This research project was designed to explore the potential and role of the Internet-based media in the Kyrgyz Republic after the 2005 March Revolution. It used a model of interaction between the government and citizens through various types of realities: the reality constructed and imposed by the state-controlled media, the reality created by alternative, independent sources of information online, and the realities experienced by citizens individually (see Figure 2.2.2). The model pulled together various theories from political science, sociology, psychology, and mass communication and focused on the exit-voice-loyalty options available for the citizens in response to governance practices.

Chapter 1 was devoted to exploration of the media space with its imposed and alternative realities through content analysis of an event, which provides a perfect example of how good governance is understood by state-controlled print media and independent online media. The event in question was supposed to be a form of people's democracy in action – the Referendum on Constitutional reform. However, with the careful manipulation of public consciousness and the voting process, the Referendum became a legitimization tool for what many experts believe to be an authoritarian constitution establishing a super-presidential, pseudo-democratic regime in a country that in early 1990s was in the forefront of democratic reforms in the post-Soviet space.

The content analysis showed that the realities constructed by the state-controlled media and independent media were vastly different but in a constant dialogue and reference to each other. The frames and messages the media sources used in relation to what the Referendum initiative meant for the key players – the president, the parliament, and the people and democracy – were mirrored with precision and depth on three most important dimensions.

First, whereas the independent media expressed concern over the looming authoritarian regime and usurpation of power by the president, the state-controlled media were talking about the necessity of enlightened authoritarianism, the strict and disciplined executive, and responsibility for government actions and initiatives concentrated in one hands.

Second, while the independent media were concerned about elimination of opposition and shrinking public space, the state-controlled media promoted homogeneity of the political space in support of benevolent presidential policies and political stability. This was a message particularly appealing for the citizens in the protest-torn country with sharp divisions between the poor and the reach, and between the southern and northern regions.

Finally, while the independent media tried to convey that one month was not enough for the citizens to make an informed decision about such a crucial initiative as the constitutional reform, the state-controlled media stressed that the constitutional reform was long overdue, has been discussed for months earlier and people were ready to make the decision.

The statistical analyses in Chapter 2 show that while there are no significant differences between the print and online media in evaluating the Constitutional Court and Referendum decisions, the mode of production mattered for the overall evaluation of government actions in terms of good governance. Online media were more critical and negative of the current government in their overall evaluation than the print media. These findings are sufficient to support the central hypothesis of Chapter 2 that online media are capable of constructing alternative realities that are more critical of the government and its performance than the traditional media with larger outreach, most of which are controlled by the state.

This presents a serious problem in for an emerging and struggling democracy like Kyrgyzstan because such an alternative reality is accessible only to those 10-15 per cent of the population who have access to Internet as well as residents of the capital city Bishkek, where circulate a few independent papers with the print run of 3,000-5,000 copies. The overwhelming majority of the country's population was exposed only to the state TV and radio channels and state-controlled newspapers. Therefore, the alternative reality created by independent online media is non-existent for most citizens.

What citizens are left with as a measure for imposed reality is their own, currently experienced realities. Chapter 2 of this dissertation was focused on how the different types of realities are perceived by the citizens in the light of good governance. Through observation, surveys and focus groups with both traditional and Internet-based media, the research produced the results showing that the study respondents are acutely aware of the sharp differences between the experienced and imposed reality.

In many cases, this realization comes without the reference to the alternative reality constructed by online media, through common sense and everyday experiences. The realization translates into high levels of frustration with the government and decreased forms of loyalty to the governance system and practices, pulling the pressure toward the exit and voice options. As this research shows, the intentions to leave the country (exit) and to express concerns about the malfunctioning in the governance and to participate in the public life (voice) are equally available for the citizens.

However, the research also showed that the level of citizens' political involvement is quite low, perhaps in part due to the reason that the sample is skewed by over-represented youth (students). Nonetheless, coupled with the high "exit" moods, such low involvement of citizens in the country's public life will almost inevitably negatively affect the prospect for a viable democracy. To correct for this serious malfunctioning,

not only an effort to wake the public consciousness is needed, but also a certain amount of commitment from the government to perform better, to fight corruption, and to include citizens more in the decision-making process. Unfortunately, this reserve is simply lacking in the current government institutions and leadership concerned mostly with preserving the status quo.

With the low levels of political interests and motivation to be involved in public affairs, the option of exit seems to be more appealing for the citizens of Kyrgyzstan, which is also supported by the high permanent and temporary immigration rates. It is natural that the exit option is exercised mostly by the young, skilled and educated, whose political interest and involvement in the public life is traditionally low, similar to other democracies. The Internet opens up new opportunities for them in the form of information about education and jobs outside of the country. As one of the focus group participants noted, with the current rate of immigration and brain drain “Bakiev will soon become the president of babushkas and dedushkas [the elderly].” To stop this trend, the government needs to open up to the young and qualified people and include them into the system of decision-making, which it is reluctant to do.

This research project has produced valuable insights for some policy implications. It has shown that as far as online media are concerned, the strongest skeptics’ fears that Internet is divisive and elitist have not come true and the Internet media in Kyrgyzstan still have the potential to facilitate the public debate at least for the politically interested citizens. Since the government of Kyrgyzstan does not seem to be interested in development of the public sphere, it is the task for the domestic and international civil society to provide more support for Internet-based media targeted at youth with the goal of changing the youth’s perception of political incapacity and turning them away from “easy exit” option toward higher political involvement in the country’s public life.

Further, the model developed for this project can be applied to other countries. Even in well-functioning democracies the gaps between the government performance and citizens' experienced realities are inevitable, and the depth of frustrations and availability of information through the media can be an interesting research topic for mass communication and political science scholars.

The next logical step for this project would be to see how this model applies to other countries that recently experienced the second wave of post-Soviet revolutions – the Ukraine and the Republic of Georgia. The potential comparative country analysis resulting from such research projects may produce an important contribution to the studies of Internet media effects and the second wave of post-Soviet democratization in the form of specific recommendations for facilitation of the public sphere development and support for Internet-based media that have the potential for “spilling over” their influence into the off-line world. Even in its current form, focused on one country only, the research implemented under this dissertation has the potential to make an important contribution to the study of democracy and media in several forms and ways:

- The project is a cross-disciplinary study of media processes and effects in a democratic transition (pulling together the current theories from mass communication, sociology, psychology and political science)
- The project's focus on new media and good governance in a “colored” revolution country is a unique set of research questions that has not been explored before with such a variety of methods and approaches
- The results can be used by policy makers to support new media in remaining managed democracies and to facilitate educational efforts to increase awareness of and demands for good governance among the citizens in new democracies.

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APPENDIX A: TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS – THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

- 1990 The president's position is introduced in all Soviet Union republics. In October, the Parliament elects physicist Askar Akaev the first president of the Kyrgyz Republic for his first 5-year term
- 1991 On August 31, days after the coup against USSR President Gorbachev, Kyrgyzstan declares its independence from the Soviet Union; large-scale market and democratic reforms start
- 1993 The first Kyrgyz Republic's Constitution defines the country as a "secular democracy" and establishes a parliamentary-presidential republic; national currency – som – is introduced making the country independent of the Russian rouble and markets; Kyrgyzstan joins WTO
- 1994 President Akaev dissolves the largely Communist parliament after a long political stand-off over the country's reformist policies and natural resources
- 1995 February – new Parliament is elected; the first of five referenda is conducted on Constitutional Amendments; President Akaev is re-elected for the second (and last) 5-year term uncontested
- 1996 First constitutional amendments introduced following the 1995 referendum tip the balance of power in favor of the president
- 1998 Second constitutional referendum effectively transforms the republic into the presidential-parliamentary republic by stripping the Parliament of some of its functions (including appointing the prime-minister) and expanding the president's authority
- 1999 August – Kyrgyzstan faces a serious external threat to national security when Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan guerillas penetrated the country and took civilian foreign hostages
- 2000 July-August – IMU insurgencies repeat, Kyrgyzstan joins the international anti-terrorist agreement; Constitutional Court resolves that Akaev's first presidential term did not count toward the two-term constitutional limit as he was elected by the parliament rather than the popular vote and term was served under the original, not the current Constitution; Akaev is elected for the third term through a highly manipulated election
- 2001 Under the anti-terrorist agreement, the United States establish a military air base for the operations in Afghanistan. Third referendum on constitutional amendments gives the president even more powers
- 2002 In a southern village of Aksy, police opens fire at several-thousand-strong protest demanding to release an imprisoned parliament member and kills six protestors; under the pressure from the civil society, President Akaev establishes a broad Constitutional Council to develop amendments that would consolidate the society, move the reforms, and improve his eroded trust and reputation with the people
- 2003 Fourth Constitutional referendum approves amendments allegedly developed by the Constitutional Council but effectively giving the president unlimited power; the 2003 version is often referred to as the "Akaev super-presidential" Constitution
- 2004 President Akaev's proponents form a party "Alga, Kyrgyzstan!" ("Kyrgyzstan, Forward!"), the leaders of which include president's daughter and son, to run in 2005 parliamentary elections
- 2005 February 19 – highly manipulated parliamentary elections produce a parliament with 80% of members loyal to President Akaev, including his son and daughter; opposition labels it "Akaev's pocket parliament" and mobilizes broad protests all over the country;
March 24 – Akaev is ousted by a popular uprising – Tulip Revolution, third in the post-Soviet space after the Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution and Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution; Akaev flees to Moscow where he currently resides;

March-April – the country’s revolutionary leaders, now in power, are in turmoil over Akaev’s resignation and the legitimacy of two parliaments – old and newly elected; as a result of political compromises, the newly elected “Akaev” parliament is legitimized; Akaev officially resigns from the presidency on April 4 in exchange for immunity from any future prosecution;

July 14 – one of the revolution leaders, Kurmanbek Bakiev, is elected the second Kyrgyz Republic’s president; his election program includes the promise to return the country to the parliamentary-presidential republic through a constitutional reform

2006 President Bakiev fires several governments; the promised constitutional reform is stalled; in spring and fall the opposition mobilizes masses demanding to complete the reform

October - the opposition presses President Bakiev to adopt the constitutional amendments restoring the parliamentary system, Bakiev signs in the new constitution in November

late November – Bakiev threatens the parliament dissolution, and the pro-presidential parliamentarians force another version by putting pressure on the opposition; the new constitution with more presidential powers is signed in on Dec.16; neither versions go through the Constitutional Court evaluation required by law

2007 April – United Front opposition movement organizes a series of large-scale “no-term” (i.e. finishing only when their goals will be achieved) protests to demand the completion of the constitutional reform. After three weeks of the stand-off, police disperses the protests using the tear gas

September 14 – the Constitutional Court looks into a claim by two parliament members – Eshimkanov and Karabekov – and resolves that both 2006 Constitution versions are illegitimate since they were not adopted by a proper procedure and did not receive the Constitutional Court scrutiny; the country is effectively returned to 2003 “Akaev” Constitution

September 15-19 – the parliament contests the Constitutional Court decision and fires three of the five judges who made it; the Constitutional Court petitions President Bakiev to interfere and he schedules the fifth Referendum on Constitutional amendments for October 21, leaving it for the people to decide whether they want to support him by approving his version of the Constitution along with the Election Code providing for parliamentary elections by party lists rather than individual tickets

October 21 – the Referendum approves Bakiev’s constitutional draft and the Election Code by a reported 75% vote in favor; opposition and NGOs contest the results claiming that the referendum was rigged and the voter turnout was only about 20-30%

October 22-24 – President Bakiev dissolves the parliament and schedules new parliamentary elections by party lists for December 16, 2007; simultaneously he fires the government leaving it acting until the new government is appointed by the new parliament’s majority party

October 24-December 16 – political parties mobilize and re-group; a number of pro-presidential parties forms the Movement “For Constitution, Reform and Development” that became a foundation for the new pro-presidential party “Ak-Jol” (“Bright, Clear Path”); opposition parties fail to unite

December 16 – pro-presidential party “Ak-Jol” wins 80% of the seats in the new and enlarged parliament through what the opposition claims to be “doctored” elections; opposition organizes a series of protest actions under the slogan “I Don’t Believe It” which are dispersed by force and detainments; President Bakiev officially announces that the country has completed the constitutional reform and effectively become a parliamentary republic.

APPENDIX B: CODING SHEETS

CS 1 – Coverage of Constitutional Court and Referendum Decisions

Coder name _____ Coding date _____

Story source _____ Date _____ Length _____ words

Story headline _____

Story genre (*circle one*): news analysis opinion interview editorial other _____

1. Is the Constitutional Court decision assessed (check one):

- Neutrally* – no judgments, just facts and straightforward reporting
- Negatively* – as something that resurrects the old 2003 “Akayev” constitution, takes the country back to where it was before the Revolution, etc.
- Positively* – as something that will allow to move the Constitutional reform forward and overcome the political tensions, eliminate chaos, etc.

2. Are there any reactions to the decision by the officials or experts? _____

If yes, please provide short descriptions:

Quote 1 by _____ (name), _____ (position): _____

Quote 2 by _____ (name), _____ (position): _____

Quote 3 by _____ (name), _____ (position): _____

3. References to what this decision means for President Bakiev? *Examples:* opportunity to dissolve the Parliament and set new elections, push for a new Constitution, acquire even more power, etc. Please provide exact quotes from the story when available: _____

4. References to what this decision means/does for the Parliament? *Examples:* early dismissal, new elections by party lists; all laws adopted by the Parliament from March 2005 till now will be void, etc. Please provide exact quotes from the story when available:

5. References to what this decision means for the people and democracy? If so, please give a quote: _____

6. Any references to possible developments (future referendum, etc.)? If so, please provide a quote: _____

Referendum:

7. **Date decision made and whose initiative is this?** _____
8. **What will be included on the ballot** (*check all that applies*):
- Election Code
 - New constitution
 - Both _____
 - No mentioning
9. **Are the draft laws available for the discussion?**
- Yes
 - No
 - No, but will be available soon (date?) _____
 - No mentioning
10. **Reaction of any NGOs or political parties to the decision on referendum?**
- Positive
 - Positive, but with reservations/recommendations to improve
 - Negative, but with recommendations to improve
 - Negative
11. **Is there enough time for the people to think about the drafts and make an educated decision?**
- Yes
 - No
 - No mentioning
12. **Any references to how much the referendum will cost?**
- Yes _____ (cost estimate)
 - No
13. **According to the story, will the administrative resource be used during the referendum?**
- Yes
 - No
 - No mentioning
14. **Will the referendum be observed by international organizations?**
- Yes
 - No
 - No mentioning
15. **Overall in terms of good governance, does the story present the government actions as**
- Strongly negative
 - Negative, but indirect, implied
 - Negative, but with recommendations to improve
 - Neutral
 - Positive, but indirect, implied
 - Positive, but with reservations/recommendations to improve
 - Strongly positive, supportive of President Bakiev

CS 2 – Coverage of Referendum Results

Coder name _____ Coding date _____

Story source _____ Date _____ Length _____ words

Story headline _____

Story category (*circle one*): news analysis opinion interview editorial other _____

16. According to the story, what is the Referendum's turnout rate? __ (official – 0, lower – 1) _

17. Is there any mentioning if the turnout numbers are different for Bishkek and the regions? If yes, describe the differences _____

18. Reaction of any NGOs or political parties to the referendum results?

- Positive (specify) _____
- Negative (specify) _____
- Neutral (specify) _____
- None mentioned

19. Any descriptions of how the process was taking place?

- Yes (specify briefly) _____
- No

20. Any mentioning of violations of the voting process?

- Yes
- No

21. If violations are mentioned, please check all those that are:

- Stuffing of ballots by local officials
- Multiple voting by the same person
- Threats and obstructions to observers
- Other (please specify) _____
- Violations of counting procedure
- Voter buy-out and bribery
- Abuse of the migrant and "budget" votes

22. Was the administrative resource used during the referendum?

- Yes
- No
- No mentioning

23. Was the referendum observed by international organizations?

- If Yes, was their assessment positive or negative _____?
- No
- No mentioning

24. Overall, is the referendum outcome presented as a positive or negative one? What will the referendum do for the democratic developments and good governance in the country? Please provide exact quotes from the story, if available:

APPENDIX C: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. In your opinion, what is the function of government in Kyrgyzstan? Is it to
 - (1) Rule the people
 - (2) Other (*please specify*) _____ (“Both rule and serve” appeared most) _____
 - (3) Serve the people
2. In your opinion, is democracy an appropriate governance system for today's Kyrgyzstan?
 - (1) Yes (*please skip Question 3*)
 - (0) No
3. If no, what do you think IS the appropriate form of governance for today's Kyrgyzstan? _____
4. Who is the president of Kyrgyzstan? _____ (correct: Kurmanbek Bakiev) _____
5. Who is the prime-minister of the Kyrgyz Republic? ___ (Almazbek Atambaev) _____
6. Please name the speaker of Kyrgyzstan's parliament. ___ (Marat Sultanov) _____
7. Is Kyrgyzstan a presidential or parliamentary republic? ___ (presidential) _____
8. When was the last version of KR Constitution adopted? ___ (December 2006) _____
9. What did the Russian intelligence services do in relation to Asia Universal Bank in 2006?
 ___ (put on black list of money-laundering banks and advised Russian businessmen not to deal with it) ___

Questions 10-38 use the scale with various degrees of agreement with a given statement (3) – (don't know, not sure):

(1) – high degree of disagreement: «strongly disagree»

(2) – moderate degree of disagreement: «disagree»

(4) – moderate degree of agreement: «agree»

(5) – high degree of agreement: «strongly agree»

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements (*please mark the appropriate answer box*):

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
10. There is no way other than voting that people like me can influence actions of the government				
11. No matter what a person's political beliefs are, he/she is entitled to the same legal rights and protections as anyone else				
12. As an individual I have more rights and freedoms today than before March 2005.				
13. As an individual I have more rights and freedoms today than when the Soviet Union existed.				
14. My (my family's) economic situation today is better than before March 2005.				
15. My (my family's) economic situation today is better than before the collapse of the Soviet Union.				
16. We are more likely to have a healthy economy if the government allows more freedom for individuals and does not interfere with honest businesses' affairs				
17. Generally, the government can be trusted to implement policies that will improve people's situation				
18. The current government of Kyrgyzstan is committed to fighting corruption.				
19. Generally, the government is tolerant to the criticism from the opposition and media.				
20. The press should be protected by the law from persecution by the government				

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
21. Today, it is less dangerous for an individual to criticize the government than it was two years ago.				
22. Kyrgyzstan's government should become much more open to the public.				
23. If an unjust law were passed, I could do nothing about it.				
24. The government provides me with enough information about its initiatives, programs and actions.				
25. Anyone with the appropriate skills and qualifications can enter a government agency and work in it.				
26. People should be able to participate in any organization even if this activity opposes some current laws				
27. As an individual I can do something to change the current situation in Kyrgyzstan for the better.				
28. The public officials do not care much about what people like me think of their performance.				
29. Demonstrations and protests are an effective way to influence the government in Kyrgyzstan.				
30. Private radios, television, and newspapers should exist alongside state-owned media.				
31. Those who are in power today understand that they were elected to serve rather than to rule the people.				
32. I feel that if I had to seek a court's protection I would receive a speedy and fair trial.				
33. The courts in Kyrgyzstan make decisions independently, without the government officials' interference.				
34. It is necessary that everyone, regardless of their views, can express themselves freely				
35. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that I can't really understand what's going on				
36. People like me don't have much say about what the government does				
37. I have the right and an opportunity to voice my concerns to my parliament representative.				
38. I believe that my parliament representative would follow up on my concern if I express it.				

39. Did you ever express a concern to your parliament representative?

- (1) Yes What was it about? _____
- (0) No

40. Many of the problems Kyrgyzstan is facing today are the result of

- (1) President Akaev's rule (2) Both presidents are responsible
- (3) President Bakiev's rule (4) Other (please specify) _____

41. Recently, Transparency International ranked Kyrgyzstan as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Which of the following statements reflects your feelings about the spread of corruption in Kyrgyzstan?

- (1) Corruption in the government is pervasive
- (2) Most government structures are corrupt
- (3) Only some government structures are corrupt
- (4) Corruption in government agencies is rare

69. What is your ethnic background? _____

70. What is your employment status?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> (1) unemployed | <input type="checkbox"/> (4) employed full-time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (2) student | <input type="checkbox"/> (5) self-employed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> (3) employed part-time | <input type="checkbox"/> (6) other |

71. What is your profession? _____

72. What is your monthly income (your family's income if you do not make money)

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$200-299 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500-599 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50-99 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$300-399 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$600-699 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100-199 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$400-499 | <input type="checkbox"/> over \$700 |

73. Your gender:

- (0) Male (1) Female

Would you like to participate in focus groups on how various media cover public affairs in Kyrgyzstan? If yes, please provide your name and telephone number on the enclosed card.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Questions for Internet Users (replace Questions 52-60):

- 1) How much time do you spend on the Internet per day on average? (from less than an hour, 1-hour intervals to more than 7 hours a day)
- 2) What are your primary goals in using the Internet (check all that applies):
 - Email
 - Communication (including social utility networks)
 - News, information (non-political)
 - Political news
 - Entertainment (download music, videos)
 - Information search (for studies or work)
 - Leisure (to kill time)
 - Other (please specify)
- 3) Do you use Internet-based media to obtain information on politics and public affairs in Kyrgyzstan (yes-no)?
- 4) Do you participate in the online political forums (yes-no)?
- 5) If you answered "yes" to Question 4, do you share the information you receive from the Internet with your relatives and friends who have no access (yes-no)?

APPENDIX D: VARIABLES AND INDEXES – CODING SCHEME

Content Analysis (Chapter 1)

Variable Name	Variable Description	Variable Coding Scheme
1. Source Independence	Media source independence from government control, ranging from highest to lowest degrees of control	(1) state (2) conformist (3) independent (4) foreign
2. Offline Impact Potential	Potential of the media source to make an impact in the offline (real) world, ranging from highest to lowest potential	(1) print newspaper (2) online version of print paper (3) online news agency (4) online paper (5) analytical website
3. Print/Online Source	Distinction between online and print sources, dichotomous variable	(1) print source (2) online source
4. Originality of Material	Originality of material published in media sources' stories, ranging from least to most original	(1) borrowed, reprinted material (2) borrowed material with own comment or analysis (3) mostly original material
5. CC/Referendum Evaluation	Media source's evaluation of the Constitutional Court decision on Referendum	(1) negative (2) neutral (3) positive
6. Overall Evaluation of Government Actions	Media source's overall evaluation of the government actions in terms of good governance	(1) strongly negative (2) somewhat negative (3) neutral (4) somewhat positive (5) strongly positive
7. Reporting of Turnout Rate	Media source's reporting of the Referendum turnout rate, dichotomous variable	(0) lower than the official (1) officially reported rate
8. Reporting of Violations	Media source's reporting of the violations and irregularities during the Referendum, dichotomous variable	(0) no violations reported (1) violations reported
9. Reporting of Administrative Resource Use	Media source's reporting of the use of the administrative resources during the Referendum, dichotomous variable	(0) no use reported (1) administrative resource use reported
10. Evaluation of Possible Developments	Media source's evaluation of possible developments after the Referendum as pessimistic or optimistic	(1) pessimistic (2) neutral (3) optimistic

Survey (Chapter 2) variables and indexes in order of appearance

Variable Name	Variable Description	Variable Coding Scheme
1. Political Interest	Respondents' self-reported interest in politics and public affairs (Q.52 in the Questionnaire), ranging from lowest to highest interest	(1) not interested at all (2) low degree of interest (3) moderate interest (4) interested (5) extremely interested
2. Internet Use	Respondents' use of the Internet, dichotomous variable	(0) do not use Internet (1) use Internet
3. Internet Media Use	Internet users' self-reported use of Internet-based media to acquire information on politics and public affairs, dichotomous variable	(0) do not use Internet-based media (1) use Internet-based media
4. Government Works for People	Respondent's agreement with the statement "Generally, the government can be trusted to implement policies that will improve people's situation" (Q.17)	(1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) uncertain / don't know (4) agree (5) strongly agree
5. Public Officials are Indifferent	Respondent's agreement with the statement "The public officials do not care much about what people like me think of their performance" (Q.28)	(1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) uncertain / don't know (4) agree (5) strongly agree
6. Perceptions of Rights and Liberties	Respondents' agreement with the statement "As an individual I have more rights and freedoms today than before March 2005" (Q.12)	(1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) uncertain / don't know (4) agree (5) strongly agree
7. Perceptions of Economic Situation	Respondents' agreement with the statement "My (my family's) economic situation today is better than before March 2005" (Q.14)	(1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) uncertain / don't know (4) agree (5) strongly agree
8. Perceptions of Rights and Economic Situation Index	Composite index of Items 6 and 7 (Q.12 and 14 in the Questionnaire)	Ranges from 2 – "strongest disagreement" to 10 – "strongest agreement"
9. Political Knowledge Index	Composite Index of Questions 4-8: "Who is the president of Kyrgyzstan?" "Who is the prime-minister?" "Name the Parliament speaker" "Is KR a presidential or parliament. republic?" "When was the last version of KR Constitution adopted?"	Ranges from 0 – "no question answered correctly" to 5 – "all questions answered correctly"
10. Media Use	Composite index of Q.53 items - respondents'	Ranges from 0 – "no

Index	self-reported use of the following traditional media: (1) local papers; (2) national papers; (3) Kyrgyz TV channels; (4) Russian and foreign TV channels; and (5) local and national radio	medium used" to 5 – "all five types of media used"
11. Media Performance Approval	Respondent's answer to Question 62: "Do you believe that the TV channels, radio and newspapers you use do a decent job in covering national politics?"	(0) no (1) yes
12. Complexity of Politics and Political Incapacity	Respondents' agreement with the statement "Sometimes politics and government seems so complicated that I can't really understand what's going on" (Q.35 in the Questionnaire)	(1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) uncertain/ don't know (4) agree (5) strongly agree
13. Civic Activity Index	Composite index of Q.63-65 - respondents' self-reported political involvement: (1) voting in 2005 presidential election; (2) participation in demonstrations and protests starting from Feb.2005; and (3) being a member of a political party or civil society organization	Ranges from 0 – "no type of activity reported" to 3 – "all three types of activity reported"
14. Government's Tolerance to Criticism from Opposition and Media	Respondents' agreement with the statement "Generally, the government is tolerant to the criticism from the opposition and media" (Q.19)	(1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) uncertain/ don't know (4) agree (5) strongly agree
15. Appropriateness of Democracy for Kyrgyzstan	Respondents' answer to the question "In your opinion, is democracy an appropriate governance system for today's Kyrgyzstan?" (Q.2)	(0) no (1) yes
16. State Function Is to Serve People	Respondents' answer to the question "In your opinion, what is the function of government in Kyrgyzstan? Is it to..." (Q.1 in the Questionnaire)	(1) rule the people (2) both rule and serve (3) serve the people
17. Spread of Corruption	Respondents' answer to Question 41: "Which of the following statements reflects your feelings about the spread of corruption in Kyrgyzstan?" ranging from the highest to the lowest levels of corruption	(1) Corruption is pervasive (2) Most government structures are corrupt (3) Only some government structures are corrupt (4) Corruption is rare
18. Personal Experiences with Corruption	Respondents' answer to Questions 42-43: "Did you personally(43)/ anyone among your relatives or close friends(42) have to bribe a government employee in the last three months?"	(0) no (1) would rather not tell (2) yes
19. Government's Effort to Solve Current Problems	Respondents' answer to Question 47: "Do you think the government is doing a decent job in trying to solve the current problems?" ranging from the most to the least effort	(1) Yes, they are doing everything possible (2) They are trying but face too many obstacles

		(3) They do only what will help them to stay in power (4) No, their main goal is to survive to the next elections (5) No, they don't care about how people live
20. Government Approval Ratings	Respondents' answers to Questions 49-50: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Kurmanbek Bakiev (49)/ Parliament (50) is handling his/its job?"	(0) disapprove (1) 50/50 (2) approve
21. Individual Political Capacity	Respondents' agreement with the statement "As an individual, I can do something to change the current situation in Kyrgyzstan for the better" (Q.27)	(1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) uncertain/ don't know (4) agree (5) strongly agree
22. Norms of Democracy Index	Composite index of the following 3 items: Q.11. "No matter what a person's political beliefs are, he/she is entitled to the same legal rights and protections as anyone else" Q.16. "We are more likely to have a healthy economy if the government allows more freedom for individuals to do as they wish" Q.22. "Kyrgyzstan's government should become much more open to the public"	Ranges from 3 – "highest level of disagreement" to 15 – "highest level of agreement"
23. Tolerance of Dissent Index	Composite index of the following 3 items: Q.19. "Generally, the government is tolerant to criticism from opposition and media" Q.21. "Today it is less dangerous for citizens to criticize the government than before March '05" Q.29. "In Kyrgyzstan, demonstrations and protests are effective in influencing a government decision"	Ranges from 3 – "highest level of disagreement" to 15 – "highest level of agreement"
24. Independent Media and Free Expression Index	Composite index of the following 3 items: Q.20. "The press should be protected by the law from persecution by the government" Q.30. "Private media should exist alongside state-owned ones" Q.34. "It is necessary that everyone, regardless of their views, can express themselves freely"	Ranges from 3 – "highest level of disagreement" to 15 – "highest level of agreement"
25. Political Incapacity Index	Composite index of the following 4 items: Q.10. "There is no way other than voting that people like me can influence the actions of the government" Q.23. "If an unjust law is passed, I could do nothing about it" Q.35. "Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that I can't really understand what's going on" Q.36. "People like me don't have much say about what the government does"	Ranges from 4 – "highest level of disagreement" to 20 – "highest level of agreement"
26. Overall Frustration with	Composite index of the following: Q.17. "Generally, the government can be	Ranges from 7 – "highest level of disagreement"

Government	<p>trusted to implement policies that will improve people's situation"</p> <p>Q.18. "The current government of Kyrgyzstan is committed to fight corruption"</p> <p>Q.25. "Anyone with appropriate skills and qualifications can enter a government agency and work for it"</p> <p>Q.31. "Those who are in power today understand that they were elected to serve rather than to rule the people"</p> <p>Q.32. "I feel if I had to seek a court's protection I would receive a speedy and fair trial"</p> <p>Q.33. "The courts in Kyrgyzstan make decisions independently, without government officials' interference"</p> <p>Q.38. "I believe my parliament representative would follow up on my concern if I express it"</p>	<p>(denoting highest level of frustration) to 35 – "highest level of agreement" (lowest level of frustration)</p>
27. Future in Kyrgyzstan	<p>Respondents' answer to Question 48: "Please select only one statement that best describes your feelings about your own future in Kyrgyzstan?"</p>	<p>(0) already left (online survey)</p> <p>(1) I will leave the country at the first opportunity</p> <p>(2) I love my country but will have to leave because of the worsening situation</p> <p>(3) I will leave temporarily (to study, earn money) but will come back</p> <p>(4) I would like to leave, but realistically it is not possible right now</p> <p>(5) I am not pleased with the way things are now, but I feel they will improve so I'll stay</p> <p>(6) This is my country and I will stay and do everything I can to make the life better here</p> <p>(7) I love my country and will never leave it even if the things go worse</p>
28. Internet Users Know More about Politics	<p>Respondents' answer to Question 61: "Do you feel that in general those citizens of Kyrgyzstan who have Internet access are better informed about the political events in the country?"</p>	<p>(0) no</p> <p>(1) yes</p>
29. Internet Users Share Information	<p>Respondents' answer to Question 59: "Do you(they) share with them(you) the political information you (they) receive on the Internet?"</p>	<p>(0) no</p> <p>(1) yes</p>

VITA

Svetlana Kulikova is a native of Kyrgyzstan, a former Soviet Republic. She graduated with honors from the Foreign Languages School of the Kyrgyz State National University in 1993. In 1994, she won a full scholarship to study political science at the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary, and earned her master's degree in 1995. In 1995-97, she studied journalism and mass communication as a Freedom Support Act fellow at Kansas State University.

Having earned her second master's, Kulikova returned to her home country and taught for seven years various media courses at the American University – Central Asia. She also served as a chair of Journalism Department, Director of Public Relations Office for this university and a director of an inter-institutional research project that resulted into a 200-page book on mass media in Kyrgyzstan.

Kulikova returned to the United States in 2004 to earn her doctoral degree in mass communications and public affairs from Louisiana State University's Manship School. While working on her degree, Kulikova developed and strengthened her research interest in the area of freedom of expression and press in emerging democracies and the role of new media in forming citizens' perceptions of good governance, which is the main focus of her dissertation.

Upon graduation from LSU, Kulikova will start working as an assistant professor in a tenure-track position in international communications with the Department of Communication at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia.