

than a decade before the collapse. Since 1981, the poverty rate had been declining by 2.5 percentage points a year. “Our results suggest that a majority of those living below the poverty line,” the authors write, “would not have done so except for the 1998 crisis.”

OTHER NATIONS

Postcommunist Shuffle

THE SOURCE: “Rose, Orange, and Tulip: The Failed Post-Soviet Revolutions” by Theodor Tudoroiu, in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Sept. 2007.

STARTING IN 2003, WHEN democracy seemed to be spreading to the most improbable nations,

revolutions broke out in three former Soviet republics. The Rose Revolution toppled a blindsided Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia and replaced him with a 36-year-old former New York lawyer. The Orange Revolution of 2004 in Ukraine installed a Westernized Viktor Yushchenko as the true winner of disputed elections, supplanting a thuggish clique later suspected of nearly killing him by dioxin poisoning. And the Tulip Revolution in 2005 in Kyrgyzstan sent authoritarian president Askar Akayev hightailing to Russia, succeeded by an opposition leader promising constitutional reform.

The revolutions followed a common pattern: a fraudulent election, massive protest demon-

strations, and the installation of a new “revolutionary” leadership. All three were hailed in the West as proof that a new civil society had grown strong enough in the post-communist countries to check fraud and corruption. In former Soviet republics with incomes as low as that of Swaziland, enthusiasts saw the birth of a new era of Jeffersonian democracy.

Alas, writes Theodor Tudoroiu, a political scientist at McGill University, all three regimes now represent “nothing more than failed revolutions.” In fact, no fresh heroes rose from the grassroots, swept into power by a newly robust civil society and banished Soviet-era apparatchiks. The “revolutions” were really the product



Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko's supporters hand out certificates to participants during the Orange Revolution in 2004. Since then, democracy has gone downhill. Winners of the three botany-themed revolutions in the former Soviet republics have all lost their hero's luster.

of a split in the “political elite” surviving from the Soviet era. The Rose, Orange, and Tulip revolutions were initiated and controlled by “outs” seeking to replace the “ins.”

Georgia’s new leader, Mikhail Saakashvili, once the justice minister under the regime he overthrew, has ripened into a little Napoleon Bonaparte, accumulating outsized powers and fending off lurid charges of murder and

The Rose, Orange, and Tulip revolutions in three former Soviet Republics, says a political scientist, have amounted to little more than a limited rotation of the ruling elites.

corruption. Ukraine’s president, a former prime minister and head of the national bank under the regime he defeated, did little after winning power, and finally was forced to offer the office of prime minister to a leader of the clique suspected of trying to kill him. Kyrgyzstan, whose president has polished coercive institutions to a brighter shine than in the Soviet era itself, is mired in corruption and nepotism and has suffered business-linked killings and political assassinations.

The democratic revolutions so beautifully named in the euphoria of mass street demonstrations, Tudoroiu writes, have proven to be not much more than a “limited rotation of the ruling elites within undemocratic political systems.”

OTHER NATIONS

Cuba’s Race Problem

THE SOURCE: “The Erosion of Racial Equality in the Context of Cuba’s Dual Economy” by Sarah A. Blue, in *Latin American Politics and Society*, Fall 2007.

IT DIDN’T TAKE LONG FOR Fidel Castro’s 1959 revolution to have a dramatic impact on race relations in Cuba. In a society so hung up on whiteness that even President Fulgencio Batista was denied membership in the Havana Yacht Club because he was a mulatto, relative racial equality arrived within a generation. Equal proportions of blacks, whites, and mixed-race Cubans graduated from high school and college. Life expectancy and infant mortality rates became virtually the same for all groups, writes Sarah A. Blue, a geographer at Northern Illinois University. Precisely equal percentages of the three racial categories held professional jobs.

But after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, an economy fueled by favorable trade deals with the Eastern Bloc countries went into near free fall. Starting three years later, Castro was forced to formally expand tourism and self-employment, and to allow relatives to send remittances from abroad. Cuba’s economy stabilized, but its hard-won racial equality was eroded, Blue writes.

Blacks are still likely to land good jobs with the state. But whites are five times more likely than blacks to have an annual income above about

\$700. The difference derives from access to dollars—or currency convertible to dollars, which whites are better positioned to possess.

Starting in 1993, residents could legally earn productivity bonuses paid by foreign (mostly European) companies in dollars, and engage in 157 specified commercial activities, such as selling crafts or homemade food, driving taxis, and opening restaurants.

In theory, dollars are equally available to all. In practice, whites are more likely to be hired for tourism jobs because managers say that foreigners feel “more comfortable” with lighter-skinned Cubans, according to Blue. Whites can open restaurants more easily because they are more likely to have room in their homes—fewer of them live with extended families because whites have emigrated at far greater rates. Moreover, 44 percent of white Cuban families receive remittances from abroad, but only 23 percent of black households do, according to a survey Blue conducted.

Living in historically disadvantaged areas with substandard housing, blacks are more likely to have moved into new Soviet-style apartment complexes far from the tourist haunts conducive to starting bed-and-breakfasts. And relatively few black or mixed-race Cubans have inherited vehicles that can serve as makeshift taxis.

A “nouveau riche” class is rising in Cuba, Blue says, but it is not equally open to all. Mere equality in education and government employment is no longer enough to level the playing field.