

Mimes for Good Governance: The Importance of Culture and Morality in the Fight Against Corruption

National First-Place Winner

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In 1993, Antanas Mockus dropped his pants and mooned a crowd of hundreds of students at Bogotá's Universidad Nacional. Two years later, he was elected as the mayor of Bogotá.ⁱ His notoriously unorthodox methods of problem solving and conflict resolution would bring unprecedented change to a city rank with corruption and violence. By focusing on the culture of corruption that was pervasive amongst its residents, Mockus accomplished in just a few years what none before him had. Between 2005 and 2010 in Kyrgyzstan, efforts to uphold a functioning democracy plagued with corruption led to political and ethnic violence.ⁱⁱ These two countries, both at war within themselves, fought for good governance in the face of internal conflict with different strategies, and their treatment of the role of society and culture in corruption played a significant role in their ultimate success or failure.

Bogotá, Colombia's capital - the fourth largest city in Latin America and home to over seven million people, is today regarded as one of the most livable cities in Latin America.ⁱⁱⁱ Conversely, in 1993, it was called the homicide capital of the world and was regarded as one of the worst cities to live in due to its rampant murder, corruption, poverty, and paramilitary activity.^{iv} Colombia is a functioning democracy, with free elections and press, and Bogotá was no exception.^v When Antanas Mockus ran for mayor in 1995, he faced a nation with a Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of 3.44.^{vi} He entered a city government where party politics virtually required handouts to party members and personal friends, and supported nepotism.^{vii}

Not only were government funds widely misused, but elected officials, law enforcement and civil servants accepted bribes from drug cartels and paramilitary groups that Colombia had been at war with for years. Paramilitary groups, such as The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC), undermined good governance in Colombia and especially in Bogotá, as the city was the center of much paramilitary activity and unrest.^{viii} Although Bogotá has sufficient laws preventing corruption,^{ix} the general populace and government officials had little regard for them, thus creating a culture that accepted corruption, immoral acts, crime and violence because there were seldom consequences.^x

Mockus, a Lithuanian immigrant, mathematician, philosopher and former rector at the Universidad Nacional, entered the mayoral race to bring good governance to Bogotá.^{xi} He ran as an independent, and became the first independent mayor of Bogotá in history. His independence meant that Mockus, instead of engaging in political patronage, could fill his council with well-qualified experts in their fields. Mockus recognized that in Bogotá, there existed disparities between law, culture and morality that could not be remedied with legislation only. Garbage was thrown on the streets because it was morally acceptable. People committed crimes because they would not be punished for them. In Mockus' view public servants, like the traffic police force (which was notoriously corrupt), were vital to uphold morality in society. The traffic police in Bogotá were ineffective and accepted bribes to not record traffic violations.^{xii} The result was what some called "chaos" in the streets of Bogotá, with 1,300 traffic deaths in 1993 alone.^{xiii} Mockus' answer was to fire the 3,200-man traffic police force and replace them with mimes in an attempt to change the morality of the citizens of Bogotá. The mime's job was to ridicule those who violated traffic laws - mocking jaywalkers, and pretending to push cars blocking intersections out of the way. In two months the percent of drivers following traffic laws

increased from 26% to 75%.^{xiv} The public's fear of ridicule resulted in a culture with better morals that frowned upon not only traffic violators, but lawlessness. Continuing his philosophy of moral over legal incentives in governance, Mockus utilized legislation to create a more moral culture, which helped to reduce homicide rates by 50%, and halted the bribing of government officials and public servants. The new morality code gave meaning to anti-corruption legislation by decreasing citizens' support to paramilitary groups and, thereby, decreased the paramilitary groups' activity in the city, bringing Bogotá closer to peace.^{xv}

Kyrgyzstan's history is quite different from Colombia's past. Kyrgyzstan is a Central Asian nation of five million that, like Colombia, is a democracy and holds free elections although their fairness has been questionable.^{xvi} Kyrgyzstan possesses a widespread culture of corruption despite anti-corruption legislation, with a CPI in 2005 of 2.3 that hinders effectively dealing with internal conflict.^{xvii} Kyrgyzstan's recent history is marred by conflict between the ethnic Kyrgyz in the north and ethnic Uzbek in the south that approached civil war at times, creating widespread tension that was also partly fueled by the pervasive corruption.^{xviii} The Kyrgyz people have incited two revolutions to end corruption in the past ten years yet a culture of lawlessness still prevails.^{xix}

In 2005, the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan brought down an infamous, corrupt leader, President Askar Akayev.^{xx} During his fourteen year rule, he unjustly restricted parliament in an effort to concentrate power in the presidency. Akayev, a leader guilty of nepotism and using government revenue to fund his campaign, was overthrown in the Tulip Revolution by enraged Kyrgyz after it became clear an election was obviously rigged in his favor.^{xxi} After ousting Akayev and installing a new and popular interim government led by the new President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Kyrgyzstan believed it could finally rest with a competent leader and a

victory against corruption. On July 23, 2009, after four years of rule, interim President Bakiyev won the presidential election with 85% of the vote.^{xxii} The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe deemed the election fixed and revealed to the small Central Asian country that Bakiyev was a leader just as corrupt as his predecessor. The failed election caused Kyrgyzstan's second revolution in the past 10 years, ironically, overthrowing a leader for corrupt practices whom they had initially elected to fight corruption.

Despite violent opposition to corruption in both 2005 and 2010, good governance was not evident in Kyrgyzstan due to a lack of anti-corruption culture and disregard for law.^{xxiii} The violent discrimination against ethnic Uzbeks, and lawlessness that pervaded in Kyrgyzstan's southern region in the political turmoil post-election were prime examples of the chaos within the state. Ethnic Kyrgyz and gangs of armed gunmen beat and killed over 300 ethnic Uzbeks, and caused 75,000 Uzbek refugees to flee across the border to Uzbekistan.^{xxiv} Although Kyrgyz committed violent acts against Uzbeks, human rights groups reported that Uzbeks far outnumbered Kyrgyz in those charged with the crimes. An attorney defending Uzbek clients said her clients were forced to confess, were never proven guilty, and that judges' decisions were politically motivated.^{xxv} These corrupt practices were supported by much of the Kyrgyz ethnic majority, who yelled insults at the Uzbeks during trials. Even after such opposition to corruption, Kyrgyz committed unlawful acts that supported corrupt practices like unfair trials.

Although the Kyrgyz overthrew both Bakiyev and Ayakar for their incompetence in practicing good governance, they themselves disregarded rules, like refraining from bribing police and government officials, and condemning lawlessness. Reforms on corruption in Kyrgyzstan focused on ensuring fair elections through monitoring conducted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Small scale efforts by organizations, like the

American Bar Association, launched attempts to reform the culture and educate the masses on their role in fighting corruption. Various reform programs, like The Street Law Program that teaches young women in Kyrgyzstan about their rights and duties under the law, have been implemented in fifty schools across Kyrgyzstan.^{xxvi} As of October of 2010, despite the reform efforts, Kyrgyzstan's CPI remained unchanged.^{xxvii}

The success of Bogotá and Kyrgyzstan in quelling internal conflict has much to do with how the culture of corruption was treated. Kyrgyzstan and Bogotá both had the advantage of a democratic government, which, although corrupt provided the basic mechanisms for change. Such progress may not have been possible in an autocratic society. However, it was the state's treatment of the culture of corruption that played a large factor in deciding their fates. For an example of how cultural norms can overshadow legal incentives, one can look to the records of outstanding parking violations of diplomats who are not required to pay fines for violations. Their only incentive to not park in an illegal spot, then, is that they are morally against it, or it is not within their cultural norm. Indeed, Sudan has 120.6 unpaid violations, which with a score of 1.6, has the second lowest CPI of any country. The three countries with the highest CPIs, Denmark, New Zealand and Singapore respectively, have a total of 3.6 unpaid violations from diplomats combined. The overall trend is that countries with low CPIs tend to have high numbers of unpaid violations.^{xxviii}

Mockus created a culture of model citizens concerned with upholding legal authority and good governance, while officials in Kyrgyzstan saw the effects of addressing corruption only through legislation and fair elections. Kyrgyzstan failed to address the sources feeding corruption by ignoring the power of the individual to decide the fate of its country and the integrity of its government. Third parties, like OSCE, while able to aid in surface level corruption failed to

change the attitude and behavior of citizens, a fault that culminated in an ethnic conflict with massive casualties. Corruption in elections and government offices must be addressed but those measures will not be effective if a culture of corruption persists. For nations to combat corruption, they must pay attention to Bogotá's and Kyrgyzstan's experiences and have third parties and leaders institute reforms to change the behavior and morality in their citizens to support and encourage good behavior. This can be accomplished with the help of third parties, legislation (like Mockus'), or through promotion of good social values in the media. Antanas Mockus said, "...there is a tendency to be dependent on individual leaders. To me, it is important to develop collective leadership. Millions of people contributed to the results that we achieved."^{xxix} For Bogotá, Kyrgyzstan, and for the world, a culture that upholds good morals can create a world of change.

Notes

ⁱ Colombia News. "Profile: Antanas Mockus." Colombia Reports. Colombia News, n.d. Last accessed 1 Feb. 2011. <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/149-2010-elections/9185-profile-antanas-mockus.html>.

ⁱⁱ National Public Radio. "Ethnic Violence Spreads in Kyrgyzstan." Weekend Edition. 13 June 2010. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=127810793>.

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Colombia." 4 Oct. 2010. Last accessed 1 Feb. 2011. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm>.

^{iv} Kantarius, A., Jack, J., Veileborg H. (Producers), & Dalsgaard, A (Director). 2009. "CITIES ON SPEED - Bogota Change."

^v "Background Note: Colombia." <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm>. (accessed February 1, 2011).

^{vi} The CPI ranks countries on a scale of one to ten, ten being the least corrupt. Transparency International. "Corruption Perceptions Index 2010." Last accessed 1 Feb. 2011. http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results.

^{vii} 2009. "CITIES ON SPEED - Bogota Change."

^{viii} United Nations Refugee Agency. "Crime in Bogotá and Cali, activities of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) in those cities, government actions to combat the activities of these groups, and protection offered to victims." 16 April 2009. Last accessed 1 Feb. 2011. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a7040aac.html>.

^{ix} Organization of American States. Report from Colombian organizations of the civil society for presentation to the Third Round of the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism for the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption -MESICIC. 2009. http://www.oas.org/juridico/PDFs/IIIinf_hemis_en.pdf.

^x 2009. "CITIES ON SPEED - Bogota Change."

^{xi} Profile: Antanas Mockus." <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/149-2010-elections/9185-profile-antanas-mockus.html>. (accessed February 1, 2011).

^{xii} Dalsgaard, Andreas Mol. Bogota Change. 2009.

^{xiii} Caballero, Maria Christina. "Academic Turns City Into a Social Experiment." Harvard Gazette. Harvard University, 2007. Last accessed 1 Feb. 2011. <http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2004/03.11/01-mockus.html>.

^{xiv} Fisman, Raymond. "Want to Make a Clean Break?" Editorial. Newsweek. Jan. 2009. Last accessed 1 Feb. 2011. <http://www.newsweek.com/2009/01/16/want-to-make-a-clean-break.html>.

^{xv} 2009. "CITIES ON SPEED - Bogota Change."

^{xvi} U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Kyrgyzstan." 4 Oct. 2010. Last accessed 1 Feb. 2011. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5755.htm>.

^{xvii} American Bar Association. "Analysis of Anti-Corruption Legislation in Kyrgyz Republic." N.p., 2006. Last accessed 1 Feb. 2011. <http://apps.americanbar.org/rol/publications/kyrgyzstan-analysis-anti-corruption-legislation-ru-eng.pdf>.

^{xviii} Minorities at Risk. "Assessment for Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan." University of Maryland. 31 Dec. 2006. Last accessed 1 Feb. 2011. <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=70302>.

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^{xxi} "Background Note: Kyrgyzstan." <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5755.htm>. (accessed February 1, 2011).

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^{xxix} Caballero, "Academic Turns City Into a Social Experiment."

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