

KYRGYZSTAN

Political **PLURALISM** and Economic **CHANGES**

Marlene
Laruelle
editor

Central Asia Program

Institute for European, Russian
and Eurasian Studies

Elliott School of International Affairs

The George Washington University



CENTRAL ASIA
PROGRAM

**KYRGYZSTAN:
POLITICAL PLURALISM
AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES**

Marlene Laruelle, editor

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Kyrgyzstan has been the most studied country in Central Asia, due to its openness to Western observers and the substantial presence of foreign institutions in its higher education system. Withstanding the pressure of its paradoxical politics, the country combines political pluralism and diverse parliamentary life with state violence, a public administration that is penetrated by criminal groups, and rising street vigilantism. Kyrgyzstan's economy is also struggling, between the mining rent curse, agricultural survival and migrants' remittances. In the past few years, Kyrgyz authorities have begun to follow Uzbekistan's path, placing excessive stress on the theme of Islamic radicalization in order to justify the status quo and the role of law enforcement agencies.

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PART I. THE PARADOXES OF KYRGYZ POLITICS

Political Parties in the Kyrgyz Republic: Their Organization and Functioning

Bermet Imanalieva (2015)

Political Parties in the Kyrgyz Republic: Their Organization and Functioning

This paper attempts to explore how and by what criteria political party formation takes place in the Kyrgyz Republic. It analyzes the extent to which ideology and business interests play a role in attracting members, and how businesses are involved in the formation of political parties. The paper relies on the results of expert surveys and interviews with representatives of political parties in Bishkek and in other regions, and from an opinion poll conducted among 1,500 people in Bishkek. This research shows that parties in the Kyrgyz Republic mostly function on the basis of a patronage network that relies on business interests and 'regional identity'. Consequently, parties do little to protect interests of their electorate and do not carry ideological values.

Genesis of the Multi-Party System in the Kyrgyz Republic

After the breakup of the Soviet one-party system in 1991, the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic formed the basis for free elections and the multi-party system. The laws "On Civil Organizations," passed in 1991, and "On Political Parties," passed in 1999, played a major role in the creation of political parties and preconditions for their active involvement in election processes. The latter law is quite liberal and

allows for the creation of a political party by an initiative of only 10 people. In 2007, for the first time in the history of the Kyrgyz Republic, political parties formed the Parliament in full by proportional system, when all then 90 deputies of the unicameral Parliament were elected on the basis of their party affiliation and the seats won by their parties.

After then-President Kurmanbek Bakiyev fled the country in April 2010 as a result of anti-government protests, a new constitution was adopted that turned the country to a parliamentary-presidential form of governance. Although the new political arrangement positively contributed to the development of political parties, it led to the emergence of a huge number (192) of political parties, which are in a permanent process of transformation, unification/absorption, reorganization, or disintegration.

This plethora of parties is one of the causes of a weak multi-party system. The parties are weakly institutionalized, do not protect people's interests, and do not carry ideological values. However, among them some are well-structured, with concrete and established organizational hierarchy and ideological orientation that make them stand out among the others. Long-established and experienced parties include the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) and Ata-Meken, with representation in all the country's regions. Some other newly created parties concentrate their influence within certain regions and they often do not enter the large political arena.

In 2015 the Kyrgyz Parliament consists of 120 members of Parliament (MP) formed by five political parties: Ata-Jurt (28 seats), SDPK (26 seats), Ar-Namys (25 seats), Respublika (23 seats), and Ata-Meken (18 seats). The government coalition consists

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² For full list of political parties in the Kyrgyz Republic, see http://minjust.gov.kg/?page_id=6551.

of SDPK, Ar-Namys, and Ata-Meken, while Ata-Jurt and Respublika became opposition factions.

Classification of Political Parties

There are a number of criteria that classify parties by various typologies, but they often lead to conceptual imbalances.³

By ideological criterion:

Doctrine-based parties—their activities are based on neatly shaped ideology and protection of some ideological purity. SDPK enters into this category with its social orientation, fair elections, and anti-corruption drive slogans; as well as nationalistic rhetoric-based parties such as Ata-Jurt.

Pragmatic parties—oriented not just toward practicality and suitability of actions, but also the use of ideas and slogans, which are more attractive and urgent during election campaigns (Respublika, Ata-Jurt, Ar-Namys).

Charismatic parties—with members united not around an idea, but rather around a popular leader’s personality (Ata-Meken, Ar-Namys).

By organization structure:

Mass parties—which unite not only members of Parliament and professional political figures, but aim at recruiting a large pool of adherents, mainly from economically disadvantageous parts of the population (workers, the rural population, etc.) They contribute to the party’s visibility and to its financial

structure, via their fees. Usually these mass parties advance a left-wing orientation and have an experienced bureaucracy. SDPK, Ata-Meken, and non-parliamentary Zamandash can be placed in this category.

Cadre parties—which have an easy membership system and an amorphous organizational structure and aim mostly at selecting their political cadres to be sure they collect enough ‘administrative support’ to get elected. Ata-Jurt, Ar-Namys, and Respublika can be placed in this category.

By activity type:⁴

Active parties—those which regularly participate in elections, have members in local councils (keneshs) and Parliament. Even if the party is not represented in Parliament, they regularly make public statements about their positions, especially on social-economic issues. We can count 12 in this category, among the main ones: Butun Kyrgyzstan, Zamandash, the Communist Party, Meken Yntymagy, Onuguu, Bir Bol, and Ak-Shumkar.

Passive parties—those which participate in elections irregularly, have no members in local councils and Parliament, and refrain from expressing their positions on social-economic issues. They are generally known to urban populations, but not to the rural populations. We can count 31 in this category.

Ghost parties—those which are registered in the Ministry of Justice, but do not participate in elections, do not have members in local councils and Parliament, and do not make public statements. We can count 147 in this category.

Table 1. Common Traits and Differences of Political Parties in the Kyrgyz Republic

Common traits	Differences
Personification of leadership	Different political age of parties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ata-Meken, and SDPK have existed since 1990 • Ar-Namys, Respublika, and Ata-Jurt were organized between 2000-2011
Parties created by elite groups, formed on the basis of patron-client relations	Degree of experience and engagement in elections. Parties formed in the 1990s have greater experience in participating in elections compared to those formed in the 2000s
Parties representing interests of business structures	Some parties have representation in local councils, some do not.
Lack of mass and systematic installments of membership fees	Regional differences in creation of coalitions at the local level (for instance SDPK made coalitions with opposition party Ata-Jurt, in the Jalalabad local council)

3 Richard Gunter and Larry Diamond, “Species of political parties. A New typology,” *Party Politics* 9, no. 2 (2003): 167–99.

4 Classification proposed by Bakyt Orunbekov, candidate of political sciences of Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, author’s interview on February 17, 2014.

Patronage Networks as a Basis for Party Formation

Parties in Kyrgyzstan are created by elite groups on principles of “horizontal integration,” when new members, mainly representatives of the elite segment, are able to join parties at any time.⁵ Elite groups include representatives of business, media, culture, and science. While the most successful parties have candidates with well-organized businesses, as well as former government officials, regionalism—where members and leaders are from the same area, kinship, or city—also plays a significant role in social mobilization when needed.

Consequently, parliamentarianism in the Kyrgyz Republic is also based on patronage networks,⁶ where business interests and “regional identity” are intertwined. A patron is usually a public official with access to state resources. Given that the main goal of Kyrgyz political parties is to gain access to resources, the patron is an essential part in the chain. This is obvious from the coalition formation strategy, where parties follow the trail of financial opportunities to access the ministries with strategic project implementations, such as ministries of Energy, Transportation, or Geology. Ideological orientation becomes secondary, or not important at all, in the formation of these parties.

Party funding schemes also indicate the presence of patronage networks. Interviews conducted by the author with the leaders of the five parliamentary parties between May and December 2012 confirmed that according to party charter documents, “membership fees” are accepted, but exact amounts will not be disclosed. For example, Altynbek Sulaimanov, a Respublika faction leader, commented: “We do not raise membership fees as we did previously. But some MPs and members of factions contribute money to our fund.”⁷ A member of the Ata-Meken party also noted that financing is based on party members’ willingness to help.⁸ When the reasons for funding confidentiality were asked, Chynybai Tursunbekov, SDPK

faction leader, said: “First of all, access of civil society and government to the information about the sources of funding can raise debates on the influence of contributors on parties. Second, some sponsors are afraid of openly donating money. Our government does not finance parties as in other countries. That is why budgets of our parties are confidential.”⁹

The field study highlights the following contradictions and defects of party formation in the Kyrgyz Republic:

- Many regional leaders of political parties do not know the exact number of party members.
- Not all parties have adopted a party-membership card system.
- Almost all party events are funded by donations from sponsors, leadership, and supporters. The membership-fee system is still in the formation process.
- Some regional leaders noted that party members are not precluded from becoming a member of other parties.
- People join one or another party generally on the basis of momentary interests and party leaders. Ideological and program basis of parties are not essential in their choice.
- Most of the regional leaders of political parties are not familiar with charter, program, and structure of their own party.

Past Local Council Elections and Upcoming Parliamentary Elections

The latest elections to local councils (keneshes) took place in 2012. The elections were comparable to the training portion of a long-distance race for parliamentary seats. The percentage of turnout of the electorate, resources, and teamwork of party members served as a gauge of readiness of parties to participate in parliamentary elections.

5 Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

6 In this context patronage networks are a “community of people where relations are based on financial interests. Informal character of communications prevails in their interrelations. During governing a state, actors of similar networks provide security to each other during implementation of illegal political, financial operations. Social fabric of patronage networks is heterogeneous and goes beyond the scope of kinship ties.” See “Vliyanie rodoplemennykh (klanovykh) otnosheniy na formirovanie (deformatsiyu) mekhanizmov gosudarstvennogo upravleniya,” Report, National Institute for Strategic studies of Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, 2013.

7 Zairbek Myktybaev, “Skol’ko deneg v ‘kassakh’ partii?,” *Azattyk Radio*, April 22, 2013.

8 Interview with Ata-Meken’s representative, Bishkek, February 20, 2014.

9 Myktybaev, “Skol’ko deneg v ‘kassakh’ partii?”

Table 2. Results of Elections for Local Councils in 2012, by Number of Seats

Political Party	Amount of Mandates Distributed by Regions						
	Issyk-Kul	Talas	Jalal-Abad	Batken	Chui	Naryn	Osh
Ar-Namys	3	Did not participate	Did not participate	Did not participate	3	Did not participate	4
Ata-Meken	7	4	25	17	16	6	7
Ata-Jurt	Did not participate	Did not participate	32	16	Did not participate	Did not participate	Participated, but not enough votes
Respublika	11	15	6	30	30	6	16
SDPK	10	5	33	56	50	6	37

As seen from the table only three political parties (Ata-Meken, Respublika, and SDPK) received seats in all local municipal councils. Ar-Namys participated and obtained mandates only in the Issyk-Kul, Chui, and Osh regions, while the party opted out from participation in Talas, Jalal-Abad, Batken, and the Naryn regions either due to weak representation or lack of support from the electorate. Ata-Jurt did not participate and does not have mandates in local town councils of Issyk-Kul, Talas, Chui, or the Naryn regions, i.e. the northern part of the country. It participated in elections in the Osh region, but did not earn enough votes. Given that Ata-Jurt is considered a southern party, this failure was unexpected. Instead, Uluttar Birimdigi under the leadership of Melis Myrzakmatov, former mayor of Osh and a native of the region, became a serious opponent.

The political success in local elections is largely shaped by the division of the constituencies into southern and northern parts, a notable fact given that the country is geographically divided into two parts separated by a high mountain range. According to Zakir Chotaev,¹⁰ virtually all parties have insufficient representation in all regions of the country and underdeveloped regional branches. The lack of regional representation of Ar-Namys in four regions and of Ata-Jurt in five regions as described above will affect the elections for the Parliament of October 2015 as well.

The possession of mandates in local councils is not an indication of possible success in forthcoming parliamentary elections. For instance, Respublika is represented in all local (municipal) councils, but due to opposing views between party leader Omurbek Babanov and faction leader Altynbek Sulaimanov, the party has reached a crisis point. In the meantime, the old regional parties popular in the southern

part of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bütün Kyrgyzstan and the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, are undergoing the process of consolidation of their position in local councils.

Political Parties in the Case of Bishkek City

In 2012, four parties won Bishkek city council seats: SDPK won 21 seats, Respublika 11 seats, Ata-Meken seven seats, and Zamandash six seats. A 1,500 respondent survey taken during a pre-election campaign gave close correlation between the choices expressed in the survey and the actual success of the parties. The survey revealed that 93.3% of the Bishkek population would participate in elections and, as Chart 1 below shows, 33.6% would give their votes to SDPK, 31.4% to Respublika, and 13% to Ata-Meken. Surprisingly Ar-Namys received only 2.5% of votes, despite the fact that its constituencies are usually the Russian-speaking population residing in Bishkek.

A question about the extent of the parties' outreach during the election campaign period reveals that Respublika had the most intensive outreach, followed by the SDPK and Ata-Meken, as indicated in Chart 2. The three parties had collected sufficient financial and human resources for holding campaigns: they acted as mass political parties which can involve many people and distribute financial and organizational support. Ar-Namys, on the contrary, was not so popular across the regions and has traits of a cadre party where a small number of influential politicians rely on the support of the wealthy strata of society. However, another cadre party, Respublika, has earned a large portion of votes despite being operational for only two years by the time the elections

10 Zakir Chotaev, *Parlamentskaya forma pravleniya v Kyrgyzstane: problemy i perspektivy* (Bishkek: Neo Print, 2012), 72-106.

Chart 1. What Party Would You Vote for?

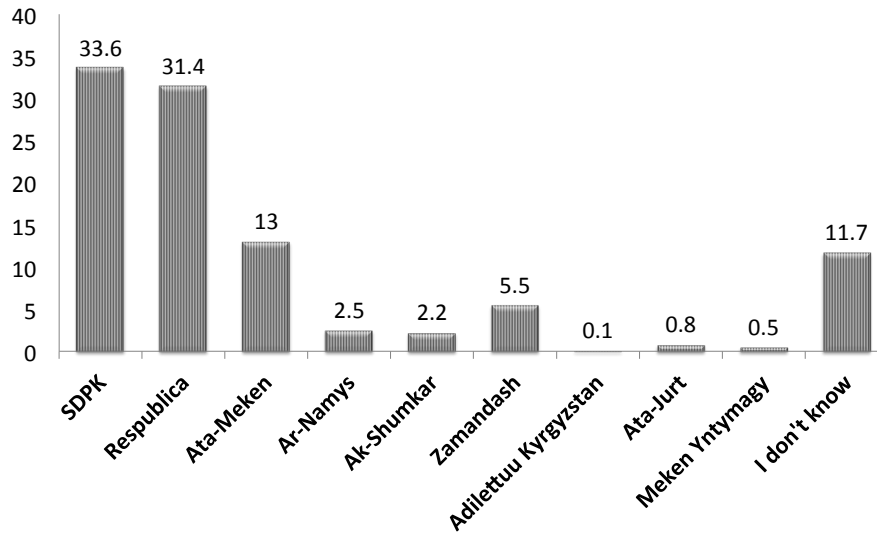
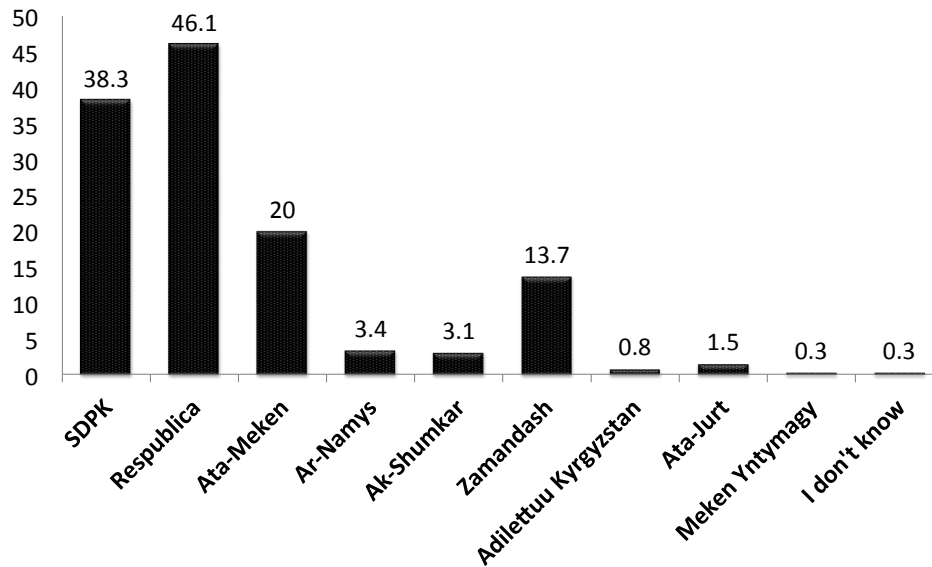


Chart 2. Comparative Intensity of Pre-Election Campaigns



were held. The reason behind the success might be financial and human resources, as well as the use of more modern communication technologies such as direct mails from the leader of the party to the voters, active using of social networks as Facebook and Twitter, and day-and-night call centers.

Intra-Party Conflicts

All three cadre parties in Parliament—Respublika, Ata-Jurt, and Ar-Namys—are experiencing intrapar-

ty conflicts that are slowly eroding their institutionalization process. In Respublika, contradictions have appeared between party leader Omurbek Babanov and faction leader Altynbek Sulaimanov concerning the party's organizational structure. The principle of a co-chairmanship institution working on the principle of "seven regions represented by seven chairmen" has not been implemented yet.¹¹ In Ata-Jurt, the split of positions occurred between the main representatives of the party faction on the issue of joining the majority coalition or not,¹² and also because of the uneven distribution of mandates amongst representatives of

¹¹ "Babanov ostanetsya odin?," *Gezitter*, March 19, 2013.

¹² Azamat Tynayev, "Kak nachinala razvalivat'sya fraktsiya Ata-Jurt," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, April 17, 2014.

south and north—southern representatives outweigh their northern counterparts. Intraparty conflict in Ar-Namys has been taking place as far back as 2011, when 15 of 25 MPs expelled their party leader Felix Kulov to replace him with Kamila Talieva.¹³

Repeated crises within the parties represented in the Parliament have led to the secession of some leaders from their parties and creation of new parties aimed at working in regions. Founded in 2012, and represented in Jalal-Abad and Osh town councils, Önügüü-Progress is led by Bakyt Torobaev, who was a Respublika party member in 2010. Another MP from Respublika party, Altynbek Sulaimanov, became the head of Bir Bol party, founded in early 2014. According to Duverger's theories on political parties, the cadre parties are more liable to breakups and splits, because they seek unification of elite groups rather than expanding their membership pool.

Conclusions

The introduction of a proportional electoral system in 2007, where election to the Parliament was performed on the basis of party affiliation, and the transi-

tion to the parliamentary-presidential government in 2010 had a significant influence on the development of the party system in the Kyrgyz Republic. Despite the fact that liberal laws led to the creation of more than 190 parties, very few matured enough to consolidate their experience in working with a faithful electorate and a united party leadership. Some parties such as SDPK and Ata-Meken have been in the political arena longer than others, actively participate in elections, have representation in the Parliament, and are steadily developing. Younger parties emerged too, often coming from a certain region and with a more fragmented electoral support.

Current unification of political parties is taking place both by merging ideological orientation and with the rational purpose of winning parliamentary elections. Ata-Meken and Jany Muun encapsulate this ideological merging: both parties announced a strategic partnership to develop a social-democrat agenda. Ata-Jurt, Respublika, and Reforma embody another kind of merging, based not on ideological directions, but on pragmatic shared interests in securing their seats. The October 2015 elections will offer a new stage of development for the Kyrgyz political system and give room for new research.

13 "Feliks Kulov annulliroval reshenie 15 deputatov," *Gezitter*, September 14, 2011.

Quotes on Quotas?

Political Representation of Women in Kyrgyzstan in the 2007 and 2010 Convocations

Natalia Zakharchenko¹ (2015)

The participation of women in politics is widely recognized by international actors as important. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action made women in power and decision making one critical area of concern and called on states to take measures “to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.” The promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment was also part of the Millennium Development Goals.² That said, in both developed and developing countries women remain underrepresented in government and national elective positions.

Very few countries have achieved gender equality when it comes to legislative bodies.³ On average there are only 22% women in national parliaments (single or lower house) worldwide (IPU-website).⁴ Gender quotas have become a popular tool to address this imbalance. Countries as diverse as Bosnia, Uganda, and Sweden, introduced mandatory or voluntary quotas for parliamentary elections.⁵ Much of the literature these days is focused on the question “How effective are these quotas?”. According to some

experts, the introduction of a quota system in “traditional” societies has created new, and perhaps even greater, challenges for women empowerment and in some cases contributed to women’s marginalization and stigmatization.⁶

Kyrgyzstan, a traditionally male-dominated society, introduced a 30% gender quota in 2007 and is hence a good test case to examine whether quotas have helped or hurt women’s empowerment. I have found that quotas (even in very traditional societies—like Kyrgyzstan) strengthen women’s empowerment. While quotas are not a panacea, they do help to increase the number of women in policy-making bodies and they do change the agenda of issues being considered.

In Kyrgyzstan, the movement toward women’s empowerment and gender equality has been a slow process, full of obstacles and challenges. In the late 1990s, Kyrgyzstan, was Central Asia’s model of democracy.⁷ It had female representatives in all parliaments since independence in 1991. However, the 2005 elections resulted in not one single woman being elected to the Jogorku Kenesh, that is, the National Assembly. This unprecedented situation got the attention of national and international activists, experts, and policy-makers, who called for legislation to ensure women participation in the any future

1 Natalia Zakharchenko (Kyrgyzstan) is an alumni of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek. She is currently working as an Assistant to a baseline study at the UN Peacebuilding Fund in Kyrgyzstan and as an Expert at UNDP Gender Programme. Natalia worked as a Junior Professional Officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic and completed her research fellowship at Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. She has several publications on migration in Kyrgyzstan and water management in Central Asia.

2 Mona L. Krook, “Gender Quotas and Women’s Political Empowerment,” *E-International Relations*, 2010, <http://www.e-ir.info/2010/06/18/gender-quotas-and-women%E2%80%99s-political-empowerment/>.

3 Rwanda’s parliament is made up of 64% of women and ranks first in terms of women parliamentarians. It has a 30% legislative quota for women; Bolivia ranks second has 53% women in Parliament and a 50% electoral quota for women. Andorra ranks third with 50% women and no quota. Bosnia ranks 62nd and has a mandatory electoral gender quota of 40% quota but only 21% if its Parliamentarian are women. Uganda ranks 24 and 35% of its Parliamentarians are women. It has an electoral quota system. Sweden ranks sixth and 44% of its Parliamentarians are women. Sweden has a voluntary party quota system.

4 <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.

5 It is difficult to estimate the number of countries that have introduced quotas. The quota project estimated the number of countries with legislative quotas around 40 (in 2006). In addition, it reported over 50 countries in which political parties voluntarily adopted a quota system. See <http://www.quotaproject.org/>. Bosnia has 21% of women after the 2011 elections, Sweden after the 2014 has 42% of women in parliament, Uganda after the 2011 elections has 35% women in its Parliament.

6 Drude Dahlerup, “Comparative Studies of Electoral Gender Quota. The Implementation of Quotas: Latin American Experiences” (paper presented at the International IDEA workshop, Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2003).

7 John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia’s island of Democracy?* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999).

parliament. It resulted in the introduction of a 30% gender quota in 2007, and women representatives increasing their share from 0% to 26.6% in the 2007 parliament.⁸

In this article, I examine who are the women that have been elected. I compare the professional backgrounds of the female parliamentarians in the 2007 and 2010 parliaments and their legislative activity.

While the 2007 and 2010 elections took place under very different circumstances—with the 2007 elections basically being a plebiscite for President Bakiyev, and the 2010 elections seeing fierce competition with no less than 29 political parties—the comparison of the 2007 and 2010 legislature remains valuable particularly in terms of women's participation.⁹

I argue that while some of the traditional barriers to enter politics remain, gender quotas have introduced new recruitment mechanisms for women and brought in new categories of female parliamentarians. This has also resulted in the diversification of their legislative activity. In sum, the gender quota has been successful in raising the number of women and diversifying legislative activity.

Introducing a Gender Quota: Formula for Success

The quota adopted in Kyrgyzstan in 2007 was gender-neutral and set a minimum representation for both sexes at 30%. Although neutral in wording, the law was adopted to address the issue that no women were elected in the 2005 parliamentary elections.

The gender quota was the result of a meeting in 2007 between the Kyrgyz President, Kurmanbek Bakiyev and representatives of the national wom-

en's forum. The latter was created by several women NGOs with the support of international organizations. The quota also known as a 'candidate quota', stipulates that party lists for elections must have one out of three seats reserved for the underrepresented sex.¹⁰ The new electoral rules were first adopted by referendum in 2007 and written into the Constitution in July 2011. In addition to the gender quota, the law also set a 15 % quotas for minorities and youth (under the age of 35).

As a result of the quota the number of women in the parliament went from 0% in 2005 to 26.6% in 2007. The pro-presidential party, Ak Zhol, which was established right before the elections, won 71 out of 90 (79%) seats in the parliament in 2007. Out of the 23 women elected, 18 represented Ak-Zhol.¹¹ The percentage of elected women stood at 23% after the 2010 parliamentary elections. All parties running for elections had fulfilled the candidate quota, but several female parliamentarians withdrew from their seats after the elections and were then replaced by men. This led to a drop of the overall percentage of women parliamentarians to 21% by September 2012.

The female representation in the 2010 Kyrgyz Parliament varies greatly from party to party. Ata Jurt, the party with the most deputies (total of 28), has only 4 female deputies, representing 14% of the party's deputies and far below the required 30% quota. The Social Democratic Party (SDPK) comes closest to 30%, with 7 out of 26 deputies being women. The resignation of some parliamentarians and the non-replacement of the resigning candidates with candidates of the same sex in both convocations has led to underrepresentation of women and challenged the spirit of the gender quota.

8 Aidai Bedelbaeva and Jyldyz Kuvatova, "Widening women's political representation in Kyrgyzstan," UNDP, August 11, 2010, <http://content.undp.org/go/newsroom/2010/july/20100716-women-kyrgyzstan.en>. The 2010 elections saw a slight decrease to 23%.

9 The 2007 and 2010 parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan took place under very different conditions. The 2007 elections were neither free nor fair. The OSCE Election Observation Mission reported that there were "delayed and non-transparent announcements of nationwide turnout figures and preliminary party totals by the Central Election Commission (CEC), as well as inconsistencies between preliminary and final totals" ("Kyrgyz Republic Pre-Term Parliamentary Elections," *Election Observation Final Report*. OSCE/ODIHR, 2008, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/31607?download=true>; Shairbek Dzhuraev, "Governance Challenges in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: The Externalization and Parochialization of Political Legitimacy," *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs Working Paper* No. 5, 2012). As Shairbek Dzhuraev (Dzhuraev, "Governance Challenges in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan," 5) notes, the elections took place in a situation of little or no competition and most of the parliamentary seats were filled according to the level of support given to the president and his party Ak-Zhol Interview with M. Tiulegenov, Head of the Department of International and Comparative Politics Department of the American University of Central Asia, August 5, 2012. In addition, a law had been adopted that limited any political party controlling more than 65 seats in the 120-seat parliament (Shairbek Dzhuraev, "Is Kyrgyzstan's New Political System Sustainable?," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* No. 210. George Washington University, 2012, <http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/ponars/pepm210.pdf>).

10 Electoral Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2007, <http://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/asia/KG/kyrgyzstan-election-code-1999-2007/view>.

11 "Kyrgyz Republic Pre-Term Parliamentary Elections."

Professional Background of Women Members of Parliament

In this section I examine how and whether the quotas changed the professional background of women and whether there were any changes in terms of age and ethnicity. I also examine whether women are re-elected.

Civil Society

The role of civil society in the process of introduction of gender quotas was very important. However, traditionally action within civil society would not lead to positions into parliament. This changed in 2007, when four women previously working for NGOs and international organizations, gained seats. Although the four were not reelected in 2010, the number of seats occupied by members of civil society organizations stayed the same. Two of them are considered to be amongst the most influential women in Kyrgyzstan. They are Asiya Sasykbayeva, director of the International Centre 'Interbilim', and Jyldyzkan Dzholdosheva, head of the Kurmanzhan Datka Charity Fund.¹² In sum, the gender quota opened space for civil society both under a very authoritarian regime and under a more liberal regime. In other words the civil society positions and the status which women enjoyed in the 1990s have been translated into political positions and power today.

Professional Background of Women Members of Parliament

An analysis of the professional background of the female deputies shows a number of differences between those elected in 2007 and those in 2010. These differences are in part explained by the non-competitive nature of the 2007 elections and the highly competitive nature of the 2010 elections

In the 2007 parliament a larger number of seats were occupied by women previously working in the central government. Indeed, the majority of female representatives in the 2007 parliament previously occupied political positions in both the central and

the local government. Through their positions, these women had access to administrative resources. This confirmed the development of Bakiyev's patronage, in which power positions were occupied by candidates loyal to his regime. As a result, the parliament of 2007 played a limited or no role in checking and balancing power. The pro-presidential party occupied 71 out of 90 seats and was easily controlled by the President.¹³

The 2010 parliament is different. Indeed, for the first time it saw a large number of women coming from the commercial sector competing for seats. Indeed, because of the competitive nature of the 2010 parliamentary elections, the political parties had to attract candidates with their own financial and social resources. Whereas candidates in 2007 could rely on resources from the party, the 2010 candidates had to find their own resources for their campaigns and reach out to different parts of the population.

As can be seen from Figure 1, the majority of women elected in 2010 occupied high managerial positions in commercial companies prior to the elections. We also see a remarkable drop of women formerly occupying government positions. Women from educational institutions remained at the same level, as did women from civil society.

Evidence from other countries suggests that gender quotas tend to promote younger women in politics.¹⁴ However, in Kyrgyzstan a reverse trend is observed.

As shown in Table 1, the mean age of women deputies has actually increased from 44 (without outlier = 66 and M= 45, 14 with outlier) to 47.2 years. The 2010 parliament is also older and more homogeneous in terms of age than the 2007.

According to a report from Saferworld, young people feel largely excluded from politics in many Central Asian states. They also see the attitudes of older generations as a barrier to their participation in politics. The participation of young women in 'any form of government', is seen by the older generation, particularly in rural areas as 'culturally unacceptable'.¹⁵ To counter this bias towards youngsters the 2007 law also included a 15% youth quota. However,

12 "Roza Otunbaeva i Aida Salyanova samye vliyatel'nye zhenshchiny Kyrgyzstana," *Ozodagon*, 2013, <http://catoday.org/centrasia/kggru/7421-roza-otunbaeva-i-aida-salyanova-samye-vliyatelnye-zhenshchiny-kyrgyzstana.html>.

13 Dzhuvaev, "Governance Challenges in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan," 4-7.

14 Rainbow Murray, "Second among unequals? A study of whether France's 'quota women' are up to the job," *Politics and Gender* 6 (2010): 93-118; Hannah Britton, *Women in the South African parliament* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005); and Catriona Burness, "Young Swedish Members of Parliament: Changing the World?," *NORA: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies* 8, no. 2 (2000): 93-106.

15 "Nobody has ever asked about young people's opinions," *Safeworld Report*, 2012, iii, <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/037%20CAsia%20web.pdf>.

Figure 1. Career of Female MPs Prior to Parliamentary Elections: 2007 and 2010

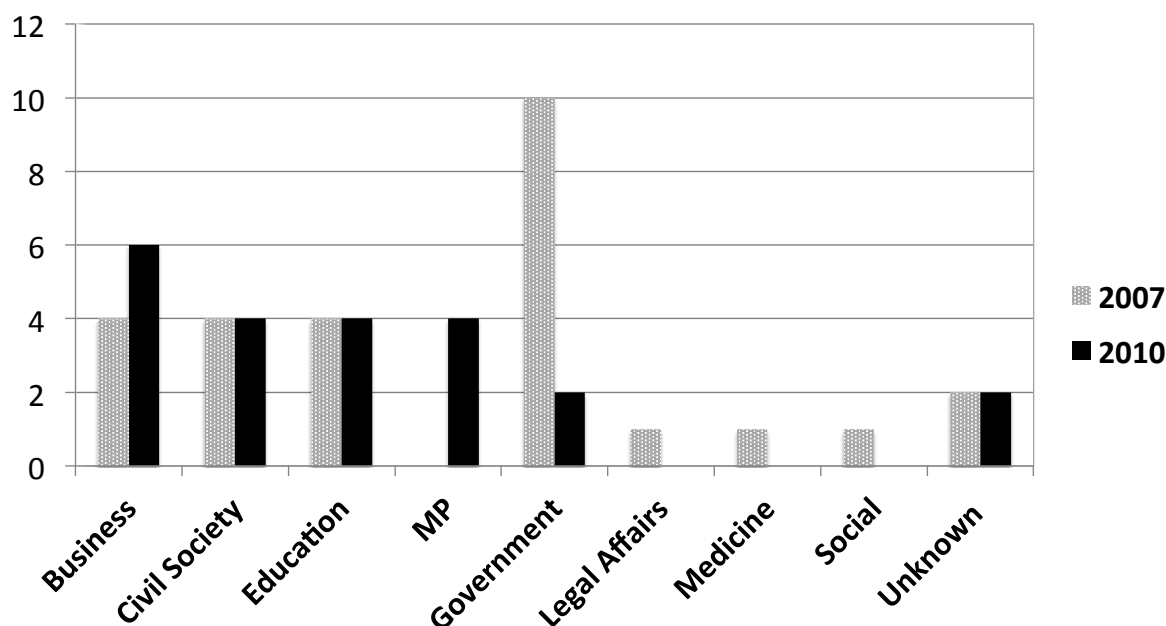


Table 1. Age of Women Deputies at the Point of Election: 2007 and 2010

Age	2007	2010
Under 30	4 (14.8%)	1 (4%)
30-39	5 (18.5%)	2 (8%)
40-49	7 (25.9%)	10 (40%)
50-59	9 (33.3%)	12 (48%)
60-69	2 (7.4%)	0 (0%)
Total (n)	27 (100%)	25 (100%)

the cultural barrier proved too high for many potential young female parliamentarians.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity did not change significantly among the female parliamentarians from 2007 to 2010. Whereas the 2007 parliament included six (22.2%) women out of 27 of non-titular ethnicity (Kyrgyz), in 2010 five (20%) women out of 25 were not Kyrgyz. An interesting issue, however, is that the only other minority represented by women in the Kyrgyz parliament is Russian. The number of ethnically Russian female parliamentarians was 6 in 2007 and 5 after the 2010 parliamentary elections. While the Uzbeks constitute around 14% of population in Kyrgyzstan, they only

occupied 11% of the seats in the 2005 parliament¹⁶ but had never had a female parliamentarian. This can be explained, first, by the general political underrepresentation of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan. As explained by Scholz, the political representation of the Uzbek minority is limited by “institutionalized barriers to political success, official disregard of citizen’s demands, and self-imposed political exclusion out of fear of reprisals.”¹⁷ Political instability in foreign relations with neighboring Uzbekistan only worsens the situation of the largest minority in the country. As argued by one of activist representative of the Uzbek minority,

Why should we get involved in politics? Uzbek problems should be solved within the community. People are afraid

16 Astra Sadybakasova, “Kyrgyzstan: How Real are Uzbek Minority Concerns?”

17 Institute for War and Peace Report, June 7, 2006, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/kyrgyzstan-how-real-are-uzbek-minority-concerns>.

that by becoming active in politics, political struggles become a matter of 'us against them', of Uzbeks against Kyrgyz (As quoted in M. Fumagalli¹⁸).

Besides the general underrepresentation of the Uzbek minority in politics, the lack of political involvement of Uzbek women can be further explained by more conservative ideas about gender roles in Uzbek communities. Charrad¹⁹ argues that although women's rights are suppressed across Central Asia, there are certain variations among the countries. Thus, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are more conservative than Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. For example, the low female labor and divorce rates, and the increase of female school dropouts studied by Gunes-Ayata and Ergun²⁰ are more prevalent in Uzbekistan than in Kyrgyzstan. Although little research has been carried out to explore the role of women in Uzbek communities, specifically in Kyrgyzstan, studies show that people's identity in such communities is based on national identity rather than state identity.²¹

Despite the fact that the 2007 and 2010 parliaments are not diverse ethnically, a comparative overview of previous parliaments shows that the last two parliaments (with had minority quota) have the greatest percentage of ethnic minority representation among women (the parliament of 1990 is hardly representative due to its non-democratic recruitment). Among male parliamentarians, the number of minority representatives dropped from 16 in 2007 to 9 in 2010. The minority quota of 15%, which was introduced at the same time as the gender quota, was filled after the 2007 elections (22 out of 90 deputies, 24.5%), but not after the 2010 elections (14 out of 120, 11.7%).

Re-Election

Re-election of women MPs is relatively rare when compared to the male MPs. Only two female representatives got successfully elected twice before 2007 and 2010 and no female deputies have ever been re-elected three times whereas as many as 33 males have been reelected more than three times since 1991. That said four women deputies were re-elected from the 2007 parliament (two out of four are ethnic Russians).

According to Medet Tiulegenov, an expert on Kyrgyz politics, this fact demonstrates some signs for institutionalization of women's presence in political parties, meaning that they are not randomly sought before elections, but considered to be fully fledged party members.²² The analysis of re-election and establishment of it as of a permanent trend depends on its frequency during future parliamentary elections. The November, 2015 elections will show whether this trend holds.

Legislative Activity

While it is important to understand to what extent the elected parliamentarians represent society, it is also critical to analyze what they do in parliament after being elected. Indeed, quotas are more than just numbers they are also a "means towards more substantive ends."²³ But what criteria should be used to measure the substantive changes of gender quotas? As Ward concludes, there are short and long-term goals which gender quotas were designed to address. Thus, in the short run "success might be the promulgation of legislation and policy outcomes."²⁴ When referring to long-term goals the author highlights the

18 Kristina Scholz, "Ethnic Uzbek Grievances in Post-Tulip Revolution Kyrgyzstan: Issues of Political Representation and Religious Freedom" (MA Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2009), 32.

19 Matteo Fumagalli, "Framing Ethnic Minority Mobilisation in Central Asia: The Cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 4 (2007): 580.

20 Mounira M. Charrad, "Central and Local Patrimonialism: State-Building in Kin-Based Societies," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 636 (2011): 49-68.

21 Ayse Gunes-Ayata and Ayca Ergun, "Gender Politics in Transitional Societies: A Comparative Perspective on Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan," in *Gender Politics in post-Communist Eurasia*, ed. Linda Racioppi and Katherine O'Sullivan See (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State, 2009), 209-36.

22 K. den Blanken, "Our Uzbek Land in Kyrgyzstan. The Uzbek Minority and Claims for Cultural Politics" (MA Thesis, Radboud University, Nijmegen, 2009).

23 Interview with M. Tiulegenov, Head of the Department of International and Comparative Politics Department of the American University of Central Asia, August 5, 2012.

24 Eilís Ward, "Real or Illusionary Progress? Electoral Quotas and Women's Political Participation in Tanzania, Eritrea and Uganda," *Trocaire Development Review* (2006): 81.

transformation of gender relations.²⁵ The long-term results represent a complicated change in societal structures that takes a long period of time. Most of the research on substantive representation, however, is focused on short to medium outcomes in the legislative context.

Childs and Krook²⁶ try to understand how different possibilities for substantive representation occur, and present five categories. Among these is the role of the legislative context, which may constrain or enhance one's chances to "translate priorities into policy initiatives."²⁷ The role of institutional norms and positional power, are viewed as determining factors in limiting or enabling women's perspectives to be integrated into policy-making.²⁸

Committee Representation

One of the most important factors when analyzing the representation of women is the degree to which female parliamentarians are able to translate women's issues into legislative initiatives.²⁹ The political space for this, however, is dependent on several factors including institutional rules and norms. Most of the important legislative discussions are done within the parliamentary committees.³⁰ Parliamentary committees thus serve as crucial arenas for women to express their policy preferences and influence the legislative process. The representation of women in such committees can serve as an important indicator of their policy preferences and identify important trends in the division of labor.

The membership of female deputies in different committees varies. First of all, the majority of women in 2007 was represented in three committees: The Committee on Labor, Migration, and Social Politics (4)³¹; The Committee on Youth, Gender Politics, and Sport; and The Committee on Security, Defense, and Judicial Reform (3). Although the representation of women in first two committees can be explained by the nature of activities they cover (i.e. so called "women's issues"), an interesting point in the 2007 parliament was the number of women in the Committee on Security, Defense, and Judicial Reform (5). This

can be explained by the fact that the comparative majority of women in 2007 had legal backgrounds, and, thus, might have worked on legal activities of the committee rather than security or defense issues. No women in 2007, however, were represented in the Committee on Energy and the Committee on Economic Affairs and Budget. In this regard, the number of committees with represented women in 2007 was 10 out of 12, whereas in 2010 this indicator changed to 12 out of 14.

The overview of the 2010 parliament presents a slightly different picture. First of all, the female deputies were more evenly represented in the committees. Thus, after 2010 women were represented in twelve committees instead of ten. The total number of parliamentary committees had also increased from 12 to 14. There were two committees with no female members, the Committee on Judiciary and Rule of Law and the Committee on the Fight Against Corruption. Most female deputies were represented in the same committees as in 2007 (Labor, Migration, and Social Politics (1); Youth, Gender Politics and Sport (4). Whereas the number of women in the Committee on Security, Defense, and Judicial Reform dropped, there was a certain increase of women in the committees related to economic affairs. Thus, there were women represented in the Committee on Fiscal and Monetary Policy (2) and the Committee on Budget and Finance (2).

One explanation for this might be that more women in 2010 had an economic background. It is also worth mentioning that three out of the four female deputies from 2007 who were reelected in 2010 changed their committee membership. Karamushkina from SDPK changed from the Committee on Education, Science and Culture in 2007 and 2010 to the Security and Defense Committee in 2012. Isaeva moved from the Committee on International Relations and Inter-parliamentary Communication to the Committee for Economic Development in 2010 and further on to the Committee on Transport and Communication in 2012. Skripkina started in the Defense Committee in 2007 and moved on to

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook, "Analyzing Women's Substantive Representation: From Critical Mass to Critical Actors," *Government and Opposition* 44, no. 2 (2009): 128, http://mlkrook.org/pdf/childs_krook_2009.pdf.

28 Ibid., 126.

29 Ibid., 128.

30 Susan Franceschet et al., "The Impact of Gender Quotas: A Research Agenda" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Toronto, 2009).

the Committee on Constitutional Law in 2010 and was in 2013 member of the International Relations Committee. The fourth, Niyazalieva, was a member of the Committee for Social Politics (and similar issues) all the time.

An issue when analyzing the committee representation is the different definitions of 'women's issues.' Thus, whereas the non-feminist approach would focus on concerns that belong to the private sphere or the broader society, feminists would emphasize policies aimed at increasing women's autonomy and well-being.³² As can be seen in the case of Kyrgyzstan, while most of the women are in committees typically associated with 'women's issues' (from a non-feminist perspective), others were guided by personal interests and educational and occupational backgrounds. This tendency has been supported by the claims of several deputies and experts saying that the promotion of women's interests by female deputy usually varies from deputy to deputy. For example, according to MP Karamushkina, the legal debate about a ban on bride-kidnapping did not get full support from all female deputies.³³ It is important to note here that one of the committees lost "gender" as an issue for discussion. After 2010 the Committee on Youth, Gender Politics, and Sports was transformed into the Committee on Education, Culture, Science, and Sport. This could have an important impact on the ability of women to translate their interests into policies. Indeed, as it was noticed in the interview by the women civil society leader, Tatyana Temirova, "gender policies enjoyed its Renaissance in the first convocation with gender quotas. The introduction of important laws against bride-kidnapping, domestic violence, and the appearance of gender expertise in the Parliament—all indicated the importance of "Gender" in one of the committees."³⁴

Positional Power

Another factor when analyzing women's opportunities to translate policy preferences into legislation

is the power they hold in parliament. According to Murray there is usually a link between the positional power of the MP and his/her performance (Murray 2010, 109). The increase of women in powerful positions can, hence, be interpreted as an increase in their status within the legislature. Murray³⁵ further argues that the positional power of parliamentarians is usually associated with seniority. Thus, men tend to hold a greater number of powerful positions.³⁶ The analysis of re-elected women revealed that the positional power of two of them had increased. Thus, whereas none of these four women occupied a powerful position in the 2007 parliament, two of them chaired committees since 2010. This can be an indication that positional power, indeed, might relate more to the seniority of the deputy than his/her sex.

As can be seen from Figure 2, there was an increase of women in powerful positions in 2010. In September 2013, two women held the positions of vice-speakers and four women were chairs of committees, whereas the number of those being vice-chairs of committees had increased from 4 to 6. Among the two vice-speakers was the already mentioned Asiya Sasykbayeva, former director of the international center 'Interbilim.' Besides her active parliamentary involvement, Sasykbayeva also ran for the Ombudsman office in 2013 and was the leader after the first round supported by the majority of parliamentarians. Although she lost in the second round, many of her colleagues continue to claim her leadership for this position.³⁷

However, the role of informal politics can also be seen in the power positions of the parliament and women are not exempted from this. Cholpon Sultanbekova, the chair of the Committee on Youth, Gender Politics and Sport before 2011, and vice-chair of Committee on Science, Culture, and Sport in 2013, is the widow of Bayaman Erkinbayev, known as a key figure in organized crime in Kyrgyzstan.³⁸ According to 'Agym' newspaper, Sultanbekova is also

31 Interview with M. Tiulegenov, Head of the Department of International and Comparative Politics Department of the American University of Central Asia, August 5, 2012.

32 Childs and Krook, "Analyzing Women's Substantive Representation," 133.

33 Interview with I. Karamushkina, parliamentary deputy for SDPK party (2007 and 2010 convocations), August 16, 2012.

34 Interview with Tatyana Temirova, "Alga" (civil society organization), August 15, 2014.

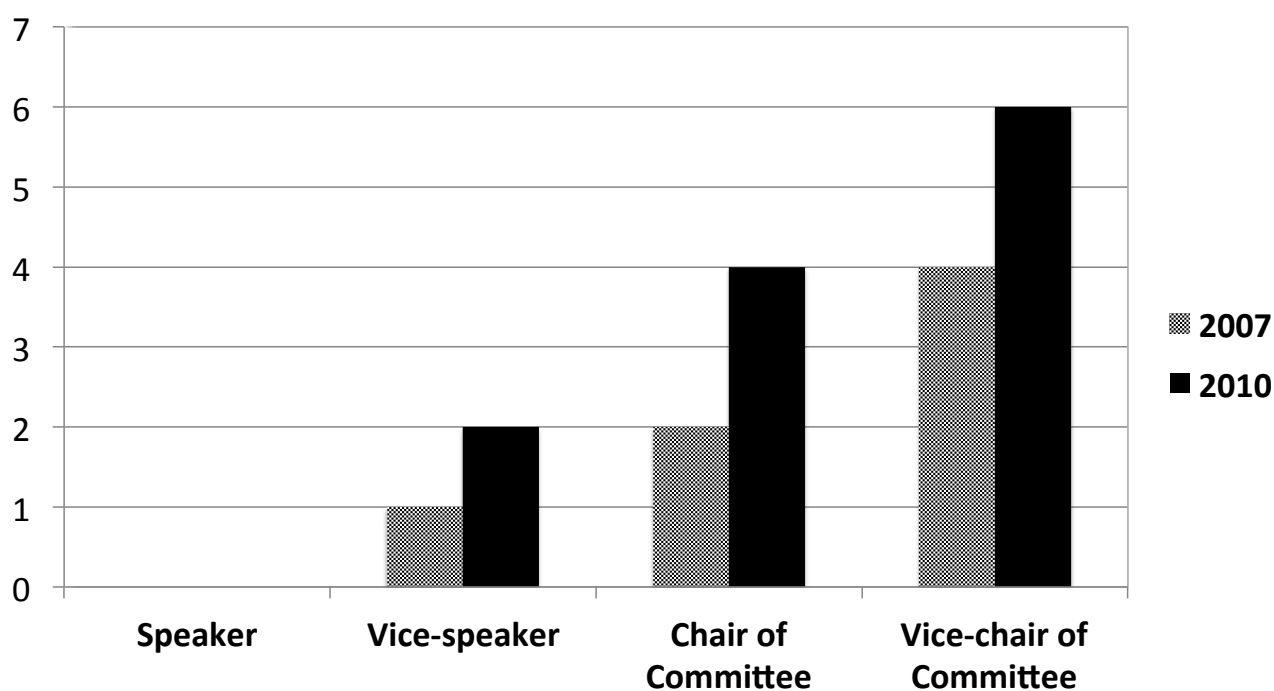
35 Murray, "Second among unequals?" 109.

36 Ibid., 110.

37 R. Toktonaliyev, "Strasti uleglis, no pretenzii ostalis," *Golos Tsentral'noy Azii*, October 3, 2013, <http://vof.kg/?p=11997>.

38 Alexander Kupatadze, "'Transitions after transitions': Coloured revolutions and organized crime in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan" (Ph.D. diss., University of Saint Andrews, 2010), <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/1320>.

Figure 2. Positional Power of Female Deputies: 2007 and 2010



one of the richest women in Kyrgyzstan.³⁹ The sister of Sanjarbek Kadyraliyev, who was also claimed to have connections with organized crime, Yrgal Kadyraliyeva, was a vice-chair of the Committee on Youth, Gender Politics and Sport before 2011 and became an initiator of a controversial ban on girls' travel in 2013.⁴⁰

As can be seen from the analysis of the legislative positions of women in the 2007 and 2010 elections, the number of opportunities to translate women's policy preferences into a legislative agenda has formally increased. Women are now represented in a wider set of committees including completely new spheres such as energy policy. Moreover, the allocation of women in committees has become more balanced, with more women represented in traditionally male-dominated committees. More women are now in powerful positions such as vice-speaker and chair of committees. The analysis of re-elected women in 2010 showed the increase in their positional power after one term of serving as a legislator.

Recommendations

For the Kyrgyz Government:

- The successful implementation of the gender quota relies on the initial success of the quota design. The lack of a mechanism for the replacement of the resigning candidate with a candidate of the same sex results in the failure of parties to fill 30% of seats in the Parliaments with women. In order to avoid the nominal presence of women in party lists it is necessary to introduce new rules that govern the resignation of parliamentary candidates.
- The ability of women deputies to translate their policy preferences into legislative initiatives is dependent on having a platform where issues can be raised. For example, the fact that gender was dropped from the Parliamentary Committee had as consequence that the issue of gender could no longer have a special platform to be addressed.

39 "10 samykh bogatykh zhenshchin Kyrgyzstana," *Agym newspaper*, November 20, 2009, <http://for.kg/ru/news/102605/>.

40 David Trillig, "Kyrgyzstan Passes Controversial Girl Travel Ban," *Eurasianet*, June 13, 2013, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67113>.

For Political Parties:

- The process of drafting the party list of candidates is as important as the political campaign itself. Political parties should have transparent and open recruitment processes. The increased involvement of civil society in the political arena is to be applauded and can contribute to a more democratic processes of recruitment.

For International Organizations:

- The involvement of women deputies in the legislative process greatly varies and depends on different factors such as education and

previous professional background. Many women and men lack a clear understanding of gender roles and what this means in terms of legislation. Achieving leadership positions in committees, where legislative drafting takes place, might be a difficult process for women who lack necessary legislative skills. Female legislators may lack the confidence or knowledge to draft legislation – one way to tackle this is to provide training for female parliamentarians International organization would do well to increase education and training on gender sensitive legislation, including gender sensitive budgeting.

Organized Criminal Groups and Religious Extremism in Kyrgyzstan

Chyngyz Kambarov¹ (2015)

For decades, the primary role of law enforcement agencies in Kyrgyzstan was to prevent and solve common crimes. Even during the Soviet period, the agencies faced a familiar enemy – organized crime that possessed a hierarchical structure, including a defined role for every member, along with unwritten, but strictly followed rules and traditions. However, with the advancement of society and passage of time, came new threats – terrorism, extremism and radicalization. This emerging threat is the reflection and result of socio-economic problems of the state and dynamics in society within last couple of decades. Organized crime can be defeated by the forces of law enforcement, but facing “radicalized organized crime” seems a much more daunting task that is further strained under current financial, technological and political conditions. Because organized crime in Kyrgyzstan is also intertwined with political power, it has penetrated into every level of government and parliament.

All attempts of the powers-that-be have failed to solve these issues of crime, extremism and corruption, or to address other social and economic grievances through reformation of state agencies. For example, the reformation of the court system, which plays a crucial role in establishing rule of law, has produced little success.

Building an effective government based on truly democratic pillars is more complex than combating organized crime intertwined with extremism. The second task is doable, although it is directly interconnected with the achievement of the first task. Further in this article the following issues will be discussed: historical background of organized crime in Kyrgyzstan since the time of Soviet period and current changes in criminal life including radicalization of organized crime and factors which serve as fertile ground for strengthening of organized crime and its

radicalization like protracted political instability and failed reforms of justice system.

In Kyrgyzstan, like in other post-Soviet states, terrorism and extremism have always been a focus of the State Committee of National Security – the state intelligence agency. However, the Interior Ministry, including the National Police, has historically been one of the strongest state executive agencies in government and responsible for ensuring law and order within the country. In the light of the growing threat of terrorism and extremism, there is a high necessity for close cooperation and joint involvement of these two basic agencies, which are responsible for security issues in countering terrorism and extremism.

Organized Criminal Groups

Organized criminal groups in Kyrgyzstan began to appear in late 1980s and beginning of 1990s, just as they did in other post-Soviet states, when the socio-economic and political life of the newly independent states was unstable and fragile. The society was stepping into a market economy to survive. Economic changes caused one part of society to become poorer even as it enriched others. Some business owners became racketeers and criminals, and even former athletes were drawn into criminal groups. It is difficult to estimate how many organized criminal groups were operating at that time because they differed by scale and size, from a few members to a hundreds of members.

Today, according to the Internal Ministry of the Kyrgyz Republic, there are four stable organized criminal groups under recognized leaders in the criminal sphere of Kyrgyzstan. These groups are known by their leaders: Kamchy Kolbaev, Aziz Batukaev, Almaz Bokushev and Maksat Abakirov. The first two criminal leaders hold the highest “rank” in the criminal sphere – “*vor v zakone*” (“Thief of Law”). There are also smaller organized criminal groups operating independently throughout Kyrgyzstan. Although it

¹ LTC of the Kyrgyz Interior Ministry, Ph.D. in Law.

is difficult to identify an exact number of all members of all organized criminal groups, more than 600 members of organized criminal groups are officially registered.

An organized crime preserved its hierarchal system, traditions and “ranks” such as “vor v zakone” or shortly “vor” – Thief of Law which is the top “rank” in criminal world, “polojenec” – the second person after “vor” by significance in criminal world, replaces “vor” in his absence to control the territory and conduct matters and usually appointed by “vor,” “smotryashi” – criminal leader who controls certain part of territory gathering kickbacks on his territory. The territory usually is a whole country or even region. They have their own subculture and unwritten rules, traditions strictly abided. However, today in Kyrgyzstan, there is a layer of criminals, basically youth, who commit crime in a band or in organized form but never care about criminal rules and do not subordinate to them, often fight with other organized crime groups members. They may organize randomly and may leave the group anytime. Such groups are also used by some politicians in political purpose. A case in point took place during political demonstrations against the government in Bishkek in spring of 2007 when people from government brought such criminal elements from other parts of the state basically south, to use them against opposition during the demonstration to frighten them. Other similar example had taken place in Issyk-Kul region in May 2013 when opposition used involved local criminal elements to organize and support political demonstrations against the government.

To reach the status of “Thief of Law” one must meet certain requirements, or rules of criminal life. These include time served in prison, never having served in army, and never having worked in the government. The “rank” is conferred in the “shodka” – meeting of certain numbers of “Thieves of Law” constituting sort of assembly to solve most important issues. If during the Soviet time, the “rank of Thief of Law” could be conferred by up to three thieves in law, after 1990s the quorum was enlarged up to 18 to 20, so to avoid corruption in conferring the criminal rank. This highest cast of people is designed to solve any contentious issues in criminal life. Acting like judges in court they run parallel, their own “institute

of justice.” Decisions issued by “Thief of Law” must be exercised, though if the decision is found unjust, it can be argued by the quorum of “Thieves of Law” up to the murdering of the “Thief of Law” whose unjust decision inflicted substantial harm. Thus influence of “Thieves of Law” on prisoners and other organized criminal groups is undoubtedly strong and politicians in some post-Soviet states may use it as one of the tools for political purpose. Equally important to note that the rank “Thief of Law” is not eternal and for making mistakes, particularly for leading not criminal lifestyle like living in luxury, entering into politics and being public etc. the rank could be deprived in “shodka.”

As Police Lieutenant-General (Ret.) Alexandr Gurov notes, in the Soviet period, there were two reasons for self-depriving the rank of “Thief of Law”: disease and love, that is if the criminal leader decide to have family and conduct normal family life. During the Soviet times “Thieves of Law” established own rules in the prisons and intrinsically were recognized authority. The reason of penal administration’s inaction toward these rules was that there were reciprocal benefits: “Thieves of Law” made prisoners work in factories within penal assets and produce product whereas officers of penal administration got promoted for accomplishment of production plans. In fact, the government anytime could deal shortly with these criminal leaders along with their rules. Criminal leaders of any level clearly understood these limits and could not stand against government. Today there is a new generation of “Thieves of Law” which tend to change the rules, get into politics and business. Many old generation “Thieves of Law” were killed by contemporary “neo-Thieves of Law” to change criminal rules and they lost the essence of the rank and no more bringing justice in criminal life. Intrinsically they preserved only the external attributes and can no longer be called “thieves of law.” Now, they are more easily considered to be Mafiosi with organized groups.²

Organized crime in Kyrgyzstan does not limit itself to traditional crimes, but has actively penetrated business and politics. It spreads and inculcates criminal ideology and a criminal cult in various layers of society, particularly amongst the youth. In high schools, students gather and pay “kickback”

² Alexandr Gurov, “Thieves of Law Gather “Kickouts” not from Prisoners but from Serious Players in Business and Politics in State,” *Biznes online*, May 10, 2014, <http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/96881/>.

to criminal ringleaders, who in their turn pass it to higher criminal leaders according to hierarchy. There is criminal leader in almost every high school, called the “smotryashi” – “watcher,” who monitors the income from racketeering among high school students. Criminal ideology is spread amongst the youth through social networks on the Internet, where criminal leaders are praised for their supposed good deeds. Joining to criminal groups certainly ensures better financial status and this is one of the main reasons.

The lack of sports financing and support for sportsmen by the government causes many young sportsmen to join criminal groups where their physical abilities are used for criminal purposes. Eventually, they become criminalized and now they are becoming radicalized by extremist religious groups. The boldest crime perpetrated recently, in January 2013, by young criminals related to organized crime leaders in the south of Kyrgyzstan, was the assassination of police colonel Shonoev Tolkunbek, the chief of Southern Department of Combating Organized Crime of the Interior Ministry. The organizer and accomplices in the assassination were between 22 and 26 years old.

A 2005 coup in Kyrgyzstan brought political instability and intensified the integration of criminals into politics. Members of organized criminal groups try to penetrate into state power through local and national parliament. At a September 2013 meeting devoted to the issues of organized crime - conducted at the Interior Ministry and attended by the Prime-Minister - the chief of the Organized Crime Combating Division reported that 12 members of organized criminal groups have been elected members of local governments.³ This is just one example of the efforts by the members of organized criminal groups to cover their criminal activity.

Many organized crime groups support themselves financially through drug trafficking, but some have used those funds to build mosques in hope that all sins will be forgiven by Allah. According to the First Deputy of the Interior Ministry, Police Major-

General Jusubaliev Baktybek, there are 30 organized criminal groups directly connected with drug trafficking and today 80% out of 17,000 prisoners in Kyrgyzstan are drug addicted. Drug trafficking is a profitable business not only for organized crime today, but for religious extremists. Although most religions prohibit dealing with drugs in any form, religious extremists justify their involvement in drug trafficking with argument that the drugs will go to Russia and will kill infidels.⁴

The rise of corruption after the collapse of the Soviet Union produced many corrupted high-ranking officials in Kyrgyzstan. Even after they are convicted, many of these corrupt officials pay “smart money” to organized crime groups to ensure their self-security in prison. According to the Chief of the State Penal Service of Kyrgyzstan, criminals know better than anyone about the level of corruption and the financial status of the officials charged with corruption.⁵

Police chiefs have complained about the ineffective laws combating organized crime. Georgia and Russia have laws that allow authorities to apprehend known organized crime leaders based on their known criminal rank, but no such law exists in Kyrgyzstan. A new law of combating organized crime was passed in the Kyrgyz Parliament and endorsed by the President in May 2013. The new law made changes and additions which have created better conditions for effectively combating organized crime. Individuals suspected of being part of organized crime have been targeted by preventive measures such as:⁶

- An official warning;
- Placement on a preventive registration in police agencies;
- Obligations put by court decision.

Background checks can be ordered on finances and property to discover unlawful connections.

A court order is required for these preventive measures except the official warning, which is issued

3 Kyrgyz National Informational Agency, May 12, 2013, <http://www.kabar.kg/law-and-order/full/61989>.

4 Interview with First Deputy Minister of Interior: “So Far Only Patriotism of Operatives Stand Against Drug Dealers’ Money,” *Delo №*, May 10, 2014, <http://delo.kg/index.php/miliciya-i-obshestvo1/6812-pervyj-zamministra-vd-kr-protiv-deneg-narkomafii-vystavit-poka-mozhem-lish-patriotizm-operov>.

5 Interview with the Chief of State Penal Service of Kyrgyzstan, “Sovetbek Arbaev: Workers of Penal System Everyday Risk Their Life in Penal Colonies,” *Vecherniy Bishkek*, May 23, 2014, http://www.vb.kg/doc/273231_sovetbek_arbaev:_sotrydniki_gsin_kajdyy_den_riskyut_jiznu_v_koloniiyah.html.

6 “Organized Crime Counteracting Law of the Kyrgyz Republic,” *ErkinToo*, May 29, 2013, <http://www.erkintoo.kg/news7461>.

by the decision of the chief of the organized crime combating department. The effectiveness of these measures will depend on how they are applied in practice, which may be limited by the technical and material capabilities of units combating organized crime.

Radicalization of Criminals

Defeating organized crime is difficult when it is intertwined with politicians. It is much more difficult to defeat it when it is intertwined with radical ideologies. Many policymakers consider extremist-backed terrorism and organized crime as distinct threats. But in Kyrgyzstan we are seeing criminals integrated not only into politics but also becoming ideologically radicalized. Historically, many leaders of terrorist organizations like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Jumaboi Hodjiev), were criminals before they became radicals.

As organized crime researcher Tamara Makarenko notes, the nature of alliances between groups varies, and can include one-off, short-term and long-term relationships. Furthermore, alliances include ties established for a variety of reasons such as seeking expert knowledge (i.e. money-laundering, counterfeiting, or bomb-making) or operational support (i.e. access to smuggling routes). In many respects, alliance formations are akin to relationships that develop within legitimate business settings.⁷ Alliances formed between terrorist organizations and organized crime may be based initially on economic, operational and other interests. But ultimately they find common ground in radical ideology.

A recent case in point is the appearance of the terrorist group “Jaushul Magdi” – Righteous Ruler – in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. The members of this organization perpetrated several terrorist attacks in Bishkek, including murder of three police officers on January 4, 2011. They were radicalized under the influence of extremist and terrorists’ websites, as well as under the strong influence of the Russian terrorist Alexandr Tihomirov, also known as Said Buryatski. But most of them were known criminals before getting radicalized and declaring jihad against the Kyrgyz government.

Another issue calling for attention is the involvement of youth in organized crime using religious slogan. Today, extremist organizations gradually take care of prisoners’ family supporting them with basic needs like food and financial assistance. It is interesting that similar support is provided in Saudi Arabia, but from the government. For instance, when a breadwinner is incarcerated, several state organizations like Committee for Supporting Prisoners and their Families provide family with an alternative salary. This amount of the replacement income varies on case-by-case basis. Other needs, including children’s schooling and family health care, are also provided and facilitated. This aid is intended to offset any hardship and further radicalization brought on by the arrest and detention of family members. The government recognizes that if it fails to provide this support, it is very possible that extremist elements will move in and do so.⁸ The effectiveness of such approach maybe argued but it is definitely has positive effect. Unfortunately the budget of Kyrgyz government can’t afford such program. More realistic approach today for the Kyrgyz government remains paying special attention to this issue involving all possible participants including civil society but not leaving this problem on security structures only. A “whole of government” approach is needed with a much earlier with the involvement of every state agency, non-government organizations, and religious institutes to make it successful.

It is clear that radical organizations and organized criminal groups are united in many of their interests and goals. Both would like to destabilize the political situation, undermine security structures, and create panic in society. Criminals always seek to take advantage from chaos, and the destabilization is a fundamental goal of international terrorist and extremist organizations. Both are also dedicated to promoting corruption in court system and political instability.

Courts and Political Instability

The reformation of the court system in Kyrgyzstan began after the 2010 coup, but has not been com-

⁷ Tamara Makarenko, “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism,” *Global Crime* 6, no. 1 (February 2004): 131.

⁸ Christopher Boucek, “Saudi Arabia’s “Soft” Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare,” *Carnegie Paper* No. 97, Middle East Program, September 2008.

pleted. Many experts say that the new government, in place since 2010, could not ensure true independence of the court system. The replacement of judges brought even more incompetent and corrupt people into court system, actually increasing the level of corruption. Organized crime groups use this corruption to pay their way out of detention when they are arrested. One of the top “Thief of law” criminal leaders was arrested in Kyrgyzstan, but released by a local court after convincing authorities he was dying of cancer. The leader, Aziz Batukaev, was a Chechen and returned to Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. There, he unofficially married a second time and continues to control his crime organization in Kyrgyzstan from a distance.⁹ A commission formed by Parliament of Kyrgyzstan found that the release of “Thief of law” Aziz Batukaev was deliberately prepared and organized by certain high-ranking officials of the penal system and court system and other state agencies. The commission recommended the dismissal of certain high-level officials of the state.¹⁰

The Chairman of the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan argued in opposition that law enforcement agencies very often detain suspects whom they claim to be a member of an organized criminal group. In reality, the suspected person never committed a serious crime but was only charged with polygamy.¹¹ These countering accusations illustrate how difficult it will be to root out corruption in law enforcement agencies and court system. Contemplating on the failure and process of court reforming ex-judge of Supreme Court, Rita Karasartova emphasize following reasons: reluctance of political leadership in conducting real reforms; willing to have obedient judges; illusion of progressive changes through selection of new judges. The most important thing in court reform is to achieve the independence of the court system. The selection of judges should not depend on political powers and powers-that-be must forget about suppressing or influencing courts if they really want to make substantial reforms in the court system.¹² Unfortunately, many judges are selected on the

basis of loyalty to certain political powers and ready to serve those interests, putting aside the rule of law.

It is difficult to make reforms under conditions of political and socio-economic instability. After the coups in 2005 and 2010, the country was economically thrown back 10-15 years. The coups left state institutions tremendously shaken and demoralized many state servants at all level. The level of people’s trust in government is also decreasing. These circumstances play into the hands of extremist organizations and international terrorist organizations who are carefully observing the political and social dynamics in Kyrgyzstan specifically, and Central Asia as a whole. When political processes are destabilized, extremist organizations are able to gradually step in. As author B. Jusubaliev notes, 900 political demonstrations occurred during 2013 in Kyrgyzstan.¹³ Police forces are taxed to the limit keeping order during such political demonstrations. This ongoing turmoil distracts police agencies from focusing on their everyday work – combating crime and ensuring the security of peaceful people.

Police forces struggle to execute their responsibilities because of a lack of personnel. Almost all services and departments are involved in ensuring security during the political riots and other demonstrations. Although they were indifferent to demonstrations in the past, now it is obvious that the Kyrgyzstani people are sick of demonstrations and are calling for decisive measures from the police toward demonstrators and organizers.

Dealing with demonstrators potentially brings police into conflict with extremist groups. An analysis of the extremists’ activities indicates that they were very involved during the days of the coups in 2005 and 2010. Hizb ut-Tahrir made an attempt to seize state power in October of 2008 in Nookat province, one of the most religious provinces in south Kyrgyzstan. Extremists organized a demonstration against the local government on the last day of holy Ramadan, complaining that the local the officials tried to limit the celebration of the holiday to the lo-

9 “Deadly Sick Aziz Batukaev Married Young Girl,” *Delo №*, May 23, 2014, <http://delo.kg/index.php/2011-08-04-18-06-33/6258-smertelno-bolnoj-aziz-batukaev-zhenilsya-na-molodoj>.

10 Decision of Kyrgyz Parliament on A. Batukaev, from May 30, 2013 No. 3111-V, http://kenesh.kg/RU/Articles/18121-Ob_itogax_raboty_vremennoj_deputatskoj_komissii_po_izucheniyu_obstoyatelstv_osvobozhdeniya_Batukaeva_A_iz_mest_lisheniya_svobody_i_ego_vyezda_za_predeply_respubliki_za_3111V_ot_30_maya_2013_goda.aspx.

11 “Chairmen of Kyrgyz Supreme Court, Feruza Jamasheva: Policemen themselves release criminals but blame on courts,” *24.kg*, May 23, 2014, <http://www.24kg.org/community/171886-feruza-dzhamasheva-milicionery-sami-otpuskayut.html>.

12 <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1396933740>.

13 *Ibid.*

cal stadium, away from the local government compounds. A riot was provoked by radical extremists, who led the mob against the government.

Organized criminal groups also take advantage of instability and the weakness of state power. After the first coup in 2005, organized criminal groups used the chaos and absence of police in the streets to cause havoc in the capital city of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek. People were afraid of to go outside and begged law enforcement agencies to take control over the city and ensure security. It was the first time people understood the significance of the police in ensuring security. Police were able to take back the streets from the criminals, but they now face greater problems in similar situations because of the growth of extremist organizations.

The Role of Police in Countering Terrorism

How should police forces respond to such an environment? To answer this question, it is necessary to look at the state's present day law enforcement capacity. Kyrgyzstan's law enforcement agency, like those of other post-Soviet states, is structured and functions by the organization which was established and developed during Soviet rule. This is more centralized, compared to the United States, where police are decentralized into state and local agencies. The structure of the system is workable, but the perception of police by the Kyrgyz people has worsened within last 20 years of independence. The majority of the public perceives law enforcement as a part of the corrupt state machine, not as an agency designed to protect people from crime.

The Interior Ministry needs more qualified personnel. Department 10 of the Interior Ministry is tasked with combating terrorism and extremism – and remains the only agency responsible for this task. This Department was abolished for a short period after the 2010 coup, when it was accused of gathering information on individuals for political rather than crime-related purposes. Many developed countries at the present time pursue counter-terrorism strategies through the whole-of-government approach. There is not enough financial and human resource in Kyrgyzstan to implement the whole-of-government approach, but some attempts have been made. A strategic plan created by the government involved all

law enforcement agencies, NGOs, religious institutes, and other state agencies. But scarce financing and a lack of technical support and qualified experts in theology caused this joint approach to be abandoned.¹⁴

The police's role in fighting terrorism and extremism is crucial in every country, and Kyrgyzstan is no exception. But despite the threat of growing religious extremism, law enforcement agencies still feel the lack of well-trained personnel in this specific area, as well as a lack of new technological support. Because little training is provided in identifying extremists, patrol-level police may stop and frisk any suspicious person based on appearance, which causes a backlash from mainstream Muslim society.

Police are responsible for the first response to a terrorist attack, so their role will remain significant. But Kyrgyz police have no advanced technology to access information databases in order to determine the criminal history of a suspected individual instantly, like most American patrols have installed in police car. Patrol officers have to memorize or keep a printed (and often blurred) picture of suspected individuals. To truly respond to extremist groups, police must expand and improve their existing databases of the members of these groups. In this year, 2014, the Interior Ministry database system contains more than 1,700 extremists, but it cannot maintain an accurate picture, because many extremist organizations followers remain out of view. The analytical team of the Department 10 feels a lack of strong and deep knowledge-based experts in theology that could qualitatively process and work with the existing and new data pertaining religious terrorist and extremist organizations and their members.

Western police working methods like community policing and intelligence-led policing could be successfully applied and implemented in Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies. A program similar to community policing has been in place in Kyrgyz police agencies since the Soviet period, which worked quite successfully at one time. The duties of "district police officers" are very similar to community policing. The goal of reaching out to people in a certain district and gaining community the cooperation to ensure security and order are similar to the philosophy of community policing.

For example, as Kelling and Bratton state: "local police officers have an everyday presence in the communities that they are sworn to protect. They are in

14 <http://analitika.org/kyrgyzstan/kg-gov/2596-kyrgyzstan-nekotorye-problemy-protivodeystviya-religioznomu-ekstremizmu-i-terrorizmu.html>

a better position to know responsible leaders in the Islamic and Arabic communities and can reach out to them for information or help in developing informants.”¹⁵ The success of community policing depends on the level of people’s trust in police, when the district police officer is seen as a protector of residents, and serving the people. The Kyrgyzstan people once had an image of “Uncle Styopa” – the police officer whom people trust and admire – but this was erased with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many qualified police officers have since retired, and those who remain face corruption, nepotism, moral degradation, criminals joining the police force, and the widespread abuse of power by police. This has created a feeling of “us and them” between the police and the public. Unprofessional behavior by many police officers in Kyrgyzstan and their attitude toward people has become an impediment to any reform in the law enforcement agencies of Kyrgyzstan.

Some of the community policing practices directed toward counter-terrorism in the United States seems applicable to the police work of the Kyrgyzstan. For example, gathering information through community policing has advantages over traditional intelligence work. Specifically it avoids: (a) undermining community trust through the compiling of unsubstantiated lists of suspects, (b) charges of profiling, phone-tapping and the legal and political encumbrances thereof, (c) costly and unproductive surveillance of suspects and places; (d) secret (and therefore suspect) operations and entrapment.¹⁶ Despite of the lack of technology and the material resources available to American police, and the difference of the police systems of the Kyrgyzstan and the United States, community policing appears quite possible to implement in Kyrgyz police work under existing conditions at an affordable cost.

Three key American police methods in the war on terrorism which are depicted by Kelling and Bratton seem even more applicable in Kyrgyzstan. First, police can be trained in the problem-solving techniques that will make them effective first preventers of terrorism. Second, Kyrgyzstan can use similar technologies which are used by American police to enhance data sharing and to catalyze intelligence-led counter-terrorist policing. Finally, and most vitally, the theory

of order maintenance commonly called “broken windows,” which police in New York City have used so successfully in the war on crime, can be adapted for the war on terror.¹⁷ With an increased technical ability at their disposal, Kyrgyz police would work more effectively. But patrol police officers in Kyrgyzstan often approach counter terrorism/extremism activity with a take-them-out mindset. Police officers who are temperamentally suited to community policing need to be left in place long enough to gain the trust of the community and to become familiar faces in the neighborhood.¹⁸

In Kyrgyzstan, district police officers tend to be younger, just graduated officers with a lack of experience of how to effectively cooperate with people. Older officers are available to teach and mentor them, but in general the “Mentor Institution” which worked during Soviet times does not work properly today. Non-transparent way of assigning officers serves as one of the major challenges to select properly qualified officer to any department. In fact non-transparent order of choosing and assigning officers and the work of Human Recourse Department of Interior Ministry is the one which should be reformed first in order to make better change in police system.

The greatest harm to the image of the police in Kyrgyzstan is caused by police involved in criminal activities, very often protecting and serving as a “roof” for various criminals, mostly “covering” drug trafficking and prostitution. Some police officers may have close ties with leaders of organized crime groups. These images create a pessimistic mood among the public about the potential for fighting crime, let alone reining in religious terrorism and extremism.

Conclusion

The issue of religious extremism was officially discussed by the top officials of Kyrgyzstan during February 2014. The discussions made it clear that new programs, concepts and strategies will remain ineffective without political and economic stability and the trust of population in security forces, especially the police. The public will be more willing to report

15 https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cb_43.htm.

16 Ronald V. Clarke and Graeme R. Newman, “Police and the Prevention of Terrorism,” *Policing* 1, no. 1 (2007): 13.

17 https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cb_43.htm Ibid.

18 Clarke and Newman, “Police and the Prevention of Terrorism,” 13.

any manifestation of religious extremism, suspicious individuals and crimes to law enforcement agencies which have gained trust. The Georgian Republican can be seen as a successful example in gaining people's trust in police in the post-Soviet era. Although some experts warned that police reform fell short in Georgia, the result of this reform effort speaks for itself. There is no doubt that reform needs financial and human resources, but more importantly it needs a political willingness, which the leadership of Georgian state was able to accomplish.

When state leaders do not have the political will, the routine work of the existing system will continue, and consequently there is no trust from the people. Words on counter terrorism and extremism concepts and strategies will remain on paper. The current state of affairs will be hard to change while portions of the public support the current conditions because of personal connections and money. But many political, economic, social and security issues can be overcome

by hiring decent and qualified personnel in government, security agencies and police through the transparent selection and promotion on basis of a merit system.

It would be preferable to see the establishment of a separate state agency explicitly committed to fighting terrorism and religious extremism. But there is no financial possibility for this in Kyrgyzstan. This means the state should strengthen existing police forces by training, capacity building and providing technical and other support to effectively prevent terrorism and religious extremism.

In summation, Kyrgyzstan's leaders must have the political will and provide financial backing, and also gain the support of the public, in order to make any drastic changes or reforms in the security sector, particularly law enforcement agencies. These changes are needed to succeed in creating a viable counter-terrorism and counter-extremism effort in the state.

Ensuring Freedom from State Violence in the Kyrgyz Republic

Sardarbek Bagishbekov¹ (2014)

Kyrgyzstan is typically portrayed as the most democratic country in Central Asia and the only one with a political environment structured around parliamentary institutions. Despite this positive image, the country still ranks almost as low as its neighbors in terms of democratic governance, particularly in having an independent judiciary and law enforcement. State violence is widespread, ultimately reducing claims of state legitimacy. The foremost issue is state sanctioned torture, which symbolizes the state's failure to guarantee security for its citizens. This paper focuses on state violence in Kyrgyzstan, particularly the acts of torture committed by law enforcement agencies, and proposes ways to curtail its use. I argue that the only way to reduce state institutions' tendency toward violence is to inform and educate the public so that they can become a strong voice calling for government agencies to respect the rule of law and adopt more effective crime prevention policies.

Cascading Challenges

In Kyrgyzstan, like in many other Central Asian states, the deteriorating human rights situation is a result of three cascading and negatively reinforcing challenges.

The first challenge has to do with regime stability, which has become a priority for the political authorities. Ensuring political stability and control over resources is considered more important than

promoting human rights and democratic transformations. The focus on stability has made the political authorities neglect reform of the judiciary and law enforcement.

The second challenge has to do with high levels of corruption, particularly in law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, and the reluctance to introduce and implement real reforms. The political authorities have repeatedly issued assurances of Kyrgyzstan's commitment to human rights and democratic principles, and pointed to its ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Convention against Torture in 1997. It has also attracted foreign funding for the implementation of appropriate police reforms. However, the strong statements of commitment to democratic principles and the primacy of human rights at the higher levels of the state are not supported at lower levels of government. Put differently, the state's advocacy for human rights and freedoms, formal legal procedures and mechanisms, and an independent judiciary are not translated in practice. Corruption amongst judges and members of law enforcement agencies (especially the police and the national security service) is rampant. Many civil and criminal cases do not respect due process. The roughly 98% of criminal cases that result in convictions is suspicious.²

In addition, an OSCE study has shown that half of Kyrgyzstani citizens believe that the police normally use violence to obtain information from detainees and defendants.³ It is likely that the high rate of convictions is obtained through testimonies given under duress. A study by an independent expert about torture in Kyrgyzstan shows that 88% of all documented cases of torture are committed by

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2 "Kyrgyzstan: The Challenge of Judicial Reform," *Asia Report* No. 150, International Crisis Group, April 2008, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/150-kyrgyzstan-the-challenge-of-judicial-reform.aspx>.

3 "Obshchestvennoe mnenie: reforma organov vnutrennikh del Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki," SIAR, <http://siar-consult.com/news/reform-of-mvd/>.

internal security agencies.⁴ Torture practices include: threats, beating of the legs with batons, near suffocation with plastic bags, electric shocks, sexual violence, rape and threats of rape, withholding of toilet and other facilities, and sustained stress positions. In 2012, out of 371 total torture allegations submitted to the prosecutor's office, only 31 cases were investigated. It is unclear what happened to the remaining 340 cases.

The third challenge is that violence has become a common tool to address social problems in Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, when citizens are unable to find justice through legal channels, they resort to self-help, including political riots and radicalization. Ineffective state responses to violent incidents have become common place. The history of social unrest is startling. The country's first two presidents were violently overthrown in revolutions in March 2005 and April 2010. We have also seen numerous inter-ethnic conflicts: between Kyrgyz and Dungans in the village of Iskra in 2006; between Kyrgyz and Russians on one side and Kurds on the other in the village of Petrovka in 2009; and between Kyrgyzs and Turks in the village of Mayevka near Bishkek in 2010.

The most violent and widespread inter-ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks occurred in June 2010 in Osh (southern Kyrgyzstan) and killed more than 400 people. The government has failed to adequately address abuses, in particular against ethnic minorities, and this has undermined long-term efforts to promote stability and reconciliation. Despite an uneasy calm in southern Kyrgyzstan, ethnic Uzbeks are still subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, and extortion, without means of redress.⁵ These ethnic clashes were not properly addressed or effectively investigated by the state authorities, and they have served as a signal of impunity and acceptance of violence.

In sum, a legitimate concern with stability is being undermined by the neglect of basic principles of

democratic and good governance and respect for the rule of law. The social contract between state authorities and citizens must be based on trust in the rule of law. When such trust is no longer available and replaced by violence, states may regain temporary stability, but ultimately become more unstable and invite ever more violence.

This paper examines state violence in Kyrgyzstan, particularly acts of torture committed by law enforcement agencies, and proposes ways to curtail its use.

Torture as the Most Serious Form of State Violence

Officially, Kyrgyzstan has banned torture. Article 22 of the constitution has underscored the state's obligations to prevent, detect and combat torture, stating that "no one shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."⁶ It also has ratified the UN Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CAT).⁷

However, despite some positive developments, torture in Kyrgyzstan continues to be widespread. Punitive-repressive police actions, stemming back to Soviet era notions of protecting the state from the people, did not disappear with independence. Numerous human rights NGOs and international organizations⁸ and experts have collected evidence of torture and ill-treatment in detention centers.⁹ During his visit to Kyrgyzstan in 2011, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Mr. Juan Méndez, noted that the use of torture and ill-treatment is a widespread phenomenon.¹⁰ Civil society groups reached the same conclusion when they monitored 47 temporary detention facilities throughout the country in 2011 and 2012. Seventy percent of 193 respondents made allegations of torture and ill-treatment by law en-

4 Irina Pavlova, "In Kyrgyzstan, 88 percent of all cases of torture fall on internal affairs agencies," *24.kg*, May 21, 2012, <http://eng.24.kg/community/2012/05/21/24335.html>.

5 "World report 2013 – Kyrgyzstan," Human Rights Watch, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/kyrgyzstan>.

6 The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic was adopted on July 27, 2010, <http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/details.jsp?id=10576>.

7 The UN Convention Against Torture was ratified by Kyrgyzstan on July 26, 1997.

8 "Kyrgyzstan: Reports of Torture, Extortion by Police," Human Rights Watch, November 23, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/22/kyrgyzstan-reports-torture-extortion-police>.

9 "Torture prevention in temporary detention centers under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the KR," *Golos Svobody*, December 15, 2011, <http://golossvobody.kloop.kg/archives/717>.

10 "Kyrgyzstan must do more to prevent torture, end impunity for abuses," UN News Center, December 14, 2011, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp/html/story.asp?NewsID=40726&Cr=torture&Cr1=#.Uok_LIPWuDU.

forcement officials, with torture being used in 83.3% of those cases to obtain confessions, and in 13.3% as a form of punishment.¹¹

Some of the most severe forms of police brutality are targeted at disadvantaged or marginalized populations such as drug users, the mentally disabled, and religious minorities, people who do not enjoy much support in the community and have limited access to justice. Ethnic minorities such as Uzbeks are specifically targeted. For example, after the interethnic clashes in 2010 only two criminal cases were investigated, despite the massive police violence against ethnic minorities in southern Kyrgyzstan. Torture is also used on young people. According to the data collected by the NGO Coalition against Torture, in more than 75% cases of torture in Kyrgyzstan, the victims were between 19 and 34 years old.¹²

Unfortunately, the state – despite its declaratory statements – has not cracked down on torture committed by its law enforcement bodies and institutions. Rapid and effective investigation of allegations of torture in Kyrgyzstan is far from guaranteed. Several factors impede access to justice and legal redress including: the lack of effective channels to file a complaint application; the difficulty of the practical application of Article 305-1 of the Criminal Code; the lack of a proper investigation agency able to conduct rapid and effective investigations into allegations of torture; and the lack of effective medical forensic examinations. Furthermore, there is a corresponding sentiment among the public at large that the police have a moral right to use torture against people who violate the law. Few citizens think critically about the problem or believe in the presumption of innocence. In public discussions about torture, one often hears both citizens and government representatives arguing about the various social and economic problems that have to be addressed before considering the moral implications of torture. Some people blame the victims of torture themselves, and others agree that while the problem exists, they do not consider it to be a priority. In both cases, what is not seen is a demonstration of the civic position, or some kind of a social censure and disapproval of the unlawful and

violent acts of police. Citizens' social disapproval of such phenomena should become a key component in the reduction of state violence.

Post-Osh State Violence

The problem of torture most acutely manifested itself in the course of investigations into offenses related to events in the south of the country in June 2010. An inquiry by the *Kylym Shamy Centre for Human Rights Protection* found that as of December 1, 2010 5,158 criminal cases were put forward. However, only 169 cases that involved 305 defendants and 446 victims were referred to the courts for consideration. According to Human Rights Watch, these criminal investigations were accompanied by massive human rights violations, including torture, unlawful detention, and ill-treatment of detainees.¹³

Criminal prosecution targeted mainly ethnic Uzbeks – indeed, 85% of detainees were ethnic Uzbeks. According to a report by the International Independent Commission for Investigating the Events in the South of the Kyrgyz Republic, mistreatment of prisoners in the first hours of detention took place in almost every case, regardless of the place of detention.¹⁴ Detainees were subjected to various methods of torture and ill-treatment, including beatings with fists, batons, metal rods, and rifle butts, use of electric shock devices, asphyxiation with gas masks or plastic bags, and burning with cigarettes.¹⁵ Investigations of criminal cases were conducted in conditions of moral unpreparedness for impartial investigations, by law enforcement agencies composed of over 95% ethnic Kyrgyz, and under conditions of massive popular pressure.

Despite serious violations and gaps at the investigation stage, the June cases were referred to the court, within 2-3 months. Within another 2-3 months, court trials took place in which the attorneys were beaten in the court rooms. More than 34 people were condemned to maximum sentences. This includes Azimjan Askarov, the only journalist in the world currently sentenced to life imprisonment.¹⁶ His case

11 "Torture prevention in temporary detention centers under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the KR."

12 Ibid.

13 "Where is the Justice? Interethnic Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan and its Aftermath, 2010," *Human Rights Watch Report*, August 16, 2010, 49.

14 Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the events into the southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010, para 278.

15 Ibid.

16 "Azimjan Askarov - 2012 CPJ International Press Freedom Awardee," Committee to protect journalists, 2012, <http://www.cpj.org/awards/2012/azimjon-askarov-kyrgyzstan.php>.

is a leading example of the judiciary in Kyrgyzstan, not only as an incidence of interethnic discrimination, but also as an illustration of how the system ignores complaints of police brutality. The public prosecutor's office and the courts, including the Supreme Court, ignored his complaints about violence and torture. In spite of statements from dozens of international organizations, official representatives of the UN and OSCE, deputies of the European Parliament, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, George Soros and many others, the case was not reopened and an appropriate investigation was not carried out.

One year later in 2011, police violence continued. Police detained and allegedly tortured Usmonzhon Kholmiraev, a Russian citizen and an ethnic Uzbek, in Bazar Korgon (southern Kyrgyzstan). He died on August 9, 2011, two days after he was released from police custody. The policemen allegedly tortured him for several hours, trying to extort money in exchange for his release. As soon as he was taken into the station, the police put a gas mask on him and started punching him. When he fell down, one of the officers jumped on Kholmiraev's chest two or three times before he lost consciousness. He told his wife before he died that the police threatened to press charges against him in connection with the June 2010 interethnic violence.¹⁷ No one was charged in his death.

In most cases, perpetrators of torture have impunity from prosecution and punishment. Prosecutor's offices are initiating investigations in only 10% of received complaints. The lack of convictions for torture as defined in Article 305-1 of the Criminal Code indicates either that the most severe form of ill-treatment by the authorities does not occur or, more likely, that there is a lack of proper investigation and legal proceedings when it does.

In October 2013, members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe made a statement that allegations of torture are not properly investigated in Kyrgyzstan and perpetrators are not being punished.¹⁸ The statement declared that government of Kyrgyzstan must "restart the process" to provide real justice for the violence that happened in 2010 and its

aftermath. As a first step, the Supreme Court must revise judgments of convictions which are discredited by complaints of torture or other obvious violations of international standards of fair trial.

Police as a Main Source of Torture

The police represent the first level of the criminal justice system. The police are supervised by the Office of the Prosecutor General. Much of police activity is indicative of whether the state is observing its international obligations to protect and ensure individual rights and freedoms.

Although not required by law, in practice confessions are generally required to obtain a conviction. Torture is the primary means for obtaining confessions involuntarily. Policemen are often promoted based on the number of cases they solve, which puts them under further pressure to obtain confessions.

The causes of police abuse and human rights violations are quite diverse: impunity, corrupt law enforcement bodies, the practice of extortion in the judiciary sector, low levels of professionalism among officers, and a lack of basic moral principles. Additional reasons for the use of violence, as reported by the police themselves are: serious institutional weaknesses, low salaries, inadequate numbers of police officers, disproportionate case burdens, and a lack of proper controls over the activities of the operating units.¹⁹

On October 30, 2013, the Kyrgyz minister of internal affairs, General Suranchiev, admitted the existence of police torture and condemned it as shameful in an interview with journalists. General Suranchiev believes that "the reason behind the torture is a race after high performance indices, meaning that policemen try to obtain confessions from detainees in order to increase the percentage of the criminal cases solved."²⁰

According to a study by John W. Schiemann from Fairleigh Dickinson University, information gleaned from interrogational torture is very likely unreliable,

17 "Kyrgyzstan: A Death Follows Police Torture," Human Rights Watch, August 11, 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/08/11/kyrgyzstan-death-fol-lows-police-torture>.

18 Zairbek Baktybaev, "V Kirgizstane ne uluchshaetsya situatsiya s pytkami," *Rusazattyk.kg*, November 2, 2013, <http://rus.azattyk.org/content/kyrgyzstan-human-rights-/25154767.html>.

19 Ivan Donis, "V Kirgizii sotrudniki otdeleniya militsii, v kotorom byl do smerti izbit grazhdanin Rossii, otdelelis' vygovorami i uvol'neniem," *News Asia*, August 12, 2011, <http://www.news-asia.ru/view/1547>.

20 Ryspek Tokatanaliev, "Glavnyy militsioner Kirgizstana v pervye priznal nalichie pytok," *Voice of freedom Central Asia*, October 31, 2013, <http://vof.kg/?p=12346>.

and when torture techniques are employed, they are likely used too frequently and harshly. For torture to generate even small amounts of valuable information, the state must make the rational calculation to torture innocent detainees for telling the truth in order to maintain torture as a threat against those who withhold information.²¹ Many experienced interrogators in the United States believe that torture is counterproductive -- it produces so much unreliable information that it is difficult to tell what is true and what is false. These experts believe that non-coercive techniques are far more effective because when the subject does begin to talk, more truths emerge.²²

Similar arguments are applicable to Kyrgyzstan, as well, where in 75% of all cases the goal of the torture is to obtain a confession of guilt from a detainee. Police violence may lead to a conviction and/or punishment of innocent individuals, and in such cases it may mean that the actual perpetrators remain unpunished and may continue to be a danger to society. Eliciting information by means of torture also reduces the capacity of the police officers to find, study, and apply new techniques and tactics of investigation and criminology.

Moving Forward

There is a public demand for police reform, including the improvement of services provided, better security and crime prevention, increased police transparency, and the reduction of corruption. Respect for human rights and freedoms should be the mainstay of police reform. In pursuing reform, the values of presumed innocence and rule of law should be paramount. Any police activities, including special operations which achieve results through illegal or inhumane actions, negate the purposes, principles, and the role of the police. The state's criminal policy should be corrected by reducing the role of repressive approaches in law enforcement training, prioritizing crime prevention, enhancing public scrutiny and accountability, and giving the public access to the maximum amount of information.²³

Although many of these changes have already been codified in both national legislation and in international agreements on human rights, there has not been much success in translating them into everyday realities. However, progressive legislation remains a crucial part of the solution to these problems, so long as it is also supported by political will, well-trained police professionals, and evidence of reduced levels of corruption.

History has shown that political will is absolutely necessary when pursuing institutional reforms – police reform is no different. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, with its vertical power structure and politicized law enforcement, leadership and political will are key components for reform. However, it is unlikely that major institutions will force the police to reform, since it is also the main institution that ensures security for the regime. Hence the importance of a scenario where the public generates political will by directing demands for more effective crime prevention and improved police services directly to the police. The role of the public can be multidimensional. It may include declarations of disagreement and social disapproval, the signing of petitions, the monitoring of police activity, and the advocacy for better police services. That is why it is very important to continue monitoring, documenting, and reporting all cases of rights violations in police settings and to continue public discussions about these problems.

Another cornerstone of police reform must address the processes of recruiting and educating police personnel. This process is monopolized by the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), which is currently the only educational institution certified to train professionals for internal affairs agencies. There have been a number of times when young students of the MIA Academy were involved in various acts of criminal and violent behavior towards civilians. Reported hooliganism²⁴ at the academy's graduation parties in 2011 and 2012 has also tarnished its reputation of professionalism. Today the academy is known for being a den of graft,²⁵ notably illustrated by the arrest of the chief of the academy

21 John W. Schiemann, "Interrogational Torture: Or How Good Guys Get Bad Information with Ugly Methods," *Political Research Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2012): 3-19.

22 Eugene Robinson, "Torture is still torture," *The Buffalo News*, May 10, 2011.

23 Public Foundation Verdict, "The Working Group of human rights organizations on Strategy of interaction with the internal affairs agencies and promoting the reform of the MIA," see <http://eng.publicverdict.ru/>.

24 Leila Saralaeva, "Derzhis, strana! V polku militsii pribylo," *Delo №*, June 28, 2012, http://delo.kg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4014:2012-06-28-07-51-39&catid=54:2011-05-19-20-40-00&Itemid=121.

25 Chris Rickelton, "Kyrgyzstan: Distrust in Police Means Privatization of Law and Order," *Eurasianet.org*, November 5, 2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66143>.

and his deputy in March 2013 on the charge of accepting bribes.²⁶

Police personnel selection should be conducted on a competitive basis and be accessible to specialists from other universities and ethnic minorities, which will help avoid isolation and development of police sub-cultures. These sub-cultures are typically hostile to human rights and the rule of law and can easily rationalize the notion of violating the law for the purposes of “law enforcement.” Unchecked, this professional culture tends to promote a sense of mission, pessimism towards social justice, positions of permanent suspicion, isolated social life, strong codes of solidarity, political conservatism, ethnic prejudice, sexism, categorization of people by types, and a willingness to conceal professional misconduct. The MIA should become an institution for training specialists, and it should strive to become a center of research for the study and implementation of new police approaches and skills.

Finally, the role of Ministry of Internal Affairs in leading reform efforts should be removed. International organizations and donors that occasionally allocate financial and technical support to the police are partially responsible for this inefficiency.

Opacity and lack of communication between donors and civil society are the main complaints against the OSCE police program in Kyrgyzstan, which has been performing a series of operations supporting police reform since 2003. In this context, the donors should not only demonstrate transparency, but they also should motivate and persuade state agencies to be open and ready to communicate with civil society. The evaluation of these programs should also include studies of public opinion on reform outcomes.

Recommendations

The following steps are essential elements for ensuring freedom from state violence:

Government of Kyrgyzstan

- Establish a centralized inter-agency body with institutionalized civil society consultations for the systematic coordination and implementation of Kyrgyzstan’s international human rights commitments and obligations,

and the provision of the human and other resources necessary for the timely preparation of state reports to UN treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review, and other appropriate mechanisms.

- Publically recognize the competence of the UN Committee against Torture to consider individual complaints of victims of torture and reports of the member-states on infringements of obligations under the convention by other member-states, according to Articles 21 and 22 of the convention.
- The Office of the Prosecutor General should establish a separate investigatory committee for police crimes with its own operative group and forensic service, and within this committee establish a special division for the investigation of torture.
- Develop an effective mechanism to receive and consider torture complaints at places of detention, with full respect for confidentiality.
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs should publically articulate new criteria for the evaluation of the police officers’ activities, including significant reductions of the weight of quantitative indicators, inclusion of public polls in police evaluations, involvement of independent institutions and civil society actors in the process of evaluations, and the development of modern integrated indicators for the assessment of the police, such as citizens’ sense of security (total assessments, satisfaction with the results of work, satisfaction with communication).
- Publically declare a zero policy stance regarding torture and condemn its use, publicizing specific examples of the crime by employees of law enforcement agency and the subsequent sanctions.
- Allocate sufficient funds in the state budget for the recently established National Center of the Kyrgyz Republic for the Prevention of Torture.
- Call upon the Ministry of Health to revise its existing internal instructions on how to comply with the Istanbul Protocol standards and issue a special decree for a timely and thor-

²⁶ “Kyrgyz Interior Ministry Academy Leaders Arrested on Bribery Charges,” *Radio Free Europe*, March 14, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan-bribery-interior-ministry/24928308.html>.

ough examination of all detainees and adopt appropriate responses.

- Develop mechanisms of implementation for the victim/witness protection law, including the demand for the temporary withdrawal of suspected officials from their jobs.
- Call upon the Supreme Court to issue a normative ruling for judges on how cases of torture should be handled, including issues of qualification of evidence.

International Community

- Continue to support human rights defenders in their monitoring, reporting, litigation, and education efforts.
- When providing financial and technical support for the judicial sector, take into account human rights concerns as described in the reports of local and international NGOs.

Understanding Illiberal Sentiments of Kyrgyz Youth

Gulzhigit Ermatov¹ (2016)

Setting the Ground

Backlash against liberal values has been among the most visible features of the current political processes in Kyrgyzstan. Local political activists have been successful in promoting laws against NGO “foreign agents” and LGBTQ rights. Commentaries on domestic and foreign affairs usually build on anti-liberal conspiracy-theory arguments that blame civil society and international assistance for subverting national security and local morality. This backlash often comes from an unexpected part of the society: youth.

Young people’s interest and broad participation in politics often arises from the mentality of a constructed ethnic “purity” and misogyny blended with Salafi-inspired Islam. Paradoxically, over the past two decades the country has seen a wave of locally and externally driven programs mainly aiming to shape young people as agents of change for democracy and peace. This paper will examine why and how young people are leading the current tide against liberalism in an environment that arguably has favored a broad and liberal outlook.

Neither the prevalence of youth-led illiberalism nor its causal link to democracy assistance has been gauged through rigorous perception studies. This paper builds on reports in traditional media and on widely cited social media debates featuring claims and views cast by young opinion leaders and political and civic activists. The paper refers to interviews and personal insights shared with me on various occasions by individuals claiming political and public space under the rubric of youth. This paper is also driven by my personal experience as a development worker closely involved in governance and peace

building initiatives that stress youth empowerment and participation.

Loaded Terms

Youth

A common scholarly leitmotif in defining youth, to which I subscribe, holds it to be a socially constructed identity that is not biologically given or determined. Depending on time, place, and situation, its duration may be shorter or longer and the social, cultural, and political importance of youth may be stronger or weaker. A big array of social actors and institutions shape the meaning of youth based on prevailing political agendas and ever-changing social interactions. For example, young people may be ascribed an agency for driving protests to change political regimes, but at the same time be regarded as amateur and unruly when it comes to deciding on vital daily and resource-bound policies and actions that concern them.

In the development literature, a common thread in definitions of youth is its transitional nature. Transitional stages are delineated between dependent childhood and independent adulthood and from school to employment as well as stages of becoming an informed member of an interdependent community.² The United Nations and its affiliate institutions have set age limits for different youth categories from ages 10 to 35 that they use for statistical purposes. Thus, for UNICEF, the “adolescent” category falls within the 10-18 year-old range; those between 10 and 24 are “young people;” and “youth” belong to the age bracket of 15-24. UN Habitat stretches youth from ages 15 to 32 and the African Union uses the highest formal age, raising it to 35.³ Most referrals to youth are skewed toward the 15-24 age bracket.

The boundaries of youth in Kyrgyzstan as in many other contexts are fluid and multidimension-

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2 See <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>; also see <http://www.youthindex.org/full-report/>.

3 <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>.

al. Although the official youth age in Kyrgyzstan is considered to be between 14 and 28, it may move upward and downward depending on place, time, social conditions and relations, and institutional context. Public and media discourse keeps the youth concept relevant and salient up to the ages of 35-40.⁴ Most of the so-called youth wings of the mainstream political parties in the country are led by individuals who are in their 30s or at least their late 20s. What is important is that this participation takes place under the rubric of youth. In my analysis of youth participation, I will be referring to cases that involve people up to their mid-30s in age.

Liberalism

It is worth briefly explaining what liberalism connotes in this paper, as it is usually the first thing people react to when they hear the topic. Generally, the term *liberalism* bears a genuine ambiguity and imprecision that this paper is not intended to resolve. Its usage here derives from the following excerpts of the widely cited broad definition:

Liberalism ... is ... a doctrine upholding the independence and supreme value of the individual person as a free agent who bears fundamental rights that exist prior to and independently of government... Understanding of liberalism may also extend to encompass a high degree of social tolerance, religious disestablishment, pluralism, individualism, and the like.⁵

Recognition of civil and political liberties and, more generally, the fundamental rights of every individual—or the rejection thereof—is what makes the agenda of those participating in local politics and social affairs liberal or illiberal. In addition, a willingness to tolerate views and attitudes outside of the mainstream as well as the ability to compromise with political opponents denote liberal views.

Civic Education, Civic Engagement, and Participation

Civic education provides the skills and values for participation in a democracy with a corresponding set of institutions, relations, and values. Broadly speaking,

its purpose is to develop the ability of youth to recognize, appreciate, and exercise the main attributes of democracy, such as voting, rule of law, individual rights and freedoms as well as human rights, and so forth—in other words, civic engagement and participation.⁶

In the context of schools, civic education has two elements that are often debated—one dubbed as mainstream, knowledge-based, and the other as progressive, participatory-based. The former focuses on in-class teaching about legal-political democratic structures and processes and citizen's rights and duties. The latter recognizes the value of this knowledge base but insists on its practical application in public life, encouraging a participatory, democratic culture through open discussion, expression of opinions, and participation in school governance as well as community affairs.⁷ Some authors may also loosely term them formal and informal education, respectively.⁸

Different understandings of participation are behind the debate between the two approaches outlined above. One may draw a spectrum delineating types of participation from very liberal, restrained engagement to a highly politically engaged citizenship. On the liberal extreme is the type of active citizenship of an informed observer, who knows how the system functions and whose participation falls within the established institutional and procedural scope of the polity, including voting and paying taxes.

On the opposite extreme is participation that seeks to influence political decisions, for example by engaging in public debates over governance or structural inequities in education, health care, and so forth, by means of media or even public protests. In between we may place citizenship manifesting in charitable actions for the good of the community, such as environmental campaigns, community donations, and so forth.⁹

Linking Youth Participation to Liberal Democracy

The literature establishes that civic education and participation above all help to enhance democracy

4 For instance, see: <http://kg.akipress.org/news:629946>.

5 Wilfred M. McClay, "Liberalism after Liberalism," *First Things* (May 2012): 26.

6 Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 64.

7 Sandi Kawecka Nenga and Jessica K. Taft, eds., *Youth Engagement: The Civic-Political Lives of Children and Youth* (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2013).

8 Murray Print and Henry Milner, eds., *Civic Education and Youth Political Participation* (Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers, 2009).

9 Nenga, and Taft, eds., *Youth Engagement*.

and liberal values. It is worth noting, though, some divergence in construing the outcomes of civic education for established democracies and for those defined as emerging ones. Scholars reporting on civic education in the former suggest that it is not the sole means of achieving greater political socialization and stronger liberal attitudes among youth (“With democracy all around them, students will absorb the necessary knowledge and appropriate views without explicit teaching or discussion”).¹⁰ The main concern in this context is the declining level of youth participation in democratic institutions, electoral processes, and public and media debates on issues of common concern, rather than an imminent risk of authoritarian and particularistic backlash.

In the newer democracies, evaluations of development assistance show that the impact of civic education ranges from better civic competence to appreciation of liberal values and increased participation.¹¹ Civic competence here often stands for political knowledge, civic skills, and perceived ability to have an influence on political outcomes—that is, efficacy. Acquisition of liberal values and ability to participate, which are of greater value in that range, arguably emerge with more frequent exposure to formal civics training coupled with interactive types of dramatization and collective decision-making exercises. The challenge here is that the environment outside of the civics classroom is often not conducive to upholding and promoting these attitudes. There is also little information on the long-term effect of civics training in fledgling democracies.

Applying Civic Engagement and Participation on Kyrgyz Soil

As in many other transitioning countries, teaching liberal democracy with the emphasis on youth has been among the major strategies of the international community’s development assistance in Kyrgyzstan. The main premise was that young people’s political and value orientations are more malleable and open to acquiring liberal views via civic education. It has been presumed that youth are more cognitively and normatively flexible and receptive, and more venturesome and broad-minded than their older compatriots.

There is also a more subtle reason for paying special attention to youth. Kyrgyzstan, as a landlocked, impoverished, and resourceless country, must place its hopes in a youthful population that is well-educated and empowered. As a more proximate reason, youth have drawn attention for reportedly active participation in frequent episodes of political violence, especially as related to the two Kyrgyz revolutions of 2005 and 2010 and a major interethnic conflict in the south of the country in June 2010. Rough estimation of international aid to “youth empowerment” gives an amount of over USD 20 million in the last seven years. The examples of civic education and youth empowerment programs implemented with the support of international development agencies and briefly described below are not an exhaustive list of the whole variety of interventions; yet they give an overview of what has been seen as relevant in the field.

School Civics

A course called “Individual and Society” first appeared in the secondary school curriculum around the time of independence in 1991. Georges Soros’s Open Society Foundation, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) are among the most frequently mentioned organizations to have been active in developing and introducing civic education. They provided textbooks and trained teachers to work with students both in class and in extracurricular settings, dubbed as formal and informal components, respectively. By the early 2000s, almost every school in Kyrgyzstan had been supplied with textbooks and teaching materials; however, not every teacher had been a beneficiary of teacher-training projects.

The repertoire of formal civics classes and informal extracurricular exercises has been rich in terms of both content and delivery instruments. School students were exposed to knowledge and understanding of human rights, law, the legal and institutional foundations of the state, economic rights, parties and elections, media and public opinion. The civics curriculum developers put special emphasis on the values of tolerance and diversity as well as some knowledge of corruption and corruption control, in an attempt to tailor the course to the local context.

10 Roxana Morduchovic et al., “Teaching Political Information and Democratic Values in a New Democracy: An Argentine Experiment,” *Comparative Politics* 28, no 4 (1996): 465.

11 Steven E. Finkel, “Can Democracy Be Taught?,” *Journal of Democracy* 14 (2003): 138-39.

Delivery instruments also varied, from lectures on a single topic to inclusion of such components as debate clubs, school self- and co-governance, and social partnership within the wider community. The programs stressed the teaching of “skills” or ways of acting in and coping with various social settings and conditions, thus being oriented toward practical application rather than theory. The purpose was to encourage students to reflect on and apply the knowledge of civics that they had learned in their classes.

Youth camps, normally operating during longer summer and winter breaks, are another important component of civic education, often considered a follow-up to in-school formal and informal learning. The camp participants are taken from their families and home settings to stay in resorts (usually on the shore of Lake Issyk-Kul) or in Bishkek, the capital city (and only rarely in other big towns). The camp program is designed to provide hands-on knowledge about the legal-institutional aspects of a democratic system, often through master-class talks by experts, politicians, and other opinion leaders.

Young people in the camp program have the opportunity to learn and apply skills through participating in the political processes of mock politics or interactive drama performances that simulate real-life complexities of governance, rule of law, and human rights in liberal democracies. While there is a little doubt about the long-term knowledge, skill, and value benefits of the youth camps, they have been questioned for being a costly, unsustainable, and elitist exercise.

By the second half of the 2000s, most of the international donor support for civics classes in the schools had started to phase out, leaving more responsibility on the local education sector to institutionalize the subject further. Reportedly, by 2005 the supply of teachers’ books and study aids on civics had ended. There is little evidence that local ownership over the civics curriculum had been genuine enough to ensure further sustainability without the support of donors. Most of the school classes on the subject had been delivered in a conservative, one-way, teacher-to-pupil manner, with a lot of rote memorization and little room for interactive and innovative methods that could induce a real demand among students and make the subject attractive.

Civic Education and Empowerment for Peace-Building

The political crises around the violent overthrow of Kurmanbek Bakiyev’s regime in 2010 and the ethnic

conflict that followed shortly thereafter in the south of the country—described as a compound crisis by the UN at the time—gave another impetus to the proponents of civic education in the civil society and the international development agencies. Empowerment of young people to become “agents of peaceful democratic change” was embraced as a remedy for inter-ethnic strife and a way to prevent the country from relapsing into authoritarianism.

This approach is another facet of the “positive youth development” concept, widely popularized since the early 2000s. In a nutshell, it is about viewing young people as assets and a resource who should have a say, particularly on issues that concern them, and whose contribution is essential for the development of their communities. This is opposite to a conservative, pathologizing attitude that treats youth as trouble-makers and as a social group at risk that needs to “be dealt with and managed” through a “keep them busy” strategy.

The International Youth Foundation’s Jasa.kg youth empowerment program, funded by USAID, the “Perspectives for Youth” program of the German Society for International Collaboration, UNICEF’s Youth Centers project, and the UN Development Program’s local youth plans exemplify the types of youth empowerment embraced by a wide variety of international development donors in the years after the 2010 political crisis and ethnic violence. Usually these projects included running young people through the donor’s own training packages, often as a part of school extracurricular learning, that aim to develop soft social skills of communication, critical thinking, collaborative action, conflict prevention, and so forth.

The training curriculum is normally blended with information on human rights, democracy, and diversity values. The project may also provide an opportunity for young people to practice their skills and knowledge through implementation of small community-service initiatives, in a manner that promotes collaboration across ethnic groups and gender equality. While doing so they are encouraged to learn to interact with their diverse communities, the authorities, and media.

This youth-empowerment response to the 2010 compound crisis and its repercussions largely ignored the secondary school, particularly for the civic-education component, albeit with a few exceptions. Those few are patchy initiatives to revitalize school self-governance, civics classes, and in-school exercises aimed at addressing juvenile delinquency

and violence, “piloted” in a statistically insignificant number of communities and schools across the country. Most of the activities were aimed at reaching a larger number of youth to benefit from the empowerment programs, who at best become better informed about democracy, human rights, and diversity values. In a smaller number of cases, the programs reported changes in attitudes and values among youth, as well as an increase in their efficacy and participation in the community. However, there is little evidence that this empowerment has become entrenched into the mainstream services provided by the state both locally and nationally.

In fact, civic education is a good example of a youth-empowerment intervention based on the presumption of liberal democratic values that is fully donor-driven, with little detectable incentive to take it over locally. There is no widely recognized and formally endorsed concept of civic education that can provide ideological direction and methodological guidance. Nor was there a strong effort to bring the variety of approaches to civics under a uniform standard and produce universally accepted learning materials. Civic training and retraining for teachers has not been fully institutionalized through, for example, higher pedagogical education or national and local retraining institutions. As one of the evaluation reports laments, under “civics,” teachers are actually teaching history, geography, and even physical training.¹²

Donors’ enthusiasm for school-based civics decreased as they saw their limited effect on long-term learning outcomes, especially in terms of changing attitudes and values.¹³ More of a “piloting” approach has been taken, to support civics in a limited number of schools and communities. This is not to suggest that civic education has ended altogether; it has continued in one form or another in many schools thanks to inertia, enthusiasm, and some sporadic support from international development donors.

Data Discussion and Analysis

Comparing with Other Transitions

As the section above exemplifies, international organizations’ contribution to youth empowerment

was tremendous and in fact largely substituted for state functions focusing on civics and rights education. Piles of donor reports on youth empowerment convincingly demonstrate the intended change in knowledge that was expected to contribute to the emergence of a new generation of citizens capable of building a democratic society. And yet, after 25 years of independence, the most widespread youth activism noticeable in Kyrgyzstan is developing under ethno-nationalist or Islamist slogans.

Kyrgyzstan has not been unique in its troubled experience of youth empowerment focused on teaching democratic and liberal citizenship. Political scientists have been concerned about the outcomes of democracy instruction across the so-called transitioning countries, especially those falling into the orbit of the “third wave of democratization.” What follows below is a condensed outline of the findings of academic impact evaluations conducted through the 1990s-2000s in Poland, the Dominican Republic, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, and South Africa. The researchers sought to gauge civic-education outcomes such as an ability to embrace democratic values, awareness, and willingness to engage effectively in politics.

All of these countries have had decades of experience under one-party or personal rule, often with a long history of political and social violence. All have gone through drastic societal transitions as a result of the disintegration of those old, unfree regimes. Socio-economic hardships and in many cases political instability associated with these transitions have profoundly affected people’s attitudes—from ambivalent to openly hostile—toward democracy and the values and norms it entails. The outcomes of political transitions in these countries have varied from a fragile or outright oppressive environment, at times even worse than it used to be, to a relatively consolidated democracy.

As in Kyrgyzstan, development and political assistance presumed a decisive role for civic education and empowerment of youth in building a pro-democratic political culture. It has been a common view that young people’s political orientations are more malleable, as they had not experienced the old regime to the same extent as their older fellow coun-

¹² See “Civic Education in the Kyrgyz Republic: Achievements, Problems and Prospects for Development,” Agha-Khan Development Network’s final report, 2007, 26, <http://archnet.org/collections/371/publications/8973>.

¹³ No formal assessment or evaluation has been conducted to measure attitudinal or value change as a result of civic education. However, the interview respondents from the donor organizations and the Ministry of Education and Science suggest that civics mainly yields a better awareness of the legal and institutional aspects of democracy.

trymen. Similarly, however, youth are influenced by their families, peers, religious institutions, and the mass media—the “other agents” of political socialization—whose attitudes toward democracy have also been affected, not to say shaped, often adversely, by radical societal transition. Young people have been learning about liberal democracy and human rights under the circumstances of that radical change.

The outcomes of the evaluation studies for civics training were rather typical across the countries for which Steven E. Finkel provides an excellent summary: “civic education has meaningful and relatively long-lasting effects in terms of increasing political information, feelings of empowerment, and political engagement and participation, but [such programs] are much less likely to affect more ‘deep-seated’ democratic values such as political tolerance, support and trust.”¹⁴ Poland, however, provides an example of a slightly detectable change in values such that those with extreme pro-democratic or anti-democratic views shifted toward more moderate attitudes after attending civics programs.¹⁵

Literature on advanced experimental or quasi-experimental research gauging the outcomes of civics and empowerment programs in Kyrgyzstan is not available, but introducing a comparative perspective from multiple countries that have a lot in common in terms of the mode and context of political transition can be helpful, especially for extrapolating some important findings to Kyrgyzstan. Based on the personal experiences and professional knowledge of the context, as well as from interviews with development practitioners, I observe that Kyrgyzstan’s civic outcomes are not far different from those described above. The programs have generated a meaningful public awareness and appreciation of the political institutions and processes associated with democracy, and boosted political engagement and participation.

Institutionalized Illiberalism

The increase in political awareness and participation has been characterized by a high level of young people’s attention to politics through mushrooming voluntary organizations¹⁶ and quasi-political groups and

individuals. Youth-run political activism increased in connection with the two upheavals that resulted in regime change in 2005 and 2010. The government resorted to the creation of a ministry specifically dedicated to youth at the national level as well as various quasi-representative bodies often called youth councils and committees on the local level. The purpose of these institutions was to capture and harness the energy of politically socializing young people.

International organizations and NGOs enthusiastically lent support to the establishment and capacity building of these bodies, training staff and helping to develop strategies and laws with the expectation that they would play an important role in promoting the well-being of youth and their active citizenship. Initial, modest concerns about the risk of investing into youth institutions with vague terms of reference and poor capacity gradually shifted into overt disappointment. The disappointment was not so much about the ministry’s initiatives to organize mass weddings and mixed martial arts tournaments that had nothing to do with building systems for youth well-being; rather, it was about the controversial conservative, traditionalist, and at times illiberal agenda that the ministry was pursuing.

Kyrgyzstan’s Ministry of Youth in its early days provides a vivid example of an institutionalized far-right populism blended with Islamism. It does so by advocating for young people sharing the values of religiousness/spirituality, ethnocentric patriotism, masculinity, and anti-elitism, while antagonizing those upholding liberal modernity and the values of diversity and rights. The ministry, for instance, has consistently pushed for keeping the Kyrgyz ethnicity as the backbone of the nation and the one responsible for other ethnic groups inhabiting the country, a dubious proposition that is supposed to be at the core of national youth policies. It has also obstinately kept sexual and reproductive health and a rights agenda away from formal and informal education, on the grounds that these contradict what they call the “traditional values” of the Kyrgyz nation. Sexuality and reproduction, they hold, need to be dealt with through religious and traditional norms, whatever that might mean.

14 Steven E. Finkel, “The Impact of Adult Civic Education Programmes in Developing Democracies,” *Public Administration and Development* 34 (2014): 177.

15 M. Kazimierz Slomczynski and Goldie Shabad, “Can Support for Democracy and the Market Be Learned in School? A Natural Experiment in Post-Communist Poland,” *Political Psychology* 4 (1998): 772.

16 Using the term “civil” for youth institutions that advocate against liberal democracy creates both semantic and philosophical difficulties that this paper cannot resolve, so for the purpose of simplicity I will here use the term “voluntary.”

Illiberal Youth, "Civil Society"

A voluntary grouping called "Kyrgyz-Choroloru," frequently dubbed as "Kyrk-Choroloru" (the Forty Knights), exemplifies well the non-state dimension of youth participation occurring under conservative traditionalist and anti-liberal slogans. "Kyrk-Choro" is the local historical vernacular that refers to the Epic of Manas, a major identity-shaping cultural legacy of the Kyrgyz people that is said to date back to a millennium ago. The "Forty Knights" were Manas's companions in his deeds.

Today's "Knights" have been noisy and provocative, at times acting outside the bounds of the criminal code with violent raids against foreign businesses, sex-workers, and the LGBT community. The first political move that brought the "Knights" into the public space was their demand to vacate the shops of Uyghurs in the local Madina market so they could be taken over by ethnic Kyrgyz.¹⁷ They also claimed a watchdog role over what they consider illegal migration of Chinese citizens. They reproduce widely stereotyped fears about creeping Chinese economic influence that will gradually transform into cultural and political capture as they penetrate the social fabric and political elites.¹⁸

The "Knights" have gained notoriety among civil society organizations and the community of human rights defenders with their raids against sex workers, or those they consider as such. They burst into gathering places associated with foreigners to search for women allegedly involved in commercial sex. The "Knights" intrude into large crowds where they push and jostle women while lining them up and filming them, and then they post the images online in order to ignite public condemnation. They vilify and harangue the women for "committing indecency and perverting Kyrgyz values."¹⁹

The LGBT community has also increasingly become a target for rampant attacks by the "Knights" and their like-minded allies. Their homophobic stance has emerged very loudly ever since they violently disrupted the LGBT community's attempt to privately celebrate the Day Against

Homophobia and Transphobia on May 17, 2015, in Bishkek. Any attempt to bring up LGBT rights in a media domain or any other public platform is met with very aggressive resistance from these groups. The backlash is usually accompanied with blunt intimidation of LGBTs and calls to take violent actions against them and the activists advocating for their rights.²⁰

There is a little credible information as to the specific political allegiances and loyalties of the "Knights" and similar groups. Of course, one cannot expect that they would disclose the source of funding for their campaigns. Nor is there much information about the sociological composition of these groups. The "Knights" and their ilk can be considered ethno-nationalists by their actions and by the messages and symbols that accompany their acts. They grotesquely accompany their campaigns with emblems of Kyrgyz culture such as the felt *kalpak* (the traditional Kyrgyz hat) and they appeal to Kyrgyz history, values, and "mentality" in their external communication and messaging.

In connection with the "Knights" it is worth mentioning a group of young people self-proclaimed on the Internet as "Patriots" (they paradoxically use the Russian or Western term *patriot*, not its Kyrgyz equivalent, *Mekenchil*). They have been making headlines in the country and beyond by putting online footage of their savage assaults against young women of Kyrgyz ethnicity. The violence has usually taken place abroad, mainly in Russia, against female labor migrants accused of dating men of the "wrong" ethnicity—that is, non-Kyrgyz.²¹

Some of these "patriotic" assaults are also reported to have taken place in Kyrgyzstan. They apparently were inspired by the Kyrgyz migrant "Patriots" in Russia and the general discourse about "true Kyrgyz values" holding women as lacking rights and as the man's submissive property. This discourse is the primary connection between the "Knights" and the "Patriots," as both publicly condone violence against women who dare to interact with men of different ethnicity.

17 Anna Leilik, "Kyrgyzstan: Nationalist Vice Squad Stirs Controversy," *Eurasianet.org*, February 10, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/71996>.

18 See, among many others, "Pretsedent: Vo chto mozhet pererasti Kyirk Choro," *Knews.kg*, February 3, 2015, <http://knews.kg/2015/02/03/pretsedent-vo-chto-mojet-pererasti-kyirk-choro/>.

19 Leilik, "Kyrgyzstan: Nationalist Vice Squad Stirs Controversy."

20 Andrew North, "Kyrgyzstan's Beacon of Tolerance under Threat from Manufactured Kremlin Homophobia," *Eurasianet.org*, May 4, 2016, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/78631>.

21 "Kyrgyzskie "patrioty" zastavlyayut zhenshchin lyubit' "svoikh" ugrozami i poboyami," *Azattyk*, February 16, 2016, <http://rus.azattyk.org/media/video/27556905.html>.

Some Tentative Conclusions

These illiberal strains of youth participation and activism in Kyrgyzstan have been largely of an indignant nature. Experience and available data suggest that the international backlash against liberal democracy has not had a decisive effect. What Alexander Cooley calls authoritarian counter-norms and counter-practices²² have not determinatively shaped young people's values and attitudes, nor have they motivated young people's actions to counter liberalism. One caveat, though, is that the external factor may have helped to put this illiberal pushback into particular semantic frames, bringing the categories of "traditional values" or "national sovereignty" saliently into the rhetoric.

The illiberal sentiments of young people are closely linked to the rise of supposedly primordial traditional identities in conjunction with religious conservatism. In some recent surveys (one funded by USAID, another by Safer World), when asked about their values, young people most often mention Islam, family, health, and patriotism. What is worrying are how these values are operationalized by young people—that is, by violating the rights of women and other vulnerable social categories. Bride-kidnapping is still celebrated by some as a "beautiful old Kyrgyz tradition."²³ It has also come to be considered decent for a Kyrgyz male who is supposedly a good Muslim to keep his wife or bride in submission and domestic service to his extended family, especially the elders. The level of tolerance among women for husbands' hitting or beating their wives for not complying with certain gender norms reaches almost 33 percent.²⁴ Some young activists build their political agenda around denying sex education for adolescents, especially girls, on the grounds of its alleged incompatibility with traditional values and religious norms.

Surveys also show that young people's attitudes toward those with different communal identities are

negative.²⁵ The notion of the Kyrgyz as the country's titular nation has gained greater weight as opposed to the one framed as "Kyrgyzstan is our common home," a concept popularized in the 1990s by Askar Akayev's regime. Local languages other than Kyrgyz are less and less tolerated in the public space. These trends have inevitably depreciated the liberal ideas of granting equal rights to each and every individual irrespective of his or her ethnic or religious background.

Illiberalism justified by traditional values and religious norms is often based on rational calculations and considerations. Young people, especially young males of the titular ethnicity, see that advancing a women's or minority rights agenda in the context of liberal democracy would undermine their perceived power base. They navigate accordingly within the traditionalist mindset, deliberately constructing a conceptual framework and blending it with religious messages that sanctify the power of majorities and vilify liberal values as being alien and hostile, meant to subvert the very existence of the nation.

On the other hand, in their quest for meaningful participation and access to resources, young people emulate the patterns of their adult counterparts in politics. Young people are well aware that their constituency is most receptive to traditionalist messages, as they are inherently more appealing and culturally autochthonous than liberal values of human rights and diversity. Liberalism has been discredited in practice, being associated with rampant poverty, pervasive corruption, and all sorts of violent injustices. Liberalism is also blamed for "moral decay and degeneration" in the society. An even more profound yet subtle challenge to liberalism is the insincerity of those who deliver and receive liberal messages. Liberal empowerment has been elite-focused and incentive-driven. Strong, genuine political platforms of an indigenous nature that would entail commitments to individual rights and liberties on the part of actual decision-makers are limited.²⁶ Thus, to quote

22 Alexander Cooley, "Authoritarianism Goes Global: Countering Democratic Norms," *Journal of Democracy* 26 (2015): 49.

23 According to frequently cited accounts of human rights activists, around 12,000 young girls annually are kidnapped for forced marriage. See <http://www.rferl.org/content/bride-kidnapping-in-kyrgyzstan/25403604.html>.

24 "United Nations Children's Funds and United Nations Population Fund's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey," United Nations, 2014, 177.

25 See "Nobody has ever asked about young people's opinions," Safer World, 2012, 4, 12, <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/640-nobody-hasaever-asked-about-young-peoples-opinions/>; "Youth of the Kyrgyz Republic: Values, Social Mood and Conflict Behavior," USAID, 2014, 17, <https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1861/youth-kyrgyz-republic-values-social-moods-and-conflict-behavior-report-research/>; "Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth—Successful Country," UNDP National Human Development Report, 2009, 2, <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/kyrgyzstan-nhdr-2010-en.pdf>; "Youth Kyrgyzstan: Bridging Tradition and Modernity," Sinus Institute, 2015, 17-18, <http://www.sinus-institut.de/en/publications/whats-new/detail-en/news/youth-in-kyrgyzstan-bridging-tradition-and-modernity-2015/news-a/show/news-c/NewsItem/news-from/13/>.

26 James Dawson and Sean Hanley, "What's Wrong with East-Central Europe? The Fading Mirage of the 'Liberal Consensus,'" *Journal of Democracy* 27 (2016): 21.

Dowson and Hanley, “citizens are left unexposed to the philosophical rationale for liberal-democratic institutions.”²⁷

Liberalism has been gospel mainly within an isolated upper-class social category often referred to as the *intelligentsia*, whose main characteristics are to be urban and Russian-speaking, with a legacy of connections to the Communist *nomenklatura* and its welfare benefits. This group has rarely been strongly tied to the countryside, which makes up around three-quarters of the country’s population. Liberalism has thus actually deepened the fracture between the shrinking Soviet *intelligentsia* elites and the post-Soviet, often profoundly traditionalist, rural communities.

Recommendations

Those involved in youth development activities should not expect that empowerment, especially through so-called civic participation, will make youth receptive to liberal democracy. There has not been any strong indication or evidence that connecting youth to knowledge and practices of liberal democracy will turn them into proponents of those values in the longer term. Those “empowered” by the development and human rights community may have little reason not to go against the value-sets that their principals tried to indoctrinate them in, if incentives to do so persist in the society at the structural level.

Civil society and the development community should thus take a more careful stance in promoting “institutionalized participation and empowerment,” that is, in supporting national bodies dedicated specifically to youth, as complaints about their poor capacity and their propensity to promote privileged groups has been well evidenced. The same is true for “youth governance” bodies at the lower levels of local governments and public service bodies that are often

not devoid of a strongly manipulative and cooptive effort by elites to capture the energy of youth for their own goals, often having nothing in common with liberal values.

Both civil society and the development community should be ready to engage in a frank and at times blunt debate with the key “spoilers,” those outspoken and influential opinion leaders and decision makers of the young generation who represent the illiberal camp. The current strategy of shying away from confrontation is not conducive in the long term. The primary content and the purpose of such debates would be to address and deconstruct attitudes based on conspiracy theories, accusations of double standards, fear of a fifth column, and so forth.

Liberal messaging also needs to be adapted to local languages and cultural values as well as to historical legacies—real or constructed. That will help establish a “buy-in” and feeling of ownership that could, in the medium term, hinder attempts to marginalize liberal values. Messaging strategies should also be contextualized by embedding them in traditional media and information dissemination channels to ensure better outreach. Those promoting liberalism and any other humanitarian and development ends need to be less obsessed with visibility and more concerned about knowledge- and value-related outcomes.

It is also important to address the structural causes of this growing youth illiberalism. Detecting a few strategic bottlenecks as entry points is the way to go. The education sector has been the catch-all field that will require assertiveness and patience to reform. More investment is needed to entrench training in soft and life skills such as critical thinking, communication, leadership, collaborative action, and so forth, with the purpose of developing the ability to make independent, informed, and responsible decisions about participation, even if this may not necessarily produce immediate liberal outcomes.

27 Ibid.

Part II. THE KYRGYZ ECONOMY: RESOURCES, MIGRATIONS, AND AGRICULTURE

The Kumtor Gold Mine and the Rise of Resource Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan

Matteo Fumagalli¹ (2015)

Kyrgyzstan's mining sector has become the battleground on which a number of players, namely the government, the opposition, local communities, and transnational corporations, defend their interests. No other site illustrates this point more than the country's most prized asset, namely the gold mine at Kumtor, located some 350 kilometers south-east of the capital city of Bishkek. Kumtor is the country's main source of hard currency, a vital contributor to the country's GDP, and the single largest private employer. Since 1997, when production started, Kumtor has emerged as one of the most contentious issues in the small Central Asian republic's socio-economic and political life.²

After several years of wrangling, protests, and calls for nationalization, the government and Centerra Gold (the company that owns the mine) earlier in 2015 looked set for the signing of yet another agreement regulating the ownership structure and the sharing of responsibilities and profits.³ Instead, in a surprising twist of events, (now former) Prime Minister Joomart Otorbayev's government withdrew from the negotiations with Centerra just before a new deal could be finalized on the grounds that the new deal would "no longer [be] in the country's best in-

terests."⁴ This occurred a few days after the Jogorku Kenesh (the Parliament) had issued a negative assessment of the government's handling of the matter (signing a new deal, that is). On April 23, the PM resigned. Since the opposition has held every single government hostage since 2010 over the Kumtor dispute, this could be construed as an outright victory of those outside (and even within) the ruling coalition advocating resource nationalism. And yet, the new government, led by Temir Sariyev, promptly confirmed that neither nationalization nor the renegotiation of the deal were on the agenda. "Nationalization will only create certain risks and threats for us. We must seek other ways," Sariyev stated in April,⁵ perhaps suggesting that the authorities' awareness of the need for a compromise might actually trump calls for nationalization. Is the turf war over?

Simply put, the controversy revolves primarily, albeit not exclusively, around the ownership of the mine and the profits that derive from the sale of gold. At the same time the dispute is not *just* about economics but also about the symbolic value of the country's natural resources at a time of imperiled sovereignty. At heart, Kumtor illustrates the dilemmas of small countries with weak economies, rich in natural resources, but in need of capital and technology, that seek to promote foreign investment while at the same time striving to protect their strategic assets.

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2 "Faktory negativnogo otnosheniya mestnogo naseleniya k investoram, razrabotchikam mestorozhdeniy poleznykh iskopaemykh, vzaimootnosheniya nedropol'zovateley i mestnykh obshchestv," Natsional'nyy Institut strategicheskikh issledovaniy Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki, Bishkek, July 2013.

3 Tatyana Kudryavtseva, "Valeri Dil: Negotiations on a joint venture for development of Kumtor mine are almost completed," *24.kg*, February 24, 2015; Darya Podolskaya, "Draft agreement on Kumtor to be ready by March 31," *24.kg*, February 26, 2015.

4 Paul Trilling, "Kyrgyzstan's Premier Says No Gold Deal as Mining Industry Fizzles," *Eurasianet*, April 13, 2015.

5 Cecilia Jamasmie, "Kyrgyzstan names new PM to settle issue with Centerra over Kumtor mine," *Mining.com*, April 30, 2015.

Resource Nationalism

Resource nationalism remains a much-debated, yet poorly understood and considerably under-theorized phenomenon. The context for its more recent upsurge and manifestations is evident. As Humphreys notes, this is “closely related to the commodities boom of the 2000s and the growing sense amongst the citizens of mineral-rich countries that they have not received an appropriate share of the benefits of higher prices and that they have insufficient control over the decisions shaping mining investment.”⁶ A more analytical approach to the phenomenon, or trend, has remained much more elusive. While some have paid greater attention to the institutional configurations constraining the environment in which foreign companies operate,⁷ others have privileged more expansive definitions. Bremmer and Johnston refer to the phenomenon in terms of “efforts by resource-rich nations to shift political and economic control of energy and mineral sectors from private and foreign investors to domestic and state-owned ones.”⁸

While the easiest way to define the phenomenon operationally would be to limit oneself to actual policies and policy changes, the risk here would be that such a restrictive approach might be applicable to too few cases. Moreover, perceptions of instability, a country’s inability to respect the sanctity of contracts, and lack of protection for foreign investors have clear negative externalities, such as their impact on investors’ confidence, thereby affecting the country’s appeal as a business destination. By contrast, a loose understanding of ‘effort’ might stretch the concept so thin to question its heuristic purpose, one of the classical problems of conceptual travel and over-stretched in the social sciences.

Thus, for the purpose of this paper, the presence or absence of legislative initiatives to redesign the ownership structure of a company or a sector shall be understood as the discriminating factor between situations which in turn might be understood as illustrative of resource nationalism. As such, Ward’s definition of resource nationalism as referring to “government efforts to maximize revenues from and exercise control over the exploitation of natural re-

sources” seems quite fitting to capture the issues at stake and the accompanying dynamics.⁹ Kyrgyzstan’s mining sector, and specifically the case of the Kumtor gold mine, thus serves as a fitting vantage point to explore the rise of this phenomenon, the motives driving it, the timing, and its impact.

Kumtor’s Centrality to the Kyrgyz Economy

Less endowed with natural resources (especially hydrocarbons) than its neighbors and with the hydro-electric sector awaiting investment to deliver on its much-heralded potential, the mining sector’s contribution to Kyrgyzstan’s economy is far from negligible. In 2014 it accounted for 15% of the budget revenues, 15% of the country’s GDP and over half of its industrial output and export revenues, constituting Kyrgyzstan’s main source of wealth (see table 1). The country’s mining industry consists of three important sectors, namely gold, extractive minerals, and ores;¹⁰ of these gold makes the most significant contribution in economic terms.

Kumtor (Map 1) is the largest gold mine in Central Asia operated by a Western company. The gold deposit was discovered in 1978, but due to the difficult environmental conditions and the costs associated with developing the mine the project was suspended. Development started again in 1992 and in 1997 the mine became operational. Production is expected to last until 2026, when most of the reserves are expected to be exhausted.

While not overtly complicated, the ownership and operating structure of the mine requires a quick summary since this is the issue around which the controversy between the authorities and the company revolve:

- The Canadian company Centerra Gold Inc. is the owner of the mine;
- Kumtor Gold Company, fully owned by Centerra, operates the mine;
- The Kyrgyzstani government owns 33% of the shares in Centerra (not Kumtor) via the state-owned mining company Kyrgyzaltyn JSC;

6 David Humphreys, *Transatlantic Mining Corporations in the Age of Resource Nationalism* (Washington DC: Transatlantic Academy, 2012), 10.

7 Ibid.

8 Ian Bremmer and Robert Johnston, “The Rise and Fall of Resource Nationalism,” *Survival* 51, no. 2 (2009): 149.

9 Halina Ward, “Resource Nationalism and Sustainable Development: A Primer and Key Issues,” *IIED Discussion Paper*, 2009, 14.

10 National Council for Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic (2013), *National Sustainable Development Strategy for the Kyrgyz Republic*.

Map 1. Kumtor



Factsheet 1: The Kumtor Gold Mine

<p>Mine discovered in 1978; Exploration started in 1992, operational since 1997.</p> <p>Life of mine: 2026.</p> <p>Between May 1997 and until 31 March 2015 the mine has produced ca. 10.3m ounces of gold (311 tons).</p> <p>Kumtor accounted for 7.4% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP and 23.1% of its industrial output in 2014</p> <p>Expected production in 2015: 470,000-520,000 ounces.</p>
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Source: www.kumtor.kg/en/deposit/production-basic-data

- Centerra also owns other mining sites in Mongolia, Russia, Turkey, and China;
- The Kyrgyz government receives dividends from Centerra's profits.

To complicate matters, the key players involved in the 'Kumtor saga' are not restricted to government and the company itself, but include the mine's employees (currently just over 3,000, 95% locals¹¹), the local communities in the Issyk-Kul Region whose livelihood are affected by the economic activities of the mine and the environmental fallout, and, perhaps most problematically, all those political actors within the government (such as in the Ata Meken and Ar-Namys parties) and outside it (especially the Ata-Jurt opposition party) who have campaigned for either a renegotiation of the deal on more favorable terms (for the state) or outright nationalization.

Contribution to the Local Economy

It is difficult to downplay Kumtor's significance to the country's economy (see factsheet 1). Between May 1997 and until March 31, 2015, the mine has produced ca. 10.3m ounces of gold (311 tons). After a very negative year in 2012, output returned to acceptable levels in 2013 and 2014 (Table 1). Kumtor accounted for 7.4% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP (Chart 1), 15.5% of industrial output in 2014 (Chart 2), and 36.5% of its hard-currency revenues in 2013 (Chart 3). In 2014 its contributions to the national budget were in excess of \$120m and in the period from 1994-

2014 its contributions within the country exceeded \$2.7bn.¹² In 2015 the mine is expected to produce between 470,000 and 520,000 ounces of gold which represents a slight decline in production compared to 2014 (production in the 1st quarter of 2015 was 164,272 ounces).¹³

Evolving Ownership Structure

The agreement regulating the ownership and operation of the mine has changed several times over the years. Kumtor Gold is currently owned by the Canadian firm Centerra Gold, which owns both the mine and output. According to the original agreement, signed in 1992 (see table 2), the Kyrgyzstani government had a 67% interest via Kyrgyzaltyn JSC, whereas a Canadian company called Cameco Corporation held 33%. The agreement was first amended in 2004, whereby Cameco sold some of its gold shares to a new (Canadian) company called Centerra (which obtained 66% of the shares) while retaining some shares in Kumtor, whereas the government's decreased to 16%. A new deal was renegotiated under the Bakiev administration in 2009 ('the New Agreement'). As a result of this, Cameco sold all of its remaining interests to the government (again, via Kyrgyzaltyn JSC).

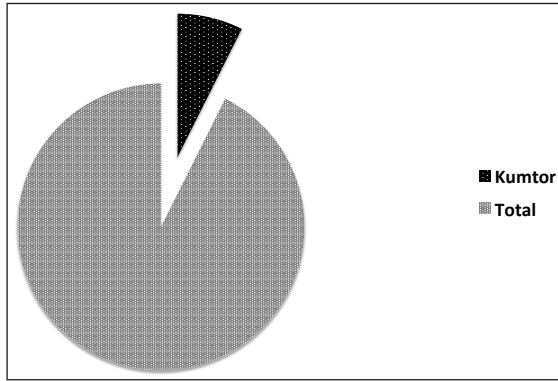
The exact terms of a new deal, replacing the 2009 New Terms Agreement, have been at the epicenter of the dispute opposing the government, parliament, and the company over the past few years. The details of this (failed) deal are outlined below. Before doing so however, it is helpful to recall the historical context

¹¹ See <http://www.kumtor.kg/en/>.

¹² "Kumtor Basic Operating Results 2014," 1.

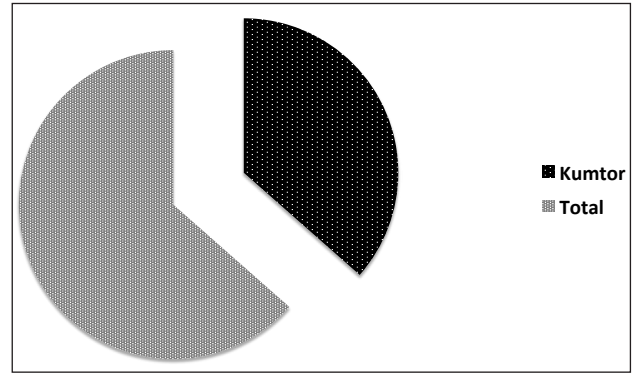
¹³ "Kumtor operating results of the 1st quarter of 2015," 24.kg, May 19, 2015.

Chart 1. Kumtor's Share of the KG GDP (2014)



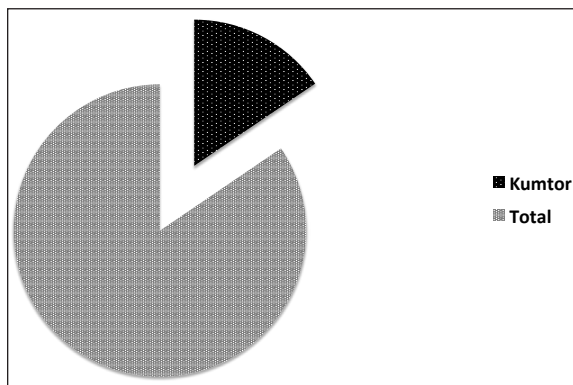
Source: Kumtor Basic Operating Results 2014, p. 1

Chart 3. Kumtor's Share in Exports (2013)



Source: Kumtor Basic Operating Results 2014, p. 1

Chart 2. Kumtor's Share of the Country's Industrial Output (2014)



Source: Kumtor Basic Operating Results 2014, p. 1

Table 1. Production at Kumtor

	Production (ounces)	Increase year-on-year
2015 (1 st quarter)	164,272	Est. 470,000-520,000
2014	567,693	-5%
2013	600,402	+90%
2012	315,238	-46%

Sources: Kumtor Operating Results, 1st Quarter 2015; 2014; 2013; 2012

Table 2: The Kumtor Deals and the Changing Ownership Structure

Partner	1992 (General Agreement)	2004	2009 New Terms Agreement	2013-2014 Aborted Deal
Centerra Gold Inc.	—	66% of shares	66%	50%
Kyrgyzstan Government (via Kyrgyzaltyn JSC)	67%	16% of shares	33% of shares in the operation of Kumtor	50% Kyrgyz gov't to sell its shares in Centerra; swaps shares for a joint venture in Kumtor
Cameco Corporation	33% of interests	Sells most of gold-related shares to Centerra. Retains some shares		

behind the recent (post-2010) surge in resource nationalism. This will serve the purpose of understanding why negotiations have been so protracted and a settlement as procrastinated as it is. This backdrop encompasses real and legitimate social grievances at the local community level, the series of incidents and scandals that have marred the life of the mine, and

the deep political instability which hinders both political and economic development.

A Troubled History: Grievances, Scandals, and Unrest

Although the core of the dispute revolves around the ownership, structure, and the distribution of

profits, social grievances, environmental hazards, and weak governance have to be taken into account as well. Local communities show increasing hostility towards the mining sector and do not hesitate to resort to violence to disrupt its operations. Just to give a sense of the trends, miners went on strike in October 2010 demanding a 100% pay raise; a renewed ten-day strike took place in February 2012, where miners demanded that Centerra pay part of their social security contributions; more recently, on May 28-31, 2013, clashes broke out again. Protesters seized control of an electricity sub-station and cut off the power supply to the mine. Environmental risks include pollution of soil, water, and air, as well as the presence of hazardous chemicals and waste, and the increased risk of landslides, mudflows, and slope erosion. Concerns over the area's exploitation and environmental damage led to new protests in late 2011, which blocked mine-bound supplies. Difficult weather conditions in the winter of 2011-2012 led to heavy ice flows and waste build-up, slowing production.

Last, but definitely not least, is the issue of governance and political instability. Corruption is endemic.¹⁴ Authoritarian governments have alternated with brief moments of pluralism and competitive politics, but time and again the country has been plunged into regime overthrows, such as in 2005 and 2010, giving rise to prolonged phases of instability. Protests and calls for nationalization, combined with calls for resource sovereignty, have resurfaced, and in fact intensified, in the wake of the 2010 events in Osh, the main city in the country's south, where clashes between groups of ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks left several hundreds dead and hundreds of thousands displaced. The Osh events, and the power vacuum which both preceded and followed them, also served as the window of opportunity for the violence, rendered the perceptions of fragility of the state (and of national identity too) which have marked Kyrgyzstan's post-independence life even more acute.¹⁵ It is against this background that the rising calls for the defense of natural resources, and 'Kyrgyz land' should be located.

The Rise of Resource Nationalism

Simply put, the controversy revolves primarily around the ownership of the mine and the profits that derive from it. Specifically the contentious issues range from the identity of the company that owns the mine, the split of the shares between the foreign mining company and the state-owned Kyrgyz one, the profits (whether they are from Kumtor 'only' or from all of the mine's owner's revenues), as well as the various taxes and social contributions that the company that owns the mine has to pay to the regional development fund, and the taxes that are contributed to the state's coffers.

The main stakeholders seem to hold interests that are not always reconcilable: the local communities demand more tangible benefits, such as schools and hospitals, and want more done to prevent environmental damage. National authorities have to protect national interests while attracting foreign investment. Mining companies are subjected to a fluid and cumbersome regulatory regime, various types of taxations, and penalties. There is an evident economic component to the dispute as the terms of the various agreements outlined in table 1 clearly show. At the same time Kumtor speaks to a more symbolic dimension of Kyrgyz(stani) politics, as the controversy raises questions of sovereignty over a country's natural resources and the possibility (and fairness) of redressing perceived past wrongs.

While controversies have been part of Kumtor's life, it was only after the collapse of the Bakiev regime in 2010 that Kyrgyzstani policy-makers became more vocal and began calling for yet a new agreement on better terms for the state or the outright nationalization of the mine. In June 2012 Kyrgyzstan's parliament narrowly voted against the nationalization of the mine. When former Prime Minister Joldoro Satybaldiev expressed his opposition to the nationalization of the mine in early October of that year, some 1,000 protesters joined a rally organized by the fiercely nationalist party Ata-Jurt in the capital city of Bishkek. Kamchybek Tashiev and two fellow Ata-Jurt members, Sadyr Japarov, and Talant Mamytov,

¹⁴ Kyrgyzstan is ranked 136th out of 175 countries in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perception Index. Bishkek also ranks poorly in the fragile states index (62th on 178 in 2015, which places it in the very high warning category).

¹⁵ Nick Megoran, "Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan: Understanding and Responding to Nationalism," *Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper* 2012/03. London: Chatham House, 2012.

were arrested and charged with seeking to forcefully overthrow the government. The controversy over the ownership and the future of Kumtor was re-ignited by the parliament's decision in February 2013 to renegotiate the terms of the 2009 agreement. This involved the parliament instructing the government to invalidate the 2009 Kumtor Project Agreement and the 2009 legislation amending the country's tax code, which gave a more favorable deal to Centerra Gold.

In September 2013, the government and Centerra agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) according to which the parties would have swapped the government's shares in Centerra for a joint venture in Kumtor. The MoU was initially rejected by the Jogorku Kenesh over the clause that would have allowed the distribution of payments due to Kyrgyzstan, to Centerra. In December of that year, a version of the MoU without such a clause was approved. Rather than bringing negotiations to a close this was merely the beginning of two long years of dragging negotiations. In that period what was being negotiated were the exact terms of the aforementioned joint venture, whilst politicians from all sides kept invoking the idea of nationalization of the mine. Especially vocal were the party Ata-Meken, most notably its leader Omurbek Tekebayev, Ar-Namys's Feliks Kulov, Respublika, and Ata-Jurt (now divided in a various splinter groups).¹⁶

The Deal That Never Was: The Failed Negotiations (2014-2015)

In February 2014, after months of protests, rallies, and violence, the parliament voted in favor of a new agreement framework. It seemed that the parties were finalizing the terms of a new agreement whose signature was expected first in late 2014 and then any time in the first half of 2015. The terms of the agreement would have been the following:

- The government would have released its shares in Centerra;
- In turns, Kumtor would have been co-owned as a joint venture (50-50) by Centerra and the Kyrgyzstani government, via Kyrgyzaltyn.

Changes would have been momentous. To start, Kyrgyzstan currently benefits from Centerra's profits in its other mines elsewhere. The new agreement would have led to Bishkek single-handedly giving up those revenues. In turn, it would have taken on greater responsibilities (the joint venture) and risks exclusively in Kumtor. This would have tied the performance of the Kyrgyzstani economy to the volatility of gold prices, made the local economy even more dependent on one single sector (gold) at the expense of other (non-gold) sectors, and also raised key questions about the long term development of the country. It is worth remembering that production is expected to end in 2026 (after which the agreement would have allowed the government to increase its shares up to 67%). In that form the agreement stopped undoubtedly short of nationalization. However, as Gullette puts it, it evidently gave up long-term financial development for short-term economic gains,¹⁷ gambling on an uncertain future.

On April 9, 2015, the national parliament adopted a non-binding resolution which called the government's handling of the Kumtor negotiations 'unsatisfactory'.¹⁸ The following day a small rally gathered outside the Jogorku Kenesh, calling for a new agreement, but stopping short of advocating the nationalization of the mine. On April 13, then Prime Minister Otorbayev, in a surprising turn of events, announced that the government would no longer pursue a new agreement as this "was no longer in the interests of the country."¹⁹ Ten days later, he resigned. While the failure to settle the issue with Centerra no doubt lies at the heart of the collapse of the government, victory was short-lived for those advocating nationalization, such as Ata-Meken's Omurbek Tekebayev or Ar-Namys's Feliks Kulov. Within days the parliament had voted in the new coalition government, identical in its composition (so, with Ata-Meken and Ar-Namys as the Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan's junior parties). The new Prime Minister, Temir Sariyev, did not waste time in announcing that "nationalization" carries "risks and threats," and thus "the government should look for other ways." In an even more stunning twist, the prime minister's spokesperson, Bakyt Asanov, noted

16 For a detailed overview of the stance on Kumtor of each political party in the country see Dave Gullette and Asel Kalybekova, "Agreement under Pressure. Gold Mining and Protests in the Kyrgyz Republic," Friedrich Erbert Stiftung, 2014, 7-11.

17 Ibid., 26.

18 Trilling, "Kyrgyzstan's Premier Says No Gold Deal as Mining Industry Fizzles."

19 Cecilia Jamasmie, "Kyrgyzstan aborts plan to grab Centerra's Kumtor mine, but wants more say," *Mining.com*, April 17, 2015; Cecilia Jamasmie, "Kyrgyzstan Gov't told to ensure 'smooth sailing' for Centerra Gold's Kumtor mine," *Mining.com*, July 1, 2015.

that the parliament had agreed to ensure the smooth operations of the mine. Kyrgyzstan's record bodes ill in that regard.

The impression instead is that rather than a breakthrough, the stall in the negotiations might simply be a lull²⁰ as negotiations are expected to resume during the year. Spats between the parties have also resurfaced in late July when the State Agency for Geology and Mineral Resources noted that Centerra's report detailing data on stocks of gold at Kumtor (including the projected lower production in 2015) was overdue.²¹

What caused the government's turnaround? Has resource nationalism won? Was it a turnaround after all? At first glance, the more radical elements inside and outside the parliament have held governments hostages repeatedly. Governments have formed and collapsed over the fate of Kumtor. Otorbayev's resignation seemed to be just the latest score in a long line of political battles. From a different angle, the refusal to sign a short-sighted deal and the fact that the new prime minister excluded (for the time being) the possibility to renew the negotiations, could instead show that the moderation of the ruling Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan and the persona of President Atambayev have prevailed and scope for compromise has finally emerged. Data coming from both inside and outside the country suggest an explanation more in line with the logic of the failed agreement. As of mid-2015 gold prices are low (Chart 4) and Centerra's own data on production at Kumtor also suggest lower-than-expected production targets this year. A status quo, which allows the Kyrgyzstani government to benefit from other Centerra-owned mines, looks, all of a sudden, not to be such a bad deal after all. Short-term economic gains are preserved.

While prevalent assessments of the trends in resource nationalism seem to point to the cyclical nature of the phenomenon (following fluctuations in global commodity prices), the case of Kyrgyzstan calls for additional research into this topic. Regardless of whether the spring 2015 events represent a victory for resource nationalists, a success for the more moderate voices, or just a lull prior to the parliamentary elections, one thing is clear: among the most significant negative externalities of the dragged negotiations are the decline of the investors' confidence in

Chart 4. Rise and Drop in Gold Prices
(\$ per Troy Ounce)



Source: Financial Times (<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/bc715480-31f3-11e5-8873-775ba7c2ea3d.html?siteedition=intl#axzz3h02bs5oX>)

the country's appeal as an investment destination. Stability and the status quo suddenly look preferable, and more lucrative.

Conclusion

The Kumtor gold mine is a prized asset in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The mining sector is central to Kyrgyzstan's economy and its ability to stay afloat, despite its structural vulnerability, its exposure to external shocks, and dependence on the gold sector. The negative externalities of the instability in that sector have impacted on all parties concerned, with no visible benefit for any. Resource nationalism has become a negative-sum game.

This paper has explored the controversies surrounding the Kumtor mine to discuss and shed light on the rise of resource nationalism in the country. Its main contention was three-fold: firstly, the mining sector has become the battleground on which the three main stakeholders, namely the authorities (including government and opposition), the local communities, and the mining companies defend their interests. Secondly, while the specifics of the agreement are of course about economics (with a focus on short-term gains), what makes Kumtor especially controversial is that this is, at its core, about the vision of the state and the role of strategic resources in the present and future of the country. Lastly, as far as Kyrgyzstan's gold sector is concerned, the rise of

20 Trilling, "Kyrgyzstan's Premier Says No Gold Deal as Mining Industry Fizzles."

21 Tatyana Kudryavtseva, "Tsentrerra eshche ne predstavila KR otchet s izmenennymi dannymi o zapasakh zolota na Kumtore," *24.kg*, July 30, 2015, http://24.kg/ekonomika/17035_tsentrerra_esche_ne_predstavila_kr_otchet_s_izmenennymi_dannymi_o_zapasah_zolota_na_kumtore/.

resource nationalism seems *not* to have followed the trends in global commodity prices. Though the phenomenon was intensified at a time of historically high prices for gold (2011-12), calls for outright nationalization, legislative initiatives to that end, and the negotiation of a new deal (however temporarily stalled), have continued even as the gold price plummeted (as of mid-2015), thereby questioning assumptions that

resource nationalism might be a cyclical phenomenon in this respect. It might in fact be that the Kyrgyz authorities' predilection over short-term gains might be behind the current lull in resource nationalist tendencies, as the status quo currently benefits all parties. Bringing the Kumtor saga to an end would allow the authorities to begin paying attention to the country's other equally urgent economic predicaments.

The Art of Survival: Kyrgyz Labor Migration, Human Capital, and Social Networks

Evgeny Vinokurov¹ (2013)

Between 15 to 20% of Kyrgyzstan's total population is currently working abroad. This socioeconomic phenomenon virtually defines the present and the future of the Kyrgyz economy and the country's sociocultural dynamics. Nonetheless, labor migration and its related issues—such as the development of human capital, the brain drain, and the role of diasporas and social networks—remains an extremely under-researched problem.

This paper intends to partially fill this lacuna. It is based on a comprehensive report by the Eurasian Development Bank's (EDB) Center for Integration Studies. The complete version, titled *Impact of Kyrgyzstan's Accession to the Customs Union for the Kyrgyz Labor Market and Human Capital*, which is available in Russian, contains a full description of the research methodology used and the relevant body of literature.² It combines macroeconomic, microeconomic, and sociological (both quantitative and qualitative) approaches to assessing the state of labor migration, its effects on Kyrgyzstan's human capital, and the potential impact of Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Belarus-Kazakhstan-Russia Customs Union (CU) and Single Economic Space (SES) for Kyrgyz labor-resource flows. It also examines money transfers, the labor-market environment, institutions and migratory networks, the education system, and workforce training.

Sociological research was based on quantitative and qualitative opinion polls. The aim was to collect information for studying and identifying the causes

and effects of labor migration from Kyrgyzstan to Russia and Kazakhstan, as well as obtain information on the benefits and costs of migration, the existing barriers to such including any problematic issues, as well as workers' remittances. The geography of quantitative research covered several key regions of Russia (primarily Moscow and the greater Moscow region), Kazakhstan (Almaty), and Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek city, Osh city, Chui, Issyk-Kul', Naryn, Batken, Talas, Jalalabad, and Osh regions). Qualitative research was based on in-depth interviews with migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan (from all the above-mentioned regions) to Russia (Moscow and Yekaterinburg) and Kazakhstan (Almaty), as well as migrants who had returned to Kyrgyzstan.

This paper starts by outlining the characteristics of Kyrgyzstan's migrant population, including their demography, occupations, education levels, income, and the volume of remittances. The analysis then shifts to the importance of established social networks abroad, which have become the true organizing force of labor migration to Russia and Kazakhstan. Finally, the potential consequences of Kyrgyzstan's accession to the CU—and its impact on migration—is examined and some recommendations put forward.

Profile of the Average Migrant Worker

It is calculated that between 15 to 20 percent of the Kyrgyz population is working abroad. Despite the sheer scale of the migration phenomenon, labor migration remains an extremely under-researched problem both in terms of basic statistical

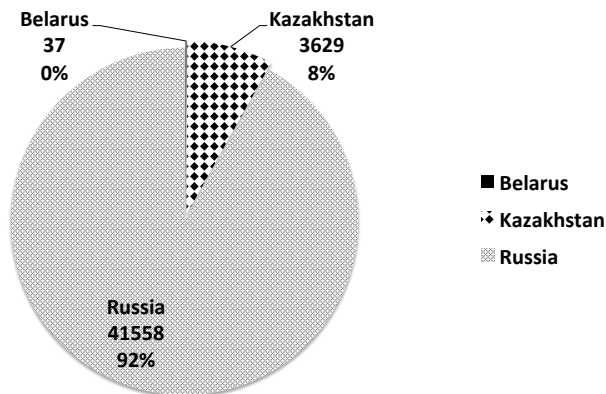
¹ Center for Integration Studies, Eurasian Development Bank.

² "Impact of Kyrgyzstan's Accession to the Customs Union for the Kyrgyz Labor Market and Human Capital," *Report No. 13*. EDB Centre for Integration Studies, Eurasian Development Bank, St. Petersburg, 2013, www.eabr.org. Unless otherwise indicated, this report serves as a source of all figures cited in this paper. Two further reports ("An Assessment of the Economic Effects of Integration of Kyrgyzstan into the Customs Union," *Report No. 1*, EDB Centre for Integration Studies, Eurasian Development Bank, St. Petersburg, 2011, www.eabr.org; "Labor Migration in the SES: Economic Effects and Legal-Institutional Consequences of Labor Migration Agreements," *Report No. 3*, EDB Centre for Integration Studies, Eurasian Development Bank, St. Petersburg, 2012, www.eabr.org) are used to supplement data and argumentation.

data and with respect to its deep socio-economic consequences. According to data published by the Kyrgyz National Statistical Committee, in 2011 the country had 457,000 migrant workers abroad. Expert estimates of the true number of migrant workers, however, range from 620,000 for 2010³ to one million for 2012.⁴ There are thus significant discrepancies between the various estimates of the total number of migrants from Kyrgyzstan to the CU countries. This further complicates the process of adopting the appropriate decisions and adapting measures with respect to migration regulation.

Official data allows conclusions to be made on the main vector of labor migration, however: 92 percent of Kyrgyz migrants work in Russia, with the remainder mostly employed in Kazakhstan; only a negligible number of migrants go to Belarus.

Figure 1. External Migration of the KR Population in 2011, by Country



The main factors determining the migratory movements from Kyrgyzstan to Russia and Kazakhstan are persistent differences in income and labor demand. If the main “discouraging” factor experienced by migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan to both Russia and Kazakhstan is the low income level and high unemployment in Kyrgyzstan, the main “encouraging” factor lies in the growing labor demand in Russia and Kazakhstan.

N., 48 years old, worked at trade pavilions in the suburbs of Moscow and Moscow proper from 2007 to 2011:

“In Bishkek, I worked as a middle-school geography teacher. I moved to my sisters in the Moscow suburbs because I had to feed my family, and get medical treatment for my husband. Now I’ve returned, bought a plot of land ... we’re building a 3-room house, we’ve opened a grocery store, and my son is finishing university. Working in Russia definitely improved my family’s financial situation. If I had continued working at the school, there wouldn’t have been enough money for anything, and there’d be no house—not even in 30 years’ time.”

A., 45 years old, working in the service sector in Almaty, Kazakhstan, since 2006:

“In Kazakhstan, the working and living conditions are better. The money that I earn is enough to cover my housing costs, food, vacations, assistance for my relatives and son ... On a single paycheck, for example, I can travel to any country, whereas in Kyrgyzstan, I’d have to work for an entire year, or at least half a year, in order to go somewhere.”

Differences in GNP per capita represent the pre-determining factor in forecasting migration trends. However, their value coefficients are of greater significance to the originating country than the destination country. This means that in the case of Kyrgyzstan, the “discouraging” factor is much more important than the “encouraging” one, which must be taken into consideration when making decisions on the regulation of migration processes. Our calculations established that deterioration in the economic indicators of the originating country is directly linked to emigration growth: if GNP per capita drops by 1 percent, emigration increases by 0.65–0.77 percent. The following factors are also of major significance to Kyrgyz citizens considering emigration:

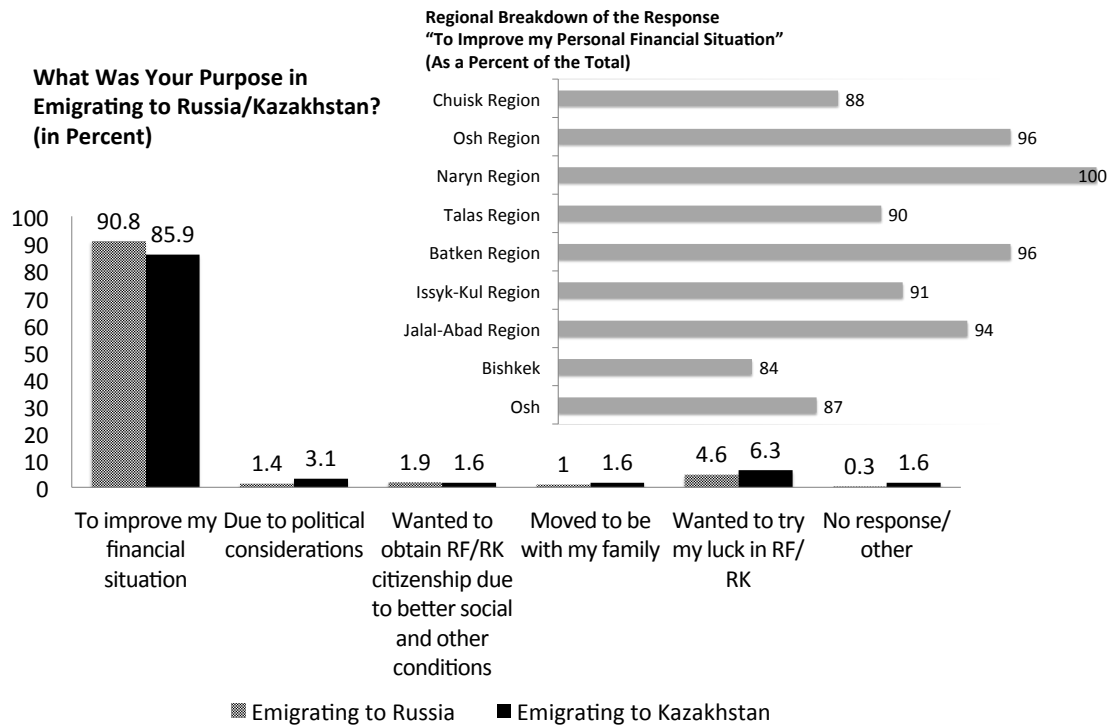
- Differences in income levels between Kyrgyzstan and recipient countries;
- Living conditions, in particular access to healthcare and the quality of medical services;
- Distances between the countries, both physical and cultural;

The presence of well-established expat communities abroad.

³ “Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011,” World Bank, 2011, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2010/11/13088961/migration-remittances-factbook-2011-second-edition>; “World Development Indicators,” World Bank, 2012.

⁴ See, for example, www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=19180.

Figure 2. Reasons for Labor Migration



Demographic and quantitative sociological assessments allow us to define the profile of the (statistically) average migrant worker. Those most likely to migrate are typically aged up to 35 (the average age is 29), come from small families (with few children), and originate either from the Chui region or the three southern regions of the country (Batken, Osh, and Jalalabad). Imbalances in interregional development are a significant factor in terms of the decision to emigrate. Residents of the Osh and Jalalabad regions express a high level of preparedness to move to another region or country in order to find work. This is due to the challenges of economic development in the southern part of the country, associated with its limited supply of arable land, scarce opportunities for livestock rearing, and low level of industrial development.

The Chui region (Bishkek) occupies a dominant position in terms of migration flows, chiefly by virtue of the fact that it serves as a transit point for departures from the country. The correlation between regional development and the desire to leave the country is confirmed by the findings of our sociological research. It indicates that the greatest motivation for migrating for the purposes of improving one's personal economic situation (94–100 percent) is primarily expressed by residents of the country's southern regions. Accordingly, strategies targeted at the development of these regions, combined with a

youth employment policy, would help to regulate—and thus serve to stem somewhat—migratory flows from Kyrgyzstan.

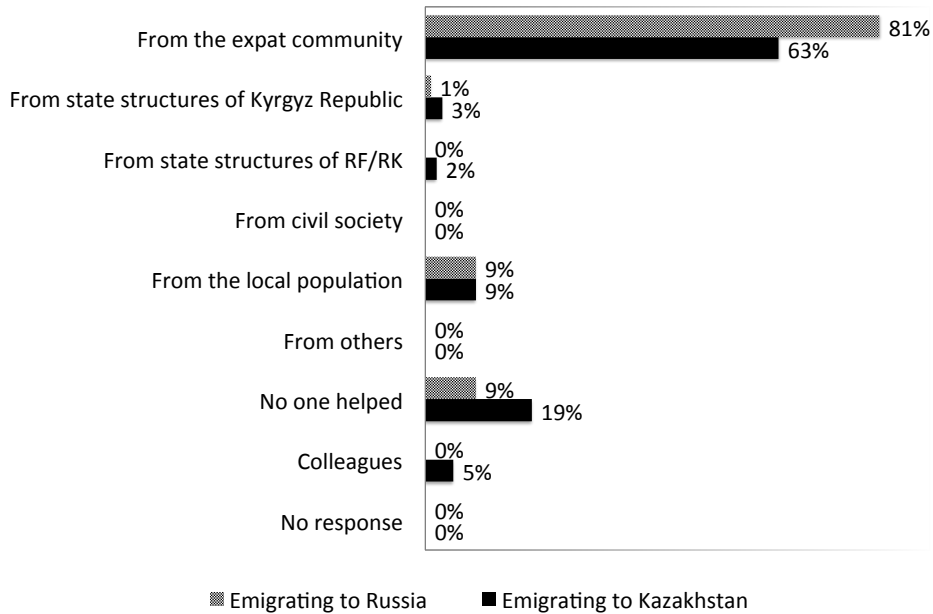
Based on the results of the calculations we made using the probit regression method, the main determinants of labor migration were revealed to be wage level, unemployment rate, household income, age, and level of education. An increase in the wage differential between the originating country and destination country increases the likelihood of emigration. An increase in regional unemployment indicators also leads to a higher likelihood of emigration. When the unemployment level reaches 20 percent, the likelihood of emigration rises to 0.017 (a 70 percent increase compared to an unemployment rate of 6 percent). Per capita household income and age have a negative correlation, and where the values of these variables increase, the likelihood of migration falls.

Social Networks are Key, State Bodies are not

The presence of social networks has emerged as an additional facilitating factor for those wishing to emigrate for wage-earning purposes. Indeed, a significant role in the decision to emigrate, and the choice of ultimate destination, is played by social networks through acquaintances or relatives. For 90 percent of

Figure 3. Sources of Assistance and Support

(“During your stay in RF/RK, from whom do you receive the assistance and support (protection of legal rights/help looking for job and/or accommodation/moral support, etc.)?”)



migrant workers emigrating to Russia, and 78 percent of those emigrating to Kazakhstan, the local presence of relatives, friends, acquaintances, and compatriots was crucial in their decision to emigrate. In response to the question of who helped the migrant workers in the destination country in terms of protecting their legal rights, looking for work and accommodation, and providing moral support, the great majority of surveyed migrants (81 percent for Russia and 63 percent for Kyrgyzstan) answered that help came from the local expat community.

At the same time, the findings showed an extremely low level of engagement and support by state agencies, both in the originating and destination countries: less than 3 percent of all respondents received assistance from the latter. Therefore, in the event of Kyrgyzstan acceding to the SES, state and intergovernmental agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations active in the area, would be well advised to establish relationships with expat migrant communities. They are capable of acting as institutional partners in the implementation of various initiatives, first and foremost, those aimed at improving systems for the notification, support, and legal protection of migrant workers.

Impact on the Broader Economy

As with any complex socioeconomic phenomenon, there are both positive and negative consequences of labor migration on the broader national economy. The overall framework is presented in Figure 4.

The main positive factor for Kyrgyzstan is the remittances sent back by migrant workers. According to National Bank of Kyrgyzstan statistics for 2011, money transfers totaled \$1.7 billion, excluding transfers made via unofficial channels.⁵ The ratio of remittances to national GDP has risen sharply since 2004 and continues to increase—it reached 25 percent in 2010 according to official data. This data is roughly consistent with World Bank data that calculated the value of remittances at 28.9 percent of the country’s GDP in 2011.⁶

Forty-five percent of those surveyed in our study send 30–50 percent of their earnings home every year. About 41 percent of surveyed migrant workers transfer an average of \$200 to \$500 monthly. Income levels of migrants vary hugely (Figure 6), as they fill very different niches in the recipient economies, both as unqualified and qualified labor.

⁵ “Report of the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2011,” National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, 2011.

⁶ “Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011”, “World Development Indicators.”

Figure 4. Labor Migration and the Broader Economy: Multiple Channels of Impact

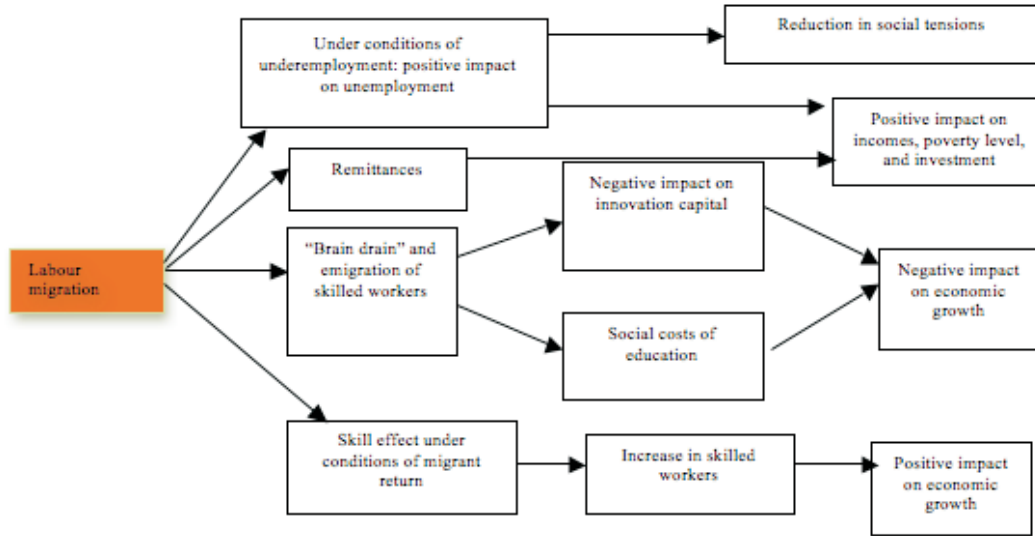
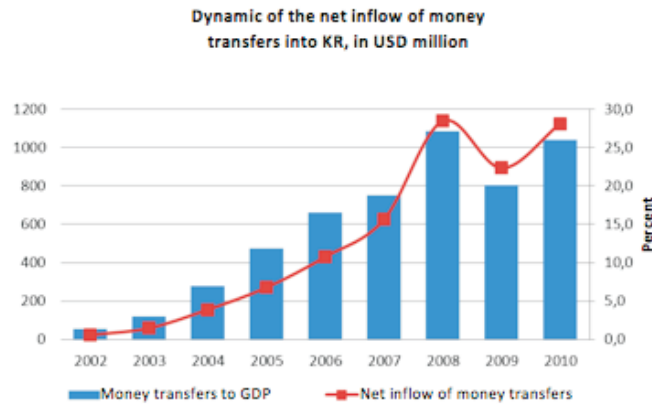


Figure 5. Net Inflow of Money Transfers



Source: National Bank of Kyrgyzstan (2011)

Figure 6. Average Monthly Incomes of Kyrgyz Labor Migrants (“What is (was) your average monthly level in the destination country?”)

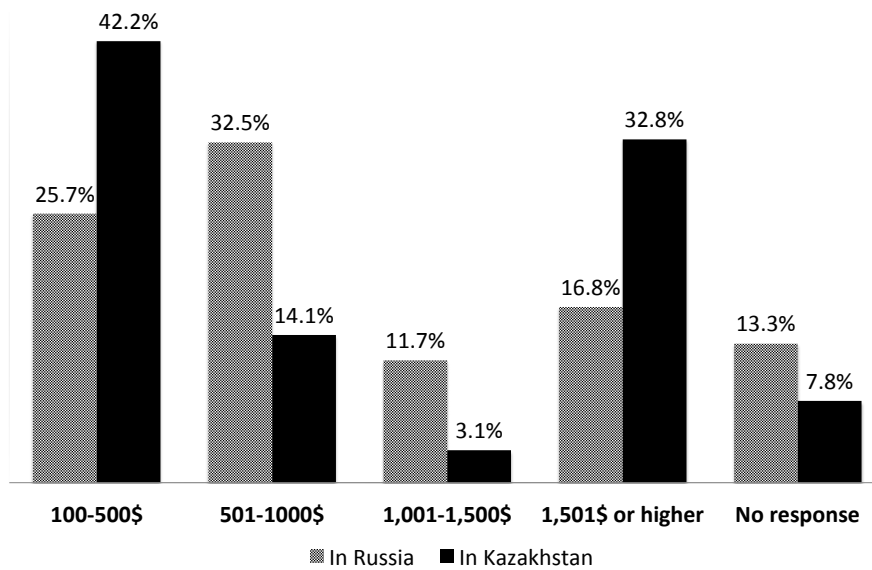


Figure 7. Occupations of Labor Migrants
 (“What occupation do (did) you have in RF,RK?”)

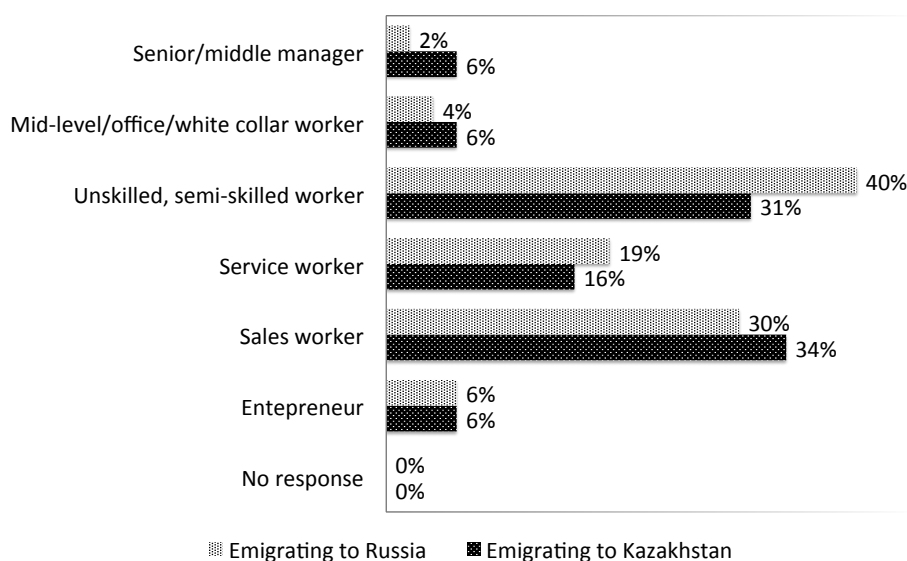
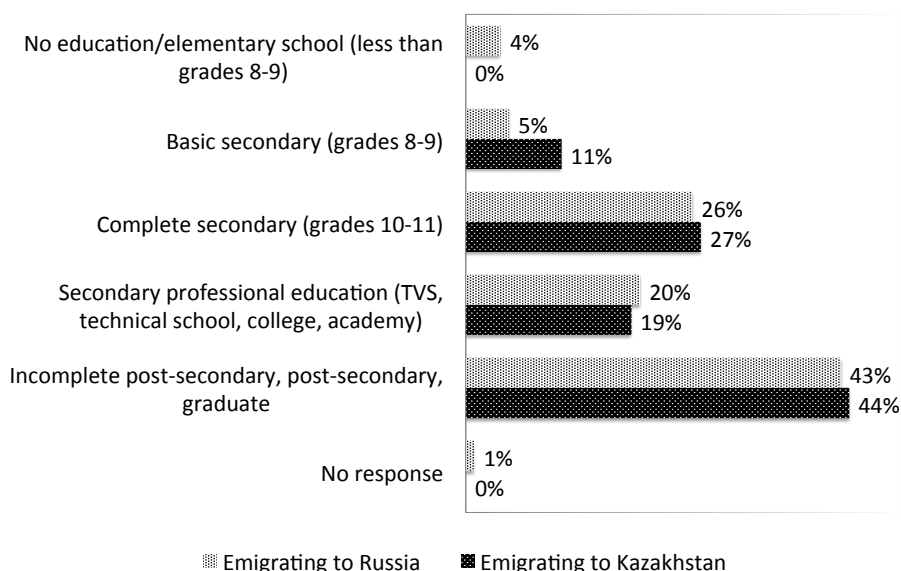


Figure 8. Education Level
 (“What is your education level?”)



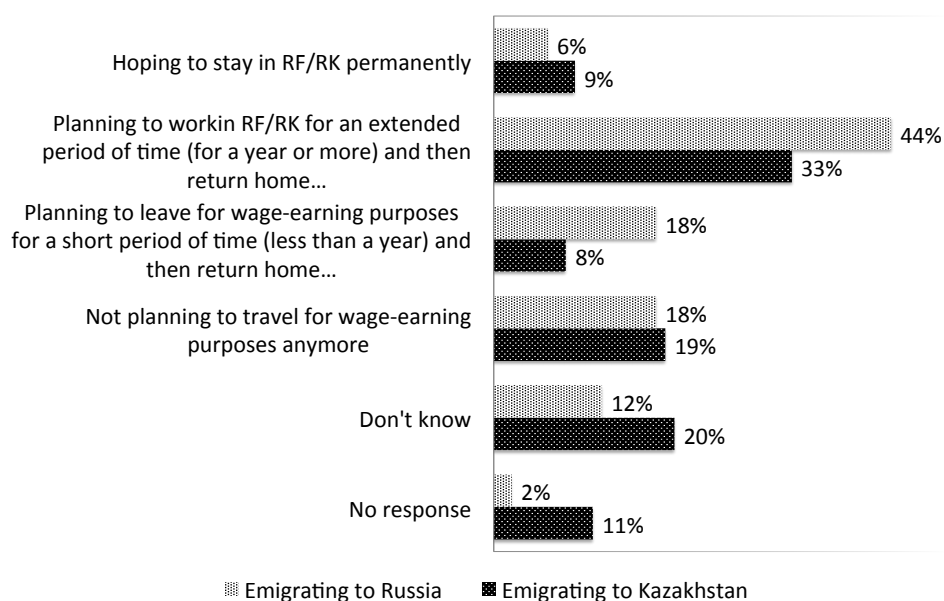
In Russia and Kazakhstan demand for foreign labor comes from the same sectors, though small differences exist in terms of scale. In Kazakhstan most migrant workers are employed in retail (41 percent of respondents), services (16 percent), and agriculture (5 percent). In Russia, construction, industry, and services are the primary employers of Kyrgyz migrants (Figure 7).

Kyrgyz workers are primarily engaged in unskilled labor. This is despite the fact that more than 40 percent of them have had post-secondary education,

whether they completed it or not (Figure 8). There is thus a discrepancy between education levels and actual jobs undertaken by Kyrgyz labor migrants.

Money transfers received in Kyrgyzstan are primarily diverted for consumption purposes, and only to a lesser extent used as investment resources. However, small investments in the development of small- to medium-sized businesses, for example in the retail sales sector, are currently on the rise.

Figure 9. Plans with Respect to Labor Migration
 (“What are your future plans with respect to Russia/Kazakhstan?”)



Ch., 39 years old, has worked in the sales sector in Almaty, Kazakhstan, since 2008:

“From Kazakhstan, hardly anyone sends money to Kyrgyzstan via the banking system. We either take it ourselves or give it to acquaintances to pass on. There’s also a well-established and reliable system of transferring money by a network of taxi drivers from Almaty to Bishkek. It costs about 10 dollars...”

In spite of the largely positive impact of labor migration on the Kyrgyz economy and society through remittances, the most visible negative impact is connected to the country’s brain drain and its diminishing qualified workforce. Not only is there temporary labor migration but there has also been a trend of permanent migration of qualified workers—engineers, doctors, teachers, agronomists, and so on. Kyrgyzstan thus faces a critical situation caused by the simultaneous reduction of the country’s production and innovation potential. This could have long-term socio-economic problems including poverty and low return on educational expenditure.⁷

It remains unclear what percentage of migrant workers are returning to their homeland, and how the process of reintegrating into the country’s labor

market is unfolding. Our survey demonstrated that 44 percent of Kyrgyz citizens residing in Russia have long-term plans for working there (33 percent in Kazakhstan), while 18 percent have only short-term plans for working in Russia (8 percent in Kazakhstan). The majority of respondents plan to return to Kyrgyzstan. Roughly one-fifth of all respondents do not want to work again in Russia or Kazakhstan, and only 6 and 9 percent (respectively) want to remain in these countries on a permanent basis.

The return of migrant workers to Kyrgyzstan is projected to have a positive effect on the development of the country’s human capital. This is due to the repatriation of specialists with newfound competencies and skills gained in the countries of immigration. Family relationships are the main reason for migrant workers returning home. The second reason is the desire to open one’s own business and apply newfound skills in Kyrgyzstan, which applies more to migrants to Kazakhstan (31 percent) than Russia (17 percent). This may be due to the greater ease of establishing contacts, finding partners and suppliers, and shipping goods from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan than to Russia. The proximity factor seems to be important in expanding business connections.

⁷ “Education and Science in KR for 2007– 2011,” National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, 2011.

Accession to the Customs Union: Potential Impact on Labor Migration

Over the last few years, the CU and SES, uniting Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, has concretized to become a set of functioning rules and institutions. Kyrgyzstan has taken the political decision to join the CU and SES and is now working toward that goal. The precise accession date has yet to be established, but January 1, 2015, may serve as a fair estimate.

The SES package includes two agreements regulating labor migration within the union: Agreement on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers and Their Family Members and the Agreement on Cooperation Among Member States on Counteracting Illegal Labor Migration from Third Countries. The first agreement is most important as it grants labor migrants the same rights as national workers in the destination countries. It includes the abolishment of work licenses and permits and the granting of social and other rights to migrants and members of their families (medical care, education; pensions are not yet covered).⁸

Our forecast for labor migration from Kyrgyzstan to CU countries indicates an annual long-term growth in labor migration of 3.5 percent. However, the growth trend of migratory flows will to a large extent depend on Russia's and Kazakhstan's migration policy. This depends on the demographic projections and economic-development trends of these two countries. According to the baseline scenario, if Russia receives 8 million immigrants in 2010–30, the total share of immigrants from Kyrgyzstan will total approximately 44,000 per year (for methodology of calculations, please see the aforementioned EDB report).

The main barrier to legal labor migration is the difficult process of registering a person's legal stay in the country of immigration. The current system of quotas in Russia, and their constant downscaling, is a counterproductive solution, which manifests itself in the rising number of illegal migrants. The foreign workforce in Russia in 2011, according to Federal Migration Service data, totaled roughly 9 million (including approximately 500,000 from Kyrgyzstan). In 2011 the Russian government established a maximum number of migrant workers of 1.7 million. In Kazakhstan, labor-migration regulatory policy is based on recognition of the temporary nature of the phenomenon. The procedure for issuing permits for

the utilization of migrant labor is geared toward the gradual replacement of foreign workers by national personnel. Labor migration in Kazakhstan has been spontaneous, and there are many legislative gaps that serve as administrative barriers that hinder labor migration. Some of these problems could be solved by establishing a system governing the free movement of workers, abolishing permits conferring the right to engage in labor activity, and improving notification about the labor markets and administrative procedures in place in CU countries.

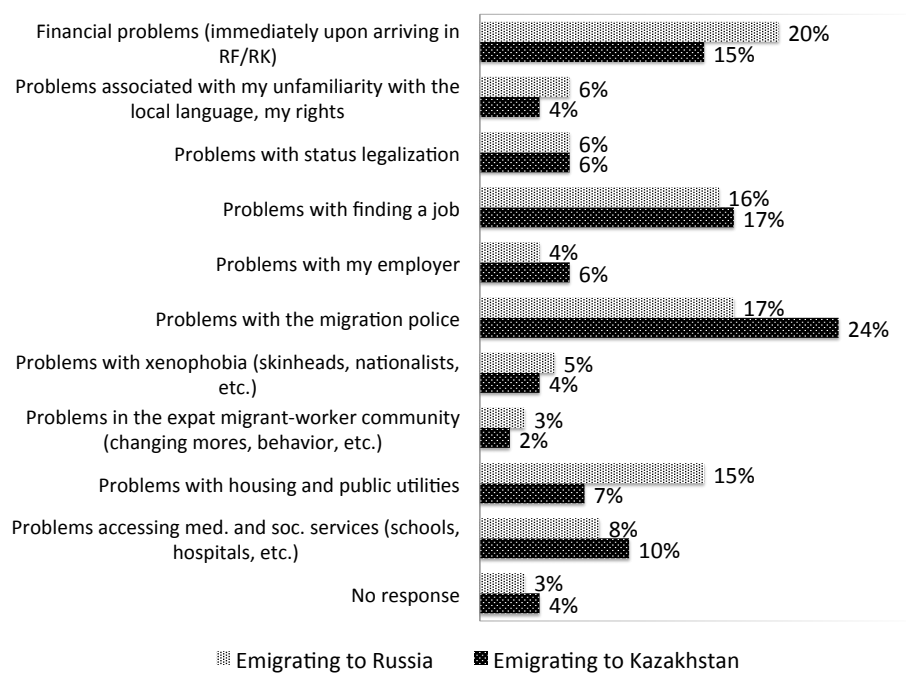
The main problems of labor migration, in the opinion of the migrants themselves, are financial difficulties and complications connected with looking for work. With respect to housing and conditions of public utilities, a gap is observed between Russia and Kazakhstan. The conditions are more challenging in the latter than in the former (15 percent in Russia, 7 percent in Kazakhstan), while problems with the migration police are more prominent in Kazakhstan (24 percent) than in Russia (17 percent) (see figure 10).

The key problems of migration are as follows: the complicated system of migrant registration; the low level of migrants' legal awareness; inadequate professional training; poor knowledge of the Russian language; and insufficiently harmonized legislation on employment terms and social security, which leads to low migrant wages and workplace discrimination. Furthermore, the weak integration of migrant workers into the society of the destination country is the result of the absence of the following: specialized intergovernmental migration-regulation agencies; an effective migration policy in the originating country; and an official notification system on employment opportunities abroad. Socio-cultural and economic differences between the local population and migrant workers cause a hostile attitude and the outbreak of conflicts.

On the level of policy recommendations, we would thus single out in the strongest way possible that *Kyrgyzstan's accession to the CU and SES should proceed in full—that is, without restriction on labor migration*. Should the labor component be excluded from the accession package, the benefits of accession will be considerably diminished. Kyrgyzstan's accession to the CU and SES should assume full access to the SES labor market, as prescribed by the aforementioned agreement. SES membership provides migrant workers from union countries with the same rights as national workers in regard to job placement and ac-

⁸ "Labor Migration in the SES."

Figure 10. Main Problems for Labor Migrants



cess to social services—for migrants and members of their families. This would lead to multiple gains for the recipient countries through increased payment of taxes,⁹ an improved situation as regards crime, lower state expenditure, improved social conditions, which is vital to the well-being of migrants, as well as increased money transfers to the countries of origin.

Simultaneously, it is important to make arrangements to secure the external borders of the CU in order to restrict the movement of citizens from third countries, and ensure the security of member countries.

Ch., 48 years old, migrant worker in Kazakhstan since 2007, working for a firm in Almaty:

“... All migrants are waiting for Kyrgyzstan to join the Customs Union—all of these migration issues would be solved, allowing people to work without hindrance in CU countries. I think the opportunity for workers to move freely will change the current situation of having to constantly leave the country and come back again, register every three months, and so on. Kazakhstan is a CU member and Kazakhs are free to work in Russia as they like, which is very convenient.”

In the realm of labor migration, Kyrgyzstan’s accession should also be beneficial in terms of cap-

ital flows. The flow of investments from the more economically developed Russia and Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan would encourage job creation, as well as see increases in household income and regional development. This in turn could become a deterrent to migration abroad.

Conclusions

Labor migration is a defining phenomenon of Kyrgyzstan’s economy and society. Social networks abroad—principally relatives and acquaintances—have emerged as an additional “encouraging” factor for those wishing to emigrate for wage-earning purposes, playing a significant role in the decision of the migrant to emigrate and the choice of destination. On the contrary, state bodies have so far failed to play a constructive role in labor migration processes. Kyrgyzstan’s accession to the CU should incorporate agreements pertaining to labor migration that would, in essence, provide migrants with a better legal status. Should the labor component be excluded from the accession package, the benefits of accession will be considerably diminished.

⁹ We estimate elsewhere that the gains for the Russian federal budget stemming from the legalization of Kyrgyz and Tajik labor migration will be in excess of 40 billion rubles a year, or approximately \$1.3 billion (see “An Assessment of the Economic Effects of Integration of Kyrgyzstan into the Customs Union”).

Commercial Banking in Kyrgyzstan

Yelena Vorobey¹ (2015)

Introduction

Accounting for trillions of assets worldwide, banking systems are crucial components of the global economy. Commercial banks are just one part of the range of financial institutions, which also includes investment banks, insurance companies, finance companies, investment managers, and other companies that profit from money flows. As financial intermediaries, banks are placed between depositors who supply capital and borrowers who demand capital and have productive uses for it. The result of successful banking system development is a steady long-run economic growth for a country. It is thus useful for other countries to have a study of a small, developing country with an emerging banking system, so that they can see the difficulties involved and the progress that can be won. Kyrgyzstan, being a small and open economy, presents some peculiarities in its banking sector, which was established relatively recently. This research aims to analyze the problems the sector is facing and propose policy recommendations by presenting the historical background and current situation of banking system in Kyrgyzstan.

Overview of the Banking Sector

As of September 30, 2014, the banking system of Kyrgyzstan consisted of the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan (NBKR) and 24 commercial banks.² The

Law “On the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic,” which defines the goals, principles, legal status, and authority of the National Bank, states that NBKR has the right to supervise the activities of commercial banks and issue licenses for banking operations.³ All commercial banks have to receive a license from the Bank of Kyrgyzstan in order to conduct banking operations.

Kyrgyzstan’s banking system has undergone several important stages in its development.⁴ The first stage, from 1991 to 1995, was characterized by the transition to a market economy, accompanied by high inflation rates and imbalances caused by structural changes in the country’s economy. Since, as in all countries, Kyrgyzstan’s banking system is closely interconnected with its general economic situation, the political and economic events of that period were reflected in the activities and financial standings of its commercial banks. In 1992, laws “On the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic” and “On Banks and Banking Activity in the Kyrgyz Republic” were passed, according to which NBKR became the central link in the banking system.

The second stage relates to the period 1996-1997, during which the comprehensive Financial Sector Reform Program was supported by a Financial Sector Adjustment Credit funded by the World Bank. The program reformed the banking system, downsizing it, and restructuring the state-owned banks, and implementing regulatory reform. This included modernizing procedures for certification and standards, rationalizing inspection requirements, and training in policy and cost-benefit analysis of licensing proposals. It made the sector more efficient and competitive, restoring the health of commercial banks in general.

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2 “Trends of the development of the banking system,” National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic, September 30, 2014, <http://www.nbkr.kg/index1.jsp?item=1481&lang=ENG>.

3 Law “On the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic” No. 59 (July 29, 1997), National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic, <http://www.nbkr.kg/index1.jsp?item=42&lang=ENG>.

4 “Chairman of the National Bank in Kyrgyzstan: There is a real credit boom,” *KABAR news*, 2007, <http://www.cbonds.info/cis/eng/news/index.phtml/params/id/375024>. See also, Denis Denisenko, “Zair Chokoev’s interview on the milestones in the development of the banking system of Kyrgyzstan,” *Vecherniy Bishkek*, 2012, http://www.vb.kg/doc/188233_osnovnye_veh_i_razvitiia_bankovskoy_sistemy_kyrgyzstana.html.

The third stage spans the years 1998 to 2001. During this time, the development of commercial banks was influenced by the macroeconomic destabilization of 1998. The Russian crisis provoked a devaluation of the country's trade partners, and exacerbated issues already present in the country's banking system due to the fact that commercial banks had unreasonably large loan portfolios in foreign currencies, and did not have the appropriate credit policies to cope with adverse developments in the financial markets. Lending to rural areas and non-trade sectors remained limited. At the same time, most banks required 120-200 percent collateral, and charged high interest rates of 50-100 percent, which also discouraged savings.⁵ This stage demonstrated the vulnerability of the banking system, not only to the general economic situation in the country, but to external shocks as well. During that time, to prevent a systemic crisis and improve the health of the banking system, the National Bank, in cooperation with the government, actively worked on restructuring and improving insolvent banks. NBKR worked on solidifying a normative legal base and aimed to address a number of issues pertaining to the opening

of a commercial bank, using warning indicators in order to improve the financial health of banks and evaluate management quality. As a result, system risk in the banking sector was localized and eventually neutralized.

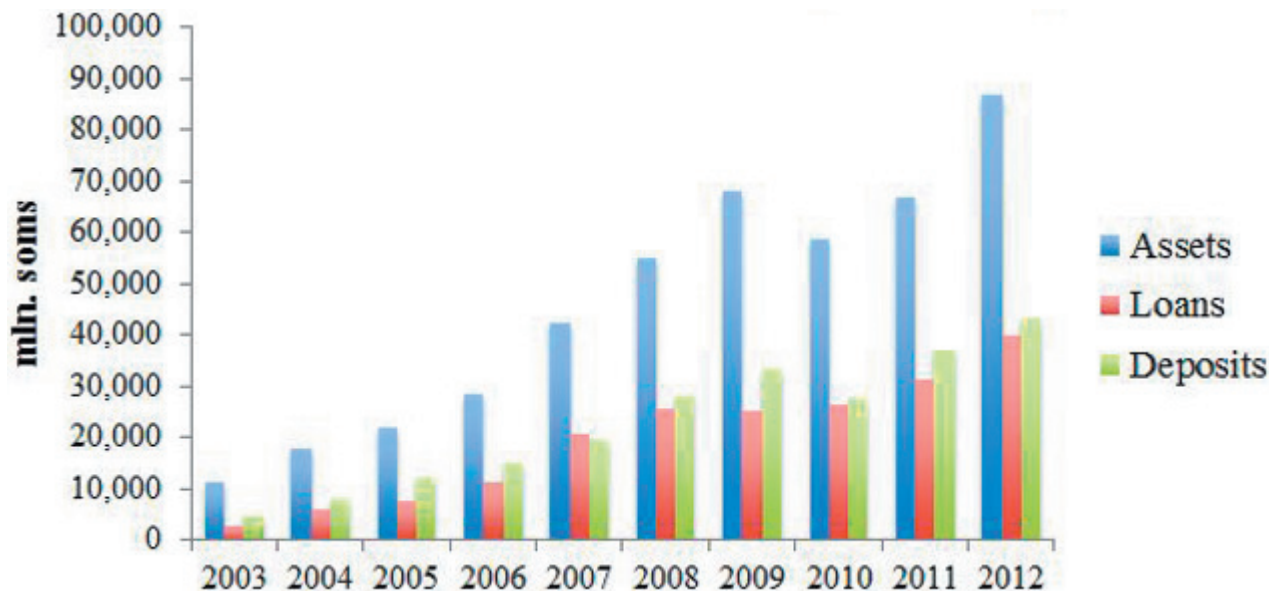
During the fourth period, from 2001 to 2005, the banking sector reforms were completed, and the banking system grew rapidly, without any external shocks or internal problems.

However, the fifth stage, which lasted from 2005-2010, was completely different, as an initial credit boom, and consequent world economic crisis, caused the slowdown of banking system growth. The political instability of 2010 entirely stopped the positive tendencies of commercial banks as a whole, and growth resumed only in 2011.⁶

Basic Indicators in the Banking Sector

Looking at statistics for the major banking indicators, such as assets, loans, and deposits, the progress is evident, with significant improvement in almost every area of banking over the last ten years.

Graph I. Basic Indicators of Banking Industry



Source: NBKR Bulletin 2012⁷

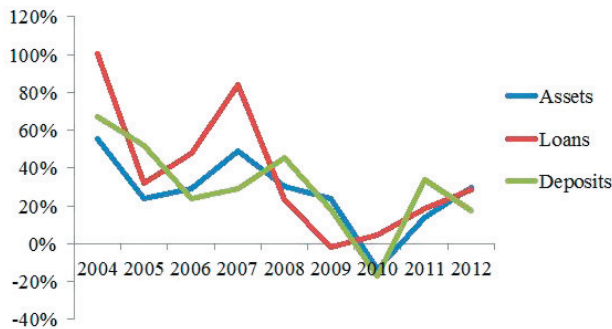
5 Lutfu Sagbansua, "The Banking System in the Kyrgyz Republic," *IBSU Scientific Journal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 39-53, http://www.researchgate.net/publication/49292207_Banking_System_in_Kyrgyz_Republic.

6 S. Abdybalytegin, ed., "Report on the stability of the financial sector in the country," National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic, 2012, <http://www.nbkr.kg/DOC/14012013/000000000019715.pdf>.

7 "National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic Bulletin," National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic, 2012, www.nbkr.kg/DOC/28032012/000000000014940.xls.

Graph I shows the dynamics of asset, loan, and deposit growth over the period 2003-2012. Growth is constant throughout the period, with the exception of 2010, when the events of April occurred and the leading bank at the time, the Asia Universal Bank, was declared bankrupt and reorganized into Zalkar Bank. Apart from that unfortunate event, indicators show consistent positive trends; not even the financial crisis of 2008 affected this dynamic.

Graph II. Grown Rates of Banking Industry Indicators



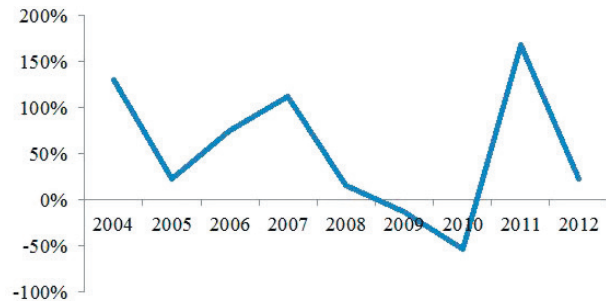
Source: NBKR Bulletin 2012⁸

While the previous graph focused on the absolute values of major indicators, graph II shows the growth rates of assets, loans, and deposits per year. The graph provides comprehensive information on the banking system's development. Here, the effect of the 2005 March revolution is reflected in decreased growth rates, which, however, rapidly regained momentum and continued on at very high levels until 2008. When financial crisis hit, however, the credit boom ended, and banks could not get funds and issue loans as easily as they did before, thus contributing to lower growth rates. In 2010 the situation became even worse due to the political instability, which even caused a contraction in the size of the banking system's assets and deposits. However, these negative effects lasted only through to 2010, and the period 2011-2012 was marked with accelerated rates of growth for loans and assets, a positive trend that augured well for the banking system in general.

Graph III shows the growth rate of the banking industry's overall income. Income growth rates remain positive throughout the period of 2004-2012, with the exception of 2009 and 2010. Due to the 2008

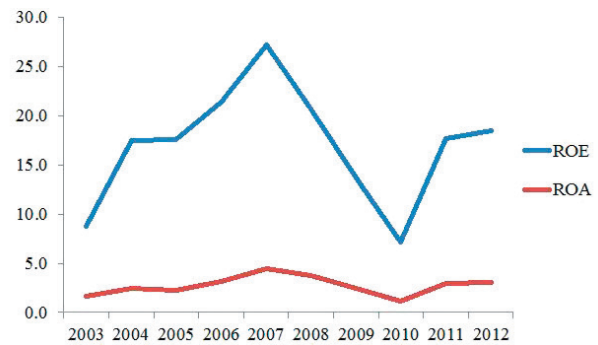
financial crisis and the political instability of 2010, the income of commercial banks plummeted; however, dynamic growth was re-established in the following period.

Graph III. Income Growth Rate in Banking Sector of KR



Source: NBKR Bulletin 2012⁹

Graph IV. ROE and ROA of Banking Industry



Source: NBKR Bulletin 2012¹⁰

Vivid indicators of company's profitability are the amount of net income returned as a percentage of shareholder's equity (ROE), return on asset (ROA), which signify how well the banking industry is returning its investments. Graph IV demonstrates quite high rates of ROE and ROA. There was not a single period during which rates were negative. Even after the 2008 financial crisis and the instability in 2010 rates decreased yet remained positive. Moreover, after this difficult period subsided return rates regained their position and the positive dynamic is likely to continue into the future, with the government and NBKR currently undertaking a number of measures to increase the attractiveness of Kyrgyzstan's banking industry.¹¹

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 "Strategy for the Development of the Banking Sector for the Period Before the End of Year 2014," National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic, 2011, <http://www.nbkr.kg/contout.jsp?lang=RUS&material=29671>.

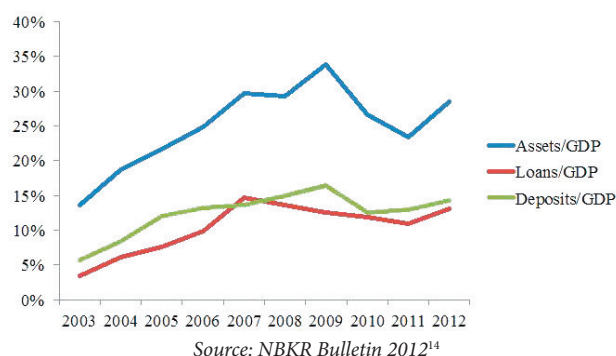
While earlier indicators show positive trends and growth throughout Kyrgyzstan's banking industry in recent years, there is room still for improvement, especially in the area of financial penetration. Today, only a small part of the national economy utilizes banking products and services, as people prefer to remain in the shadow economy, outside of the closely monitored financial industry. Yet, if the situation changes, this can mean a huge potential for development of banks, since the market of financial services is far from operating at full capacity.

Financial Intermediation

The banking sector's role as a financial intermediary that accumulates financial resources for further redistribution to creditworthy borrowers directly depends on the development and performance of banks. Kyrgyzstan has the lowest level of financial intermediation compared to other CIS countries,¹² which indicates the poor development of its financial sector. In institutional terms commercial banks continue to play a major role in the system of financial intermediation, outperforming other financial intermediaries in terms of economic potential.

Graph V demonstrates the dynamics of financial intermediation in Kyrgyzstan. Three major indicators are used: assets relative to GDP, loans relative to GDP, and deposits relative to GDP. It shows that the economy is far from being fully serviced by banks. In developed countries, the loans-to-GDP ratio is usually around 100 percent. In Kyrgyzstan, however, the ratio peaked at 17 percent in 2009, and since then there have been no significant changes. The ratio of deposits to the size of GDP in the first half of 2012 amounted to 16.4 percent (13.5 percent in 2011). The growth of this indicator was due to fast rate of growth of deposits in the banking system (33.1 percent) relative to the growth rate of nominal GDP (7.3 percent since the beginning of 2012).¹³ There is a positive trend of financial intermediation in the banking system, yet the level remains relatively low.

Graph V. Financial Intermediation Coefficients



Because the financial flows are not going through the financial system, there is a lack of efficient and effective distribution, which fuels the shadow economy and creates losses of economic potential. However, there is considerable potential for growth, which may be implemented in the absence of any adverse economic or political obstacles. The exceptionally high growth rates, as demonstrated by assets, loans, deposits, and income during 2003-2008, have not yet exhausted their potential. With the loans to GDP indicator at only 14 percent, the size of the loan market can increase manifold times, just as can banking industry assets, deposits, and profits, provided there is adequate funding.

Problems

The banking sector in Kyrgyzstan faces a number of problems that are hindering the proper development of a financial system in the country. One of the major problems is general lack of investment, which can be explained by the previous political crisis. The political revolt of 2010 led to an outflow of about \$240 million in first days of April. In order to combat this capital flight, a temporary administration was imposed, limiting the amount of money able to be withdrawn to a certain amount each day.¹⁵ In spite of this, deposits had decreased by 30 percent by April 2010.¹⁶ At that moment banks were having problems in meeting liquidity requirements, and many were on the edge of insolvency. In the first years of Kyrgyzstan's independence many commercial banks went bankrupt. As a

12 Abdybaly tegin, ed. "Report on the stability of the financial sector in the country."

13 Ibid.

14 "National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic Bulletin."

15 Jim Nichol, "Kyrgyzstan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests," *Report for Congress*. Congressional Research Service, 2013, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/97-690.pdf>.

16 Ibid.

result many depositors lost their savings. This led citizens to have little trust in Kyrgyz banks and discouraged them from placing deposits in them. Even if the situation has significantly improved in recent years, additional investment would further stimulate long-term growth and help banks to move onto a new level of doing business.

The problem of political pressure remains pertinent. The Asian Universal Bank (AUB), the largest commercial bank, which holds about a quarter of the combined assets and deposits reported by the entire Kyrgyz banking system, entered a period of trouble after an audit was conducted in 2010. The foreign securities purchased for AUB by some Kyrgyz brokerage companies linked to the previous regime could not be confirmed to be officially registered with AUB. The bank's insolvency became clear and it was placed under conservatorship. This crisis revealed how susceptible the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic was to external pressure. In that situation, NBKR took no action to solve the problem either by imposing sanctions on or revoking AUB's license. Indeed, NBKR to have been prevented from doing so, which demonstrates that the *de facto* central bank had no supervisory independence. Regular suits against the national bank and a lack of judiciary independence are additional problems faced by the financial sector. Indeed, the court system is used to exert pressure on NBKR in order to release banks from conservatorship, even though those banks are in violation of statutory thresholds.

High interest rates remain one of the major concerns of Kyrgyzstan's financial system. The reason for this state of affairs is twofold: a shortage of deposits, and high risk combined with uncertainty for the future. Thanks to the mistrust that was engendered during the first years of introducing the banking system into Kyrgyzstan, still today there is a persistent shortage of long-term deposits available to banks in the country. That is why the majority of the loans issued are short-term credits, which are unsuitable for financing investment projects with long payback periods. The low level of funds attracted from the population could also be partially explained by the high inflation and relative low earnings in the country. Constantly increasing costs of living, due to rising

costs for electricity, gas, food, etc., lead to a decrease in the level of savings. With 34 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population living below the poverty line,¹⁷ the ineffective registration system in the country, and previous negative experience, there is a high probability of default from creditors. Higher interest rates are thus set as a way of compensating for the greater risk. However, the logic here is flawed, because imposing such high interest rates on loans makes them almost impossible to repay.

Another big issue is the lack of competition among commercial banks. Although to date there are 23 commercial banks, only a few of them get the biggest share of deposits,¹⁸ and therefore some kind of imperfect competition might be assumed, which contributes to the sharp difference between the deposit and loan interest rates. Establishing a competitive and efficient banking system capable of providing a range of financial services to both borrowers and investors could increase domestic investment.

In addition to these problems, external shocks affect the growth of the financial sector and of the economy in general. One third of the sector consists in the subsidiaries of Kazakh banks, which were able to maintain themselves without disruption during the post-crisis period of 2008.¹⁹ However, increased economic and financial uncertainty in the region is affecting demand for money and credit growth, and is contributing to an increase in "dollarization," which accounted for 58 percent of deposits by individuals and legal entities as of September 30, 2014.²⁰ In spite of this, the financial sector remains heavily dependent on the Russian and Kazakh economies, due to extensive labor migration and the remittances received from these countries, as well as to strengthened ties resulting from accession to the Customs Union. In this light, the ongoing economic crisis, coupled with trade sanctions against Russia, is especially worrisome. The decrease of oil prices, which brought about the depreciation of the ruble, is soon expected to influence the Kyrgyz banking sector, since not only will financial flows from remittances decrease, but their value will also fall. All these factors add to the uncertainty of returns for depositors, and might further discourage saving, holding back the development of the commercial banking sector.

17 "World Development Indicators, Kyrgyz Republic," World Bank, no date, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/kyrgyz-republic>.

18 "Strategy for the Development of the Banking Sector for the Period Before the end of Year 2014," National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic.

19 "Kyrgyzstan," *Staff Country Report* No. 09/209, International Monetary Fund, 2009, 4-5.

20 "Trends of the development of the banking system."

Recommendations

The problem of political pressures is probably one of the most difficult to solve, as the country is still developing and has not fully established and enforced its legal system yet. According to independent experts, legal rights will not be protected until the population gets out of poverty. This is difficult, however, as the financial system cannot function properly as a means to channel funds from people with an excess supply of money to people with productive ideas. All combined, a vicious circle is created that is impossible to escape from unless there is some change to external factors or to people's mentality.

NBKR might provide more favorable loan conditions and/or regulations for emerging banks, and ease the entry requirements to increase competition in the sector. Healthy competition will lead to a visible improvement in banking practices, products, and quality of service, and will encourage innovation. However, this could give rise to the side issue of so-called moral hazard: with increased competition, banks will be more willing to get involved in risky activities in order to get profits. Thus NBKR would need to take a strong supervisory role over the activities of banks.

NBKR together with commercial banks should work on promoting and creating favorable conditions with the aim of attracting investments. Possible means to achieving this include a higher level of disclosure, so the information about banks' performance is available to all, not only Internet users. NBKR can also insist on a higher level of consumer protection by getting banks to provide potential depositors with all the required information about borrowing costs, and methods of financial charges, as well as ensuring they reduce discrimination. Such information might even be provided in the form of public seminars in both rural and urban areas. With increased awareness, and an understanding of the sector's functioning and corresponding benefits, people should become more open to making deposits.

The problem of high interest rates is probably the cornerstone of all the other problems. NBKR should regulate the fall of interest rates as well as off-balance-sheet activities. One way to reduce risk, and therefore also interest rates, is to adopting floating interest rates that change with respect to changes in inflation. Ensuring that banks upgrade their screening techniques instead of relying on collateral should mean that only credible borrowers are accepted. With a decrease in asymmetric information, the risks will also be reduced, and it will be possible to lower interest rates. The profits for commercial banks will become lower; however, with this means the country might achieve the long-term goal of economic development and high employment.

Conclusion

Over the last ten years, there has been a significant improvement in, and growth of, Kyrgyzstan's banking sector indicators. The goals of improving the system are already embedded in NBKR's Development Strategy for 2011 and 2014. Combined with more emerging services, an increase in innovations, and promising economic indicators, this means that the sector is predicted to continue its growth. The sector nonetheless faces several problems, most of which stem from its early stages of development and have plagued it throughout its development. Some of the problems, such as high interest rates, imperfect competition, and lack of investment, are readily solvable through regulations and supervision by the government and the central bank. Political instability and pressures that result in distrust of the banking system remain an acute problem of the country. While progress in the banking system is a vital component of stable economic growth, the government and the nation need to deal with the issue of political interference and its negative consequences on economic development, and take active measures towards resolving it.

Policy and Institutional Change for Economic Performance and Social Justice in Pasture Management: Comparing Experience in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan¹

Safovudin Jaborov,² Asyl Undeland,³
and Altynai Achilova⁴ (2016)

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan face similar development challenges as the two poorest post-Soviet countries and share many geographical and socioeconomic similarities. Both are rural, agricultural, mountainous and landlocked, with underdeveloped economic and social infrastructures. Agriculture is a significant contributor to the countries' GDPs as well as an important source of income and subsistence for rural populations. Livestock husbandry is a critical source of income for rural households and holds specific cultural and traditional value for both nations, as it is a measure for prosperity as well as part of all traditional and sacral celebrations and events. However, weak governmental policy, ineffective institutions, a lack of appropriate knowledge and skills among rural residents on animal husbandry practices, a shortage of cultivated fodder and combined feedstuff, and fast growing livestock numbers place enormous pressure on natural pasture resources in both countries. In addition to the environmental degradation of soil and vegetation of grasslands, poorly managed pasture use can lead to land grabbing by powerful and wealthier individuals while fueling conflicts in communities over access to the resource.

While both countries have implemented pasture management reforms, Kyrgyzstan was first to adopt a pasture law and has progressed in the institutional establishment and development of legislation. Tajikistan's reform path pursued the same objectives but has been slower to improve conditions. In this regard, the objective of this study is to understand the role policy and institutions play in pasture management in Tajikistan, and to support ongoing re-

forms based on the lessons learned in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. While the countries have differences in political economy and their social and cultural environments, Tajikistan can evaluate Kyrgyzstan's experience to help implement better results.

Tajikistan has not yet successfully formulated a policy vision for pasture management, developed efficient legislation, or established appropriate institutions at the local and national level that could lead to change and ensure it is achieving increasing livestock productivity and thus incomes. The sustainability of reforms in Tajikistan in such a poor governance setting is also risky. To advance reforms, the country needs to have a clear vision of the pasture-tenure systems, strengthen the legislative base, and build relevant institutions to implement the reforms effectively.

Methodology

The study is based on a desk review of data and documents available on livestock and pasture management in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. All three co-authors are deeply engaged in advancing pasture management reforms in both countries, and have first-hand experience and a deep understanding of the underlying challenges for reforms. The co-authors compared information in databases of surveys conducted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) projects in both countries. IFAD livestock and pasture development projects in these countries are not nationwide but operate in only livestock-intensive areas. The projects share objectives of facilitating livestock-based economic growth by using resources sustainably, through improved management at the national level, transferring knowledge, and building users' institutions to empower them in responsible governance of the resource. The projects

1 This project was completed thanks to a start-up grant from Open Society Foundations in the framework of the Central Asia – Azerbaijan Fellowship Program at the George Washington University.

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also facilitate pasture management reforms in both countries to ensure social justice in pasture management. Surveys were conducted in 2014 with sampling of 510 households in the Naryn and Issyk-Kul regions of Kyrgyzstan and 500 households in the Khatlon region of Tajikistan.

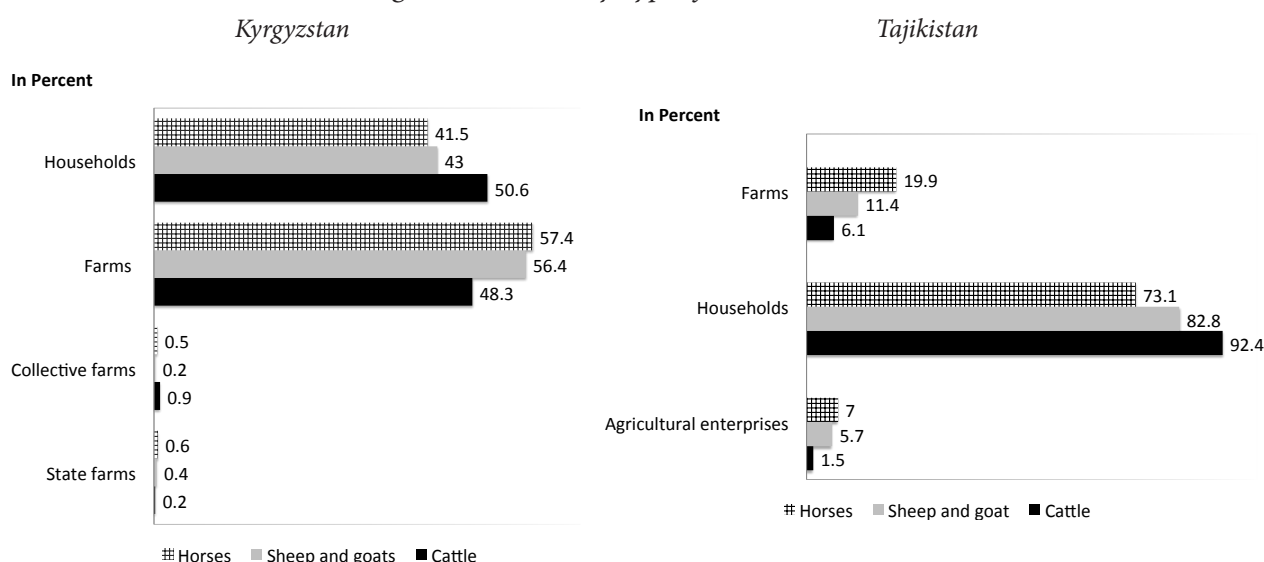
Context

The Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Tajikistan share many similarities. These are small, mountainous neighboring countries landlocked in Central Asia, with populations of 6.1 million and 8.3 million respectively in 2015. The economies of both countries are underdeveloped, largely agrarian, and highly dependent on other countries and remittances from labor migrants. Various anecdotal data suggest that more than a million people left their respective countries looking for labor migration, heading mostly to Russia. Both are in the 10 top remittances-receiving countries, with migrant transfers of about US\$3.7bn in Tajikistan and US\$1.7bn in Kyrgyzstan in 2015. They also rank high in terms of remittances' share in GDP: remittances make up the equivalent of 41 percent of GDP in Tajikistan and 31 percent of GDP in Kyrgyzstan in 2015,⁵ making these countries extremely vulnerable to external factors, especially to recessions in the migrants' destination countries.

Poverty levels in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are pervasive, reaching 30.6 and 32 percent respectively according to 2014 World Bank data. Both countries were part of the Soviet Union until 1991, and since then are trying to build independent economies. Tajikistan suffered a civil war from 1992 till 1997, which delayed the country's development. Kyrgyzstan had two major political unrests, which resulted in ousting the presidents in 2005 and 2010.

Both countries rely on agriculture not for economic growth (agriculture contributes less than a third of GDP⁶), but as a source of income and food security for about 65 percent of population who live in rural areas. Agriculture production is largely concentrated in smallholder farms, which are mostly subsistence and semi-subsistence family-based farms with small surplus productions sold at market. In Kyrgyzstan in 2013 about half of all meat and dairy products were supplied to the markets by rural households and another half by farms (Figure 1A). In Tajikistan, households are responsible for the production of over 80 percent of livestock (Figure 1BB), which shows that livestock is more oriented towards commercial purposes in Kyrgyzstan, compared to its subsistence nature in Tajikistan. The process of transforming household farming into real farming—where agriculture is a major source of income and not a supplement to other incomes—is happening in Tajikistan as well, but in a slower pace.

Figure 1. Livestock by Type of Farm, 2013 (%)



Source: National statistics committees of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

5 "Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016," World Bank, 2016.

6 Sebastien Peyrouse, "The multiple paradoxes of the agriculture issue in Central Asia," EUCAM Working Paper No. 6, November 2009.

Livestock in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is still based mostly on grazing natural pastures. Very limited numbers of farms, usually large commercial farms, supply livestock in winter with compound feed. Farmers in both countries prefer to graze livestock on natural pastures starting from April-May until October and then keep them in sheds with supplemental hay. Even in the winter months livestock graze around villages. This is a cheap but unproductive way of rearing livestock for consumption. Mountain agro-pastoralism occupies the largest area of land use and has the comparative advantage in an extensive mountainous land-use setting.⁷ As Table 1 shows, permanent pastures in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan constitute 87 percent and 69 percent of total agricultural land, respectively. With limited arable land—in both countries it constitutes less than 7 percent—high fragmentation, as well as a shortage of irrigation water, livestock plays an important role in the countries' and households' economies, serving as a coping mechanism.

At the same time, traditional livestock systems are different in areas targeted by the IFAD projects. Kyrgyzstan's northern provinces of Naryn and Issyk-Kul are traditionally livestock communities, where livestock is a mandatory part of all traditional and religious celebrations and events, giving it special cultural and traditional value. The livestock system there is based on mobility, with vertical transhumance grazing not only an economic activity but a lifestyle of nomadic people. Tajiks in the Khatlon and Kulob zones are more sedentary and traditionally engaged more in cropping and gardening and less in livestock. Livestock rearing is mostly for consumption purposes there, with few farmers focusing on it as commercial activity.

However in terms of land ownership, in Kyrgyzstan about 88 percent of interviewed households own farming land, but less than 30 percent of interviewed households own such land in Tajikistan. Households in both countries own or rent an average of 2 hectares (ha) of arable land. At the same time the maximum land owned in a Tajik household is 135 ha, while in a Kyrgyz one it is 16 ha, showing that the land-privatization process has been implemented more evenly in Kyrgyzstan, where every household received about the same land share per person.

In Tajikistan, remnants of old Soviet collective farms are reorganized into cooperatives or associa-

tions, with Soviet operational arrangements: members of cooperatives work for the farm, receive payment in kind (in flour, vegetables, fruits), but in no way participate in the decision-making process. Since the end of the Soviet period land ownership in Tajikistan has evolved, with new sets of regulations regarding the formal possession and use of pastures, but traditional informal practices continue. Our analysis shows that influential and wealthier villagers can gain more control over the more valuable pastures, arable lands and water resources.⁸ Moreover, the pasture law stipulates that pasture-land use certificates are issued based on the type and number of livestock. However, in reality there are many cases when, despite of the owned number of livestock, individual households obtained pasture use rights for large pasture plots while other smallholders have no opportunity for fair access to the pastures that their ancestors used for centuries. This is one of the main challenges for social justice in pasture-management practices in Tajikistan.

The number of livestock held by households in targeted communities of the two countries shows important differences in the livestock systems: Tajikistan's households own half less livestock than households in Kyrgyzstan in general, with 3.8 animals per household (Figure 2). The data shows that Tajik households prefer cattle, which mostly graze around villages and are kept in the home shed. The Kyrgyz prefer sheep, which they take to the remote summer pastures for 5-7 months. Even when overall ownership of various households' assets is lower in Tajikistan, there are significantly more cases of barn and shed ownership than in Kyrgyzstan (Figure 3), because livestock are held in the backyard, partially due to poor access to pasture resources.

The productivity of livestock seems to be significantly lower in Tajikistan than in Kyrgyzstan. According to the IFAD projects' surveys, the lactation period of cows in target districts is low, with 94 percent of interviewed households reporting cows' lactation period at less than 180 days. At the same time, about 45 percent of households in communities of Kyrgyzstan targeted by IFAD reported higher than 180 days of lactation. The majority of Tajik households in IFAD communities interviewed reported a yield of about 2 liters of milk per day, while the majority of Kyrgyz households gain about 6 liters a day.

7 Carol Kerven et al., "Pastoralism and Farming in Central Asia's Mountains: A Research Review," Mountain Societies Research Centre, University of Central Asia, 2011.

8 Kerven et al., "Pastoralism and Farming in Central Asia's Mountains."

Table 1. Land Use by Agricultural Type

	Total Area (sq km)	Agricultural Land (% of Total Area)			Arable Land (% of Total Area)			Permanent Pastures		
	2008	1992	2000	2007	1992	2000	2007	sq km	% of Total Area	% of Agric. Land
Kyrgyzstan	191,800	52.6	55.9	55.9	6.9	7.1	6.7	93,650	49	87
Tajikistan	139,960	32.1	32.7	32.7	6.1	5.6	5.1	31,980	23	69

Source: Kerven, C., Steimann, B. Ashley, L., Dear, Ch. and Inamur Rahim, *Pastoralism and Farming in Central Asia's Mountains: A Research Review* (Mountain Societies Research Centre, University of Central Asia, 2011).

Table 2. Livestock in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (In Thousands)

Year/Livestock	1990	2000	2004	2006	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Kyrgyzstan											
Cattle	1,711	1,470	1,583	1,701	1,860	1,942	1,965	2,022	2,066	2,122	2,202
Sheep and Goats	9,996	3,799	3,773	4,046	4,502	4,816	5,038	5,288	5,424	5,641	5,829
Horses	313	354	347	347	362	372	378	388	399	407	432
Tajikistan											
Cattle	1,351*	1,062	1,304	1,423	1,799	1,830	1,897	2,011	2,044	2,099	2,262
Sheep and Goats	3,355*	2,222	2,816	3,161	4,147	4,200	4,395	4,003	4,733	4,923	5,057
Horses	52	72	75	76	77	76	76	77	77	77	78

Source: Compiled from data of National Statistical Committees of Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan

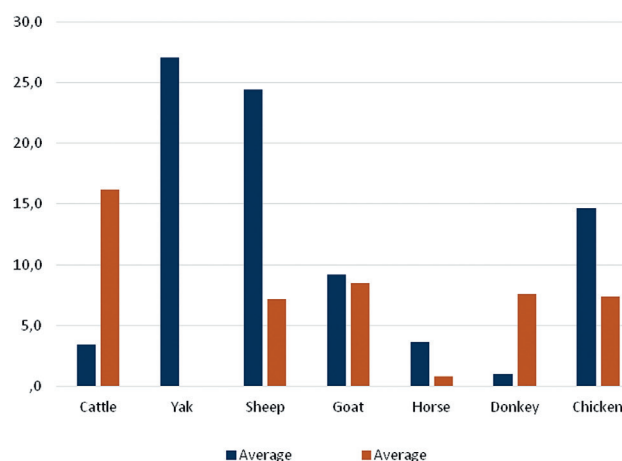
* Data from Report of The Tajikistan Emergency Agriculture and Livestock Rapid Assessment, 2008, based on data of Tajik Ministry of Agriculture.

Though there is steady growth in the number of livestock in both countries, livestock and pasture productivity remains the main concern in Tajikistan's agricultural sector. A shortage of winter feed forces smallholders for early grazing practices, which ultimately threatens pasture productivity. Decreasing land area size and yields caused a collapse in the production of cultivated feed crops in Tajikistan. Between 1991 and 2000 the total cultivated feed available to livestock in Tajikistan fell by 79 percent.⁹

The major finding in regards to livestock in both countries is that livestock in Kyrgyzstan has been quickly becoming a commercial activity, while in Tajikistan it is still more for subsistence. This can be partially explained by a shortage of land ownership by Tajik farmers and limited access to pastures. While the overall context in the target areas for development of livestock is similar in both countries, in Kyrgyzstan households tend more towards grazing natural pastures, while in Tajikistan households

tend to prefer to keep livestock in pastures near their houses.

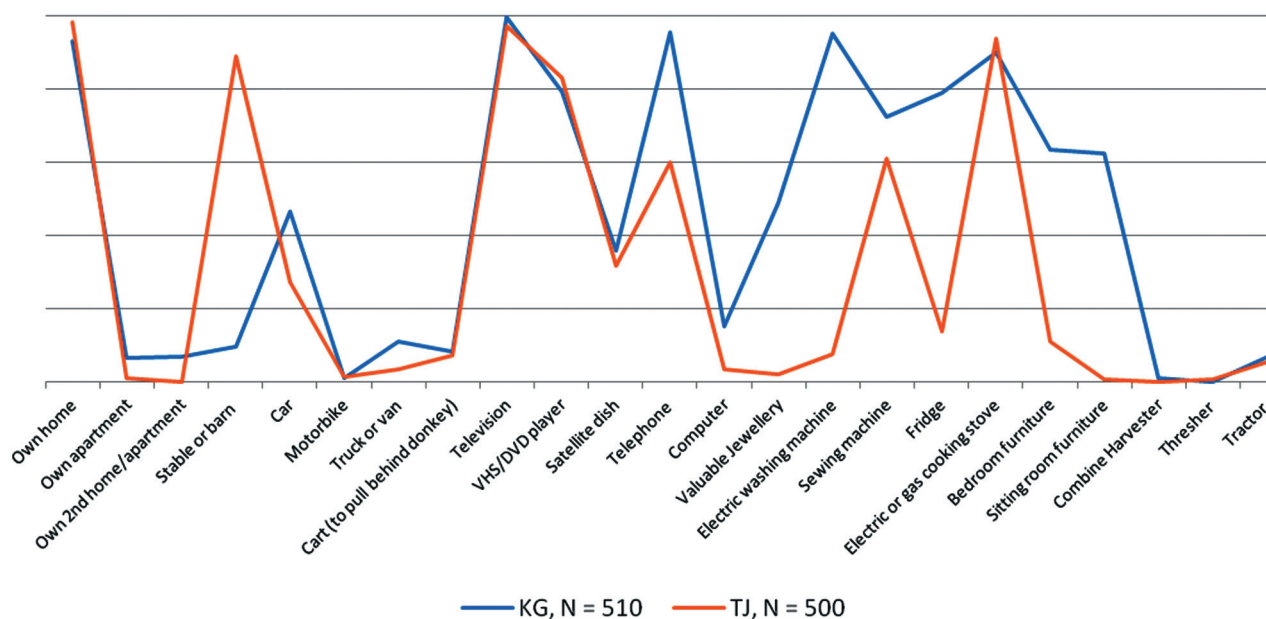
Figure 2. Average Number of Livestock per Household in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan



Source: Baseline survey in LMDP (Kyrgyzstan) and LPDP (Tajikistan) funded by IFAD, 2014

9 S. Sedik, "The feed-livestock nexus in Tajikistan: Livestock development policy in transition," FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia Policy Studies on Rural Transition, 2009.

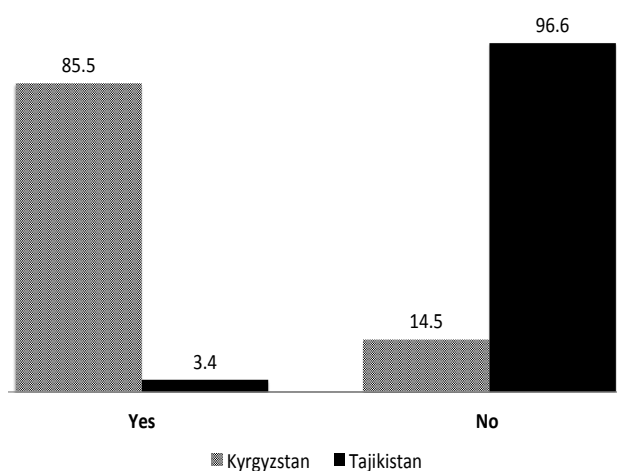
Figure 3. Ownership of Assets by Households in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan



Source: Baseline survey in LMDP (Kyrgyzstan) and LPDP (Tajikistan) funded by IFAD, 2014

The tendency in Tajikistan to keep animals in sheds year round can be partially explained by the limited access to pastures. Thus, the LPDP survey in both countries revealed huge differences in access to pastureland: more than 96 percent of interviewees said that they do not have the right to use pastures, while less than 15 percent have limited access to pastures in Kyrgyzstan. Pasture access in Kyrgyzstan is easier and seems to contribute to the commercialization of the livestock sub-sector.

Figure 4. Use of Pastures or Acquired Rights to Pastures



Source: Baseline survey in LMDP (Kyrgyzstan) and LPDP (Tajikistan) funded by IFAD, 2014

Pasture Reforms Overview

Kyrgyzstan

To boost livestock productivity, provide fair access to pastures, mitigate conflicts among users, and ensure environmentally sustainable use, the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan revised existing management policies and pasture-tenure systems. These reforms have been launched with support from the World Bank, IFAD, and bilateral donors. As a result of several years of piloting and stakeholders' discussions, Kyrgyzstan adopted a new pasture law in 2009. Tajikistan followed in 2013, with similarities aimed at decentralizing pasture management to the lowest administrative level and to pasture users' associations. However, the pace and outcomes of the reform processes in two countries have been different.

With the collapse of the collective farms in Kyrgyzstan in early 1990s, arable land was privatized by their members' households, when individuals employed earlier in collectives received equal land share. Each member of former collective farms was entitled to land share and assets share in the form of livestock, machinery, facilities and other equipment. All arable land in Kyrgyzstan was privatized by the end of the 1990s and each household received a share of irrigated, dry lands and hay land. The size of plots varied depending on availability of land in the area. Pastures remained state owned and have been man-

aged by state authorities at three levels: regional state administrations managed remotely from villages' pastures, which were used for grazing in summer period; district authorities managed pastures that were in the middle belt of the mountains and were used in spring-fall; and local governments (*aiyl okmotu*) managed village pastures that were grazed during winter period.

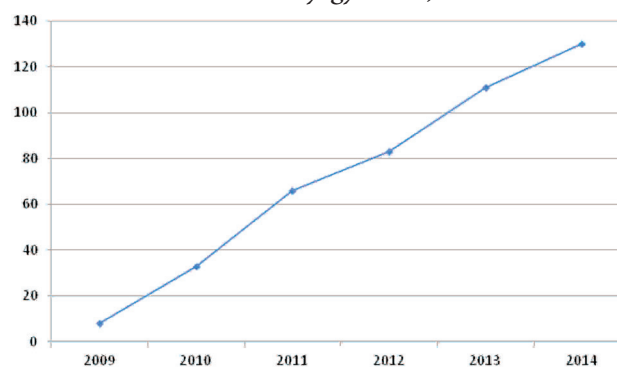
Pastures by law were supposed to be leased by these authorities for 5-10 years through competitive auctions and subleases were not allowed. Payments for pasture use were based on land area leased and paid to the respective authorities. Such a fragmented management system was not conducive for effective and sustainable use and created many issues with corruption and uneven access. Pastures all over the country were leased by wealthier people who were equipped to participate in auctions and then subleased these pastures informally to communities. Payment based on land area led to overgrazing of pastures, because people leased a small area and grazed livestock beyond its carrying capacity. Such overgrazing and degradation of pastures was especially severe near villages, and pasture fees were not collected properly.

The pasture law adopted in 2009 completely changed the management structure. Though pasture resources remain under state control, the management function devolved to local governments. The law went even further, giving communities the right to form users' unions to manage pasture resources. To ensure sustainable use, pasture users have to elaborate and enforce pasture management plans for 3-5 years, and payment based on number of animal heads to promote mobility and avoid resource degradation.

Pasture management reforms in Kyrgyzstan were led by the Pasture Department under the Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration, which elaborated policies, formulated legislation and monitored work on the ground. It played crucial role in the changes. These reforms are still at the initial stage; pasture users' unions are still young institutions and need long-term support to strengthen. However, there are already results, such as an increase in the collection of pasture fees, in investments in pasture improvements and infrastructure, and the number of conflicts has dramatically decreased. According to the Pasture Department collection of pasture-use

fees significantly increased between 2009 and 2014. In 2014, collection of pasture-use fees reached 130 million Kyrgyz soms which is more than 15 times higher than in 2009 when the reforms were launched. Significant investments in pasture infrastructure were made from 2010 to 2014: more than 1,000 bridges for moving cattle to distant pastures were built and/or renovated, more than 7,000 km of roads were built and/or renovated, and more than 400 water points (interceptor ditches) were built and/or rehabilitated.

Figure 5. Collection of Pasture Fees in Kyrgyzstan (In Million Kyrgyz Som)



Source: Pasture Department under the Ministry of Agriculture of Kyrgyz Republic Tajikistan

Despite of the recognized importance of the role of livestock husbandry for both poverty alleviation in rural areas and for natural resource protection, sustainable pasture management until recently was not included in the policies, strategies or plans for natural resource use and forest management in Tajikistan.¹⁰ Tajikistan only started pasture reforms a few years ago following Kyrgyz model, with an aim to devolve management to the local level. However, these reforms suffer from a piecemeal approach and have not yet brought expected outcomes.

Pastures in Tajikistan during Soviet times were also managed by the state and collective farms. With the arable land privatization and restructuring of these farms into smaller units, many pasturelands were left *de facto* outside of any oversight and have been grazed on an "open access" basis. Following the experience of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan's government decided to adopt a pasture law in March 2013. The initial draft of the law was quite similar to the 2009 Pasture law in Kyrgyzstan that gave more power, functions and responsibilities to users' groups at the village level with the intention of empowering them

10 "Tajikistan Environmental Performance Review," *Second Review Synopsis*. United Nations, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, New York/Geneva, 2012.

to sustainably and efficiently manage this resource. However, this policy met significant opposition from vested interests and high-level politicians.¹¹ Thus the law was significantly revised from the Kyrgyz prototype after reviews in the government and parliament (Table 3).

Table 3. Key Differences in the Pasture Legal Framework in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Implications
Pastures are state owned and the state has the responsibility to develop policy and legislation and oversee management and use. The Ministry of Agriculture, specifically the Pasture Department, is the authorized state body.	Pastures are state owned and the state has the responsibility to develop policy and legislation and oversee management and use. On August 2015, the State Committee for Land Management and Geodesy of Tajikistan was assigned as an authorized state body responsible for the pasture management and the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Tajikistan was assigned as an authorized state body responsible for the pasture use.	Though recently the government has assigned responsible bodies for pasture management and use in Tajikistan, there is ambiguity with two agencies managing one resource, and no capacity in these agencies to advance pasture-management reforms in the country. Projects lack ownership and thus sustainability.
The pasture management function devolved to the lowest level of government: rural municipalities, which have the right to devolve it further to users' groups. No direct individual access to pasture allocation is allowed; it is done only via users' groups to ensure transparency and equity.	Pasture management was devolved to the commissions at the district level, which do not exist. These commissions are to be established but there are no clear regulations about how they should be formed.	Committees to be established at the district level in Tajikistan have no supplemental regulations on decision-making powers and processes, functions, responsibilities, or rights. They have to be funded to develop comprehensive pasture-management plans. This did not happen and they do not exist outside of the projects' areas, making the pasture-management arrangement unsustainable.
Pasture Users' Unions (PUU) are made up of all members of the community by law. Access to pastures is only through the membership in the PUU.	Access to pasture use can be either through Pasture Users' Unions as a community based group of users, or individually: any user within or outside of the community can apply for a pasture lease.	The condition in the pasture law of Tajikistan undermines the incentive to establish community groups, and better-off farmers continue to get better access directly. The PUU as an institution does not work because of a lack of incentives or requirements for users to access pasture-lease rights through that institution.
PUU are responsible for pasture management and collecting fees. PUU collects pasture use fees to be directed towards implementation of the pasture management plans.	PUU can apply to district committees to obtain lease rights to pasture land. The pasture land tax goes to district level authorities. No pasture use fees are required.	PUU in Tajikistan have no financial basis to manage or improve pasturelands.

The new pasture law as it was adopted by Tajikistan's government in 2013 is confusing: it does not provide stakeholders an institutional framework or mechanisms. Implementing agencies, stakeholders and beneficiaries face uncertainty about implementation strategies and mechanisms and the functions and responsibilities of partners and beneficiaries. At the same time, the Ministry of Agriculture faces challenges in developing a policy and legal framework of regulations and guidelines to support implementation of this Pasture law.¹² IFAD and the government of Tajikistan's funded a Livestock and

11 Andreas Wilkes, *Institutional analysis on pasture management in Tajikistan* (Freiburg: UNIQUE Forestry and Land Use GmbH, October 2014).

Pasture Development Project aimed to provide technical support to the Ministry of Agriculture to review and revise the Pasture law and introduce relevant and necessary changes to strengthen the bases of fair and sustainable pasture management in the country. The project's proposed amendments mainly addressed the role of the Pasture Users Unions (PUUs) with the ambition of strengthening their role in pasture management and in the decision-making process, and attempted to clarify ambiguous clauses and articles of the existing version of the law. In total, more than twenty amendments, including the establishment of a National Pasture Development Fund to generate and accumulate finances for pasture improvements, were proposed to the Tajik government and parliament for review.

The experience of the LPDP implemented only in a limited part of the country shows that due to the government's weak commitment, vague policy and institutional framework, pasture management reform in Tajikistan is progressing extremely slowly and is under the risk of halting due to the lack of a clear policy and inexistent regulatory and normative foundations. The reforms are mainly driven by the international donor organization's projects and programs. However, donor-initiated reforms usually slow down when reaching the offices government officials. Furthermore, the proposed establishment of the National Pasture Development Fund, if approved by the government and parliament, may require a long time to develop the legal and implementation arrangements, since it needs budget allocations either from the state budget or from donor organizations. Both potential funders' procedures require substantial time. For instance, allocating funds from the state budget requires at least one year after establishment of the entity. Support from the international donor organization also requires undergoing a long process of design and approval. In this regard, dedicated capable and operational institutions for pasture management would play a great role in expediting the reforms.

To highlight the slow progress of pasture reform in Tajikistan, according to the Article 9 of the pasture law, the government of Tajikistan listed an "authorized state body" as responsible for pasture manage-

ment and use, which is critical for further reforms. However, it took more than two years to adopt relevant legislative acts and to assign authorized state bodies responsible for pasture management and use. Thus, only in August 2015, as part of ongoing pasture management reform, the government of Tajikistan adopted Decree #509, which assigned the State Committee for Land Management and Geodesy of Tajikistan as an authorized state body responsible for pasture management, and the Ministry of Agriculture as an authorized state body responsible for the pasture use.¹³ However, until now no further instruction has been adopted, nor has coordination been established between these agencies in order to define the roles and responsibilities of each in detail.

Investment policies and practices are bottlenecks for sustainable pasture management in Tajikistan. In 2015, the government of Tajikistan adopted the state Pasture Development Program for 2016-2020. The Program envisages allocation of 300,000 Tajik Somoni (US\$ 38,000)¹⁴ annually, which is a negligible amount to have a real effect on pasture improvement. Thus, the Program aims to improve only 1,420 ha of pastureland out of 3.85 million ha in the course of this five year program.¹⁵ The Program also takes a piecemeal approach to addressing the improvement of pasture infrastructure largely in the summer pastures, which are mainly used by the state breeding farms and large, better-off individual farmers.

On the other hand, the collection mechanism for pasture use fees by the users and PUUs at the local level has not yet been elaborated or reflected in legislation, though there are enormous efforts by the IFAD project to establish a pasture use fee collection system in the limited districts of the Khatlon region of the country. By contrast, in Kyrgyzstan collection of pasture use fees has increased and, according to the community pasture management plans, pasture use fees are used for construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of the pasture infrastructure as well as for the improvement of pasture conditions and prevention of degradation.

Another outstanding issue to be addressed is pasture demarcation at the local level. With growing attention to the legal status on pasture land tenure, conflicts around pasture demarcation will increase

12 Ibid.

13 The Decree of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan No. 509, August 1, 2015.

14 Pasture Development Program for 2016-2020, The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2015.

15 Ibid.

in the local level. There are many cases when land use certificate holders occupy more pasture areas than they have been entitled to, according to their certificates. Therefore, the process of establishing pasture management commissions at the district level¹⁶ should be accelerated. Though more than three years has passed since the adaptation of pasture law, there has been no commission established and operational at the district level.

The process of the formation of PUU is extremely slow due to a lack of state support for their development, as well as institutional capacity at the national level to facilitate their formation. So far formation of the community based pasture management in Tajikistan has been supported by the international donor community, including three international financial institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which initiated the formation of the first pilot PUUs through its Rural Development Project even before the pasture law was adopted. ABD has established 10 PUUs in the districts under the Republican Subordination in 2013. Following ADB's experience, within the framework of the LPDP, IFAD supported the formation of 203 PUUs in five districts in Khatlon in 2014 and 2015. IFAD announced the expansion of LPDP to another 5 districts in Khatlon in 2016. However, these activities have not yet been initiated.¹⁷ The World Bank's Environmental Land Management and Rural Livelihoods Project has supported the formation of 8 PUUs in four districts of the Rasht area in 2015. Other bilateral donors, such as the Swiss and German governments, have been also active in formation of the several PUUs at the district levels.

PUUs established by donors' projects regularly report on improvements in livestock and pasture productivity. Particularly, PUUs supported by IFAD's and the World Bank's projects regularly report on the improvement of pasture conditions, due to the implementation of pasture rotation, and on increases in livestock productivity.¹⁸

Thus, as of today, around 220 PUUs have been established through the support of donor agencies. However, though more than three years have passed

from the date when the pasture law was adopted, there is no data on established PUUs by local communities themselves. Moreover, the analyses show that the majority of communities, where international donor's projects do not work, are not aware of the Pasture law or about their rights to establish and run PUUs.

The state Pasture Development Program for 2016-2020 does not include any community development activities to support smallholder farmers for formation of PUUs at the local level per se. It also does not envisage any pasture improvement works or construction/rehabilitation of pasture infrastructure that is located in the near-village pastures and used by smallholders. Instead, the Program is focused on Soviet-style activities, such as improving access to summer pastures through reconstructing access roads, including bridges. Because the summer pastures are mainly used by state breeding farms and big individual farmers, the smallholders do not benefit from the implementation of the Program.

Conclusions

Support to livestock husbandry and fair and efficient access to pasture resources for smallholder farmers plays a crucial role in poverty reduction and food security in both countries.¹⁹ However, pasture management reforms in Tajikistan have not yet established a coherent or effective management and use system. The law adopted in 2013 was a piecemeal approach, which created more confusion than a clear, effective, fair and sustainable pasture management system. The Ministry of Agriculture initiated a revision of the pasture law in 2015, establishing a working group where representatives of responsible government ministries and agencies such as the Land Committee, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, and the Tax Committee were included, but improvements have not yet been made.

In addition, weak institutional framework remains one of the biggest bottlenecks to successful

¹⁶ According to the Pasture Law establishment of pasture management commissions at the district level should be carried out.

¹⁷ "Mezhdunarodnye donory vydelyat dlya uluchsheniya sostoyaniya pastbishch Kulyabskogo regiona 24 milliona dollarov," *Asia-Plus*, June 22, 2016, <http://news.tj/ru/news/mezhdunarodnye-donory-vydelyat-dlya-uluchsheniya-sostoyaniya-pastbishch-kulyabskogo-regiona-24m>.

¹⁸ "Efficient Pasture Management and Sustainable Development of Livestock Sector: Achievements, Problems and Prospects," Materials of Conference, November 20, 2015, Dushanbe, Tajikistan; Materials of Annual Conference of Pasture Management Networking Platform, March 15, 2016, Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

¹⁹ Peyrouse, "The multiple paradoxes of the agriculture issue in Central Asia."

pasture reform in Tajikistan. The outdated institutions only hamper the change that could bring economic growth.

Public discussions and awareness-raising campaigns initiated in Tajikistan by international donor organizations and their projects during the last three to four years have started effecting both high level politicians and the general public. More people are concerned about fair and equitable pasture land allocation in country. Thus, in the process of ratification of a new financial agreement between the government of Tajikistan and IFAD on LPDP II, Shukurjon Zuhurov, the Head of the lower Chamber of the Tajik Parliament, stated that "Currently some of the pasture land is on the hand of strangers who have nothing to do with livestock but unilaterally define unfair pasture use fees by themselves, and we should put an end to such practices."²⁰

The process of non-merit based pasture privatization by individuals is an emerging urgent issue for contemporary mountain agro-pastoralism.²¹ Due to unfair pasture land allocation and quickly increasing numbers of livestock, many smallholders face shortages of pasture land in nearby pastures. In this regard the government of Tajikistan should consider pasture land reallocation based on the number of livestock as stipulated in the pasture law. Pastureland realloca-

tion should be considered as an urgent and important issue, otherwise the policy orientation to support livelihoods of poor people will continue to increase the wealth of the influential and wealthier group who has better access to the financial resources. Mobilized and empowered PUUs at the community level can also actively defend and promote their own pasture use rights at different levels.

The Kyrgyz experience demonstrates that users' institutions established on the ground can foster pasture improvements if empowered with the collection of revenues and knowledge on how to spend these funds. Such improvements made by local communities benefit the productivity of pastures, as well as prevent further pasture degradation, through organization and implementation of rotational grazing, as well as seeding pastures and fodder cultivation. The government of Tajikistan should take urgent steps to adopt relevant changes in the legislation to support and encourage an official collection and use of pasture fees by PUUs.

There is a lack of data on the effectiveness of PUUs as an efficient tool for the promotion of sustainable pasture management in Tajikistan. Therefore, sustainability of PUUs as community-based organizations and their role on sustainable pasture management should be investigated further.

20 "Mezhdunarodnye donory vydelyat dlya uluchsheniya sostoyaniya pastbishch Kulyabskogo regiona 24 milliona dollarov."

21 Kerven et al., "Pastoralism and Farming in Central Asia's Mountains."

PART III. ISLAM AND ISLAMISM: SOCIETY AND STATE POLICIES

Contemporary Modes of Islamic Discourse in Kyrgyzstan: Rethinking the Moderate-Extremist Duality

Vincent M. Artman¹ (2016)

Islam's growing political, cultural, and social influence in Central Asia has become a major preoccupation of analysts and policymakers since 1991. Much of this discussion, however, has focused on questions related to security, extremism, and terrorism.² A characteristic motif in this literature is the juxtaposition of "moderate Islam" with "Islamic extremism." The struggle between moderates and extremists, in turn, works to shape a broader geopolitical metanarrative in which Central Asia is constructed as a place of instability, violence, and political repression.³ Some have even depicted the region as being faced with the possibility of a Eurasian "Arab Spring" scenario.⁴

Not surprisingly, the actual religious landscape in Central Asia is substantially more complex than this binary admits: rather than a stark division between local moderates and foreign extremists, closer inspection reveals a myriad of different theologies, religious groups and movements, and discourses about the proper role of religion in society. In the end, attempts to conceptualize Islam in terms of generalized

moderate and extremist variants obscures the very real diversity that exists *within* such categories. The end result is an inaccurate and unhelpful depiction of the role of religion in Central Asia today.

The focus of this brief will be Kyrgyzstan, where government regulation of religion has typically been less severe than in neighboring states, affording greater freedom for debates within the religious sphere to occur openly. Indeed, one of the most striking developments in Kyrgyzstan since the 1990s has been the growth of popular interest in Islam and the increasingly visible participation of Muslims in the public sphere. At the time of the Soviet collapse, however, Kyrgyzstan was widely considered by Western observers to be one of the most secularized republics in the Soviet Union.⁵ Even as late as 1999, one scholar wrote, "At first glance, there is no obvious sign that Islam is the official religion of the Kyrgyz. When you walk in the street of the capital, you feel only the cold breeze of 'Scientific Atheism' blowing in your face."⁶

Such an assessment would make little sense today: even in the country's cosmopolitan capital, Bishkek, it is common to see people in modern professional attire walking side by side with friends wearing fashionable, brightly-colored hijabs.⁷

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2 An example of this genre is Roald Sagdeev, *Islam and Central Asia: An Enduring Legacy or an Evolving Threat?* (Washington, DC: Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 2000). See also S. Frederick Starr, "Moderate Islam? Look to Central Asia," *New York Times*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/27/opinion/moderate-islam-look-to-central-asia.html>; Aidai Masykkanova, "Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan Is No Myth," *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/06/radicalization-in-kyrgyzstan-is-no-myth/>.

3 For more on this "discourse of danger," see: John Heathershaw and Nick Megoran, "Contesting Danger: A New Agenda for Policy and Scholarship on Central Asia," *International Affairs* 87, no. 3 (2011): 589-612.

4 Robert D. Kaplan and Lauren Goodrich, "Central Asian Tensions," *Stratfor*, January 30, 2013, <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/central-asian-tensions>.

5 A typical assessment notes: "The Kyrgyz received Islam late, and lightly, and Soviet rule left them with a vague conception of being 'Muslim,' as much in a cultural as a religious sense," cited from Robert Lowe, "Nation Building in the Kyrgyz Republic," in *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, ed. Tom Everett-Heath (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 122.

6 Michel Gardaz, "In Search of Islam in Kyrgyzstan," *Religion* 29, no. 3 (1999): 276.

7 As in many other countries, the practice of veiling has taken on a political dimension in Kyrgyzstan. See Nate Schenckan, "Kyrgyzstan: Hijab Controversy Changes Debate over Islam's Role in Society," *Eurasianet*, October 12, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64306>.

Vendors sell Islamic literature on the streets and in public markets, and stores advertise their stocks of *halal* products.⁸ Theologians hold popular seminars in conference centers in the city center, which are attended by hundreds of young men and women, and parents can send their children to any number of Islamic schools.⁹ Consumers can now do business with any of several Islamic banks, and universities, government offices, and even bazaars often set aside space for a *namazkhana*, or prayer room. On Fridays, the streets around Bishkek's Central Mosque are even more choked with traffic than usual, while the mosque itself is usually filled beyond capacity. During warmer seasons hundreds of men lay their prayer rugs on the ground in the courtyard and perform prayers (*namaz*) under the open sky.

The growing conspicuousness of such conventional markers of religiosity, however, only tells part of the story, and it would be a mistake to interpret these developments as evidence of a general consensus about the role of Islam in Kyrgyzstan today. After all, the so-called "Islamic revival"¹⁰ in Central Asia has never been a uniform phenomenon. Historically, there have always been many competing streams of Islamic discourse and practice in the region. A full accounting of this diversity is well beyond the scope of this paper.¹¹ Instead, what follows is a brief examination of some of the many cleavages and perspectives that make up the contemporary religious scene in Kyrgyzstan, where the meaning of terms like extremist and moderate is everything but self-evident.

Textualists

Much of the literature on Islam in Central Asia devotes a disproportionate amount of attention to a

motley assortment of what are called "Islamic extremist" organizations. At different times this list has included groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tablighi Jama'at, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Jihadist Union, al-Qaeda, and, most recently, the Islamic State. It is worth noting several key points about these organizations, which are in many respects quite different from one another. First, not all of them embrace violence, and those that are violent have had a negligible impact in Central Asia. For example, according to one account, "From 2001-2013, there were three attacks that have apparently been claimed by such groups, with a total of 11 deaths."¹² Despite their apparent impotence, the fear of violent extremism has nevertheless been seized upon by governments in the region as a convenient justification both for domestic political repression and as a means of "ensuring the cooperation and support of the West but also of Russia and China."¹³

A second crucial point is that the very designation of extremist likely obscures more than it explains. Indeed, one of the few characteristics held in common among the various extremist groups in Central Asia is a perspective on Islam that might be referred to as "textualist" or "originalist." This perspective tends to understand the Qur'an and Hadith (accounts of the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad) as the only authoritative source of religious norms and rejects much of the broader Islamic scholarly tradition that developed over the centuries. From the textualist point of view, moreover, local customs and traditions that came to characterize the practice of Islam in various geographical and social contexts are condemned as *bid'a*, or "unwelcome innovations." Textualists of all stripes, meanwhile, typically claim to represent a more pure and authentic form of Islam; however it is not a given that this purist perspective necessarily constitutes extremism.

8 There are several competing standards for *halal* certification in Kyrgyzstan, a fact which has caused some confusion for consumers. See "Kyrgyzstan: Rival Halal Standards Means 'Trust with Your Eyes Closed,'" *Eurasianet*, January 15, 2014, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67943>.

9 Bruno De Cordier, "Kyrgyzstan: Fledgling Islamic Charity Reflects Growing Role for Religion," *Eurasianet*, December 8, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62529>.

10 Mehrdad Haghayeghi, "Islamic Revival in the Central Asian Republics," *Central Asian Survey* 13, no. 2 (1994): 249-66.

11 To get a sense of this diversity during the post-Soviet era see: Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Maria Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2007); Bruce Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan: Kazak Religion and Collective Memory* (London: Routledge, 2001); Johan Rasanayagam, *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

12 John Heathershaw and David Montgomery, "The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics," *Research Paper*. Chatham House, London, November 2014, 14.

13 Bayram Balci and Didier Chaudet, "Jihadism in Central Asia: A Credible Threat after the Western Withdrawal from Afghanistan?," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2014. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/08/13/jihadism-in-central-asia-credible-threat-after-western-withdrawal-from-afghanistan>.

A third, related, point is that the term “extremist” is misleading because it usually serves as an umbrella label that conflates truly violent radical organizations like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, non-violent, albeit revolutionary, movements like Hizb ut-Tahrir, and wholly apolitical groups like the Tablighi Jama’at. While this kind of terminological fuzziness often works to the advantage of state regimes interested in controlling the religious sphere, it tells us little about the nature of the organizations in question.

Hizb ut-Tahrir, for example, is banned throughout Central Asia because the group’s propaganda advocates the establishment of an Islamic caliphate. Moreover, the group is often viewed as an “Uzbek phenomenon”¹⁴ in Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan, this perception plays into prevalent narratives regarding the potential for a repeat of the traumatic inter-ethnic violence akin to that which ravaged the country in 2010.¹⁵ At the same time, Hizb ut-Tahrir has won many adherents by providing social goods that the Kyrgyz state has been unable to supply.¹⁶ Thus, while Hizb ut-Tahrir’s goal of establishing a caliphate is shared with violent organizations like the Islamic State, its non-violent, gradualist methods are not; simply grouping both together as “extremist” obscures the very real differences between them.

In a similar fashion, the case of the Tablighi Jama’at clearly illustrates the difficulties in using the broad, overarching terminology of “extremism” to refer to textualist Islamic movements. The group, whose name loosely translates as “the society of spreading the message,” was founded in the 1920s in India, and its primary mission is “faith renewal... to make nominal Muslims good practicing Muslims by helping them to get rid of un-Islamic accretions and observe Islamic rituals faithfully.”¹⁷ However, like

Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Tablighi Jama’at is banned as an “extremist” organization throughout most of Central Asia, despite the fact that it is non-violent and expressly apolitical. In most cases, the unstated motivation behind such restrictions is a desire on the part of governments to maintain a monopoly over the religious sphere.¹⁸

In Kyrgyzstan, however, the Tablighi Jama’at operates openly, and in fact appears to be widely influential. In some respects, the group’s appeal is not difficult to understand: its message of helping Muslims to practice a more “pure” Islam based solely in the Qur’an and Hadith, attracts many who are in search of what they feel to be a more authentic religious experience. Moreover, the fact that the Tablighi Jama’at is an apolitical movement means that participation in its activities, especially *daavat*,¹⁹ the act of inviting fellow Muslims to pray at the mosque, provides a risk-free avenue for exploring and expressing a self-consciously Islamic identity rooted in the foundational texts of the religion.²⁰

Yet, even in Kyrgyzstan the Tablighi Jama’at is not entirely without detractors. Adherents have sometimes provoked controversy for wearing what are sometimes derided as “Pakistani” styles of dress – “long tunics, baggy pants and turbans in emulation of the Prophet Mohammed.”²¹ Many Kyrgyz consider such clothes to be culturally inappropriate, or even a potential sign of extremist beliefs. In response to the controversy, members of Tablighi Jama’at have been encouraged to adopt more familiar “national” styles, including the traditional Kyrgyz *kalpak* hat.

While such compromises appeased some critics, officials in the State Commission for Religious Affairs continue to express skepticism about the group’s ultimate goals. Some suggest that the Tablighi Jama’at

14 Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: the Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2010), 58.

15 Igor Rotar, “Situation in Southern Kyrgyzstan Continues to Smolder Two Years Since Ethnic Riots,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9, no. 115 (2012), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=39507](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=39507).

16 Eric McGlinchey, “Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 56, no. 3 (2009): 16-28.

17 Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 135.

18 Gulnoza Saidzimova, “Uzbekistan: Tabligh Jamaat Group Added to Uzbek Government’s Blacklist,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 20, 2004, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1056505.html>

19 *Davaat* is the local pronunciation of the Arabic word *dawa*. So prevalent is this activity in Kyrgyzstan that members of Tablighi Jama’at are colloquially referred to as *daavatchilar*.

20 Numerous other Islamic funds and organizations also operate in Kyrgyzstan, including the Turkey-based Nurçular (also known as the Gülen movement), Mutakallim, an Islamic women’s organization, and Adep Bashati, a Kyrgyz group whose leadership received training at the renowned Al Azhar University in Egypt. Like the Tablighi Jama’at, these organizations often operate schools and medresehs, run charities, and provide other kinds of social services. The Kyrgyz government maintains a list of officially registered organizations, which can be found here: <http://www.religion.gov.kg/ru/muslim.html>

21 Nate Schenkan, “Kyrgyzstan: Islamic Revivalist Movement Quietly Flourishing,” *Eurasianet*, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64378>.

could be “laying the groundwork” for radical extremist movements.²² Other observers, such as the popular Kyrgyz theologian Kadyr Malikov and Emil Nasritdinov, a professor of anthropology who has himself participated in *daavat*,²³ argue that the group actually siphons potential recruits away from more violent groups by providing Kyrgyz Muslims with an apolitical avenue for exploring the possibilities of faith renewal.²⁴ Nevertheless, the Kyrgyz government is still considering the possibility of following the example of its Central Asian neighbors and banning the Tablighi Jama’at as an extremist organization alongside the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.

In the end, such overly broad and politically arbitrary definitions of what constitutes extremism ultimately reinforce the notion that the term itself is usually of limited analytical value.

Normative Hanafism

If the word “extremist” lacks definitional clarity, then the term “moderate” is similarly imprecise. For example, in Kyrgyzstan the definition of “moderate Islam” is in many respects a product of the mobilization of theology in the service of state policy. According to an official report entitled the “Conception of State Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Religious Sphere 2014–2020”: “[I]n order to ensure national security and cultural identity, the state is creating conditions for the strengthening and development of traditional forms of moderate Sunni Islam, based on the religious-legal school of Hanafism and the Maturidi creed.”²⁵ To this end, the government has begun to promote what it calls “traditional Kyrgyz Islam,” which “does not place in opposition Islamic beliefs and national traditions and customs, and has an ideological basis for the development of partnership with the state.”²⁶

As a secular entity the government is constrained in the degree to which it directly intervenes in theological issues. Nevertheless, the State Commission for Religious Affairs, a secular body under the jurisdiction of the President of Kyrgyzstan, has broad authority to “regulate the religious sphere or other activities of religious organizations through laws and other normative legal acts.”²⁷ At the same time, Kyrgyzstan also has an “official” Islamic governing body, which is called the Muslim Spiritual Authority of Kyrgyzstan. Although this institution, which is also known as the Muftiate, is legally separate from the Kyrgyz government, in practice it cooperates closely with the state. Moreover, unlike the State Commission for Religious Affairs, the Muftiate is an explicitly religious body, and it is composed of *ulema*, or Islamic scholars.

A significant proportion of the Muftiate’s activities is aimed at spreading “correct” knowledge of Islam among Kyrgyz Muslims.²⁸ In addition to holding classes on the basics of the Qur’an and Hadith, the Muftiate also publishes religious literature, much of which is devoted to outlining the basics of Islamic belief and ritual, providing answers to common questions about religion, giving religiously-grounded advice on topics like marriage, child-rearing, and so forth. But the Muftiate’s efforts to promote knowledge of Islam are not limited to remedial religious instruction; they are also intended to foster the development of patriotic, nationalist, political quietist, and moderate Kyrgyz Muslims.

The Muftiate thus provides important theological underpinning to the state’s broader efforts to combat extremism. For example, along with representatives from the president’s Security Council and the State Committee for Religious Affairs, the Muftiate now evaluates imams on their “knowledge of Islam.”²⁹ The tacit goal of this process is to ensure that imams are not spreading religious extremism, which is defined

22 Personal communication.

23 Emil Nasritdinov, “Spiritual Nomadism and Central Asian Tablighi Travelers,” *Ab Imperio* 2 (2012): 145–167.

24 Personal communications.

25 “Kontseptsiya gosudarstvennoy politiki Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki v religioznoy sfere na 2014–2020 gody,” 17, http://www.president.kg/files/docs/kontseptsiya_na_rus._prilojenie_k_ukazu_pkr-1.pdf. The Hanafi *madhhab* is one of the four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence, and the one that is most widespread in Central Asia. Typically, Hanafism allows for more consideration of local customs and practices than other *madhhabs*, and is sometimes interpreted as advocating political quietism. Maturidism is a philosophical doctrine that grew out of the teachings of Abu Mansur Muhammad al-Maturidi, a tenth century philosopher from Samarkand. Maturidism affords a greater role to human reason and free will than some other schools of thought.

26 *Ibid.*, 10.

27 Z. Chotaev, G. Isaeva, and Z. Tursubekov, “Metodicheskie materialy: gosudarstvennaya politika v religioznoy sfere: zakonodatel’nye osnovy, kontseptsiya i “traditsionnyy islam” v Kyrgyzstane,” Bishkek, Gosudarstvennaya komissiya po delam religii Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki, 2015, 12.

28 Nazira Kurbanova, “Islamic Education in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Journal of Social and Political Studies* 15, no. 1 (2014): 90–103.

29 “Kyrgyzstan Testing Clerics’ Knowledge of Islam,” *Eurasianet*, May 28, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/73636>.

as “adherence to violence and radical acts directed towards the unconstitutional change of the existing order, and threatening the integrity and security of the state, society, or individuals using religious rhetoric.”³⁰ Similarly, the Muftiate argued that “real sacred ‘jihad’ is...a struggle against ‘terrorism,’ which is accursed by God and the angels.”³¹ In 2015 the Muftiate hosted an international symposium on “Extremism and Takfirism³² as a Threat to Modern Society.” This symposium brought together religious officials from across the Central Asian region, as well as from countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, India, and Pakistan, to discuss the problem of extremism and terrorism. Among the resolutions adopted by the delegates were a declaration that terrorism and violence are contrary to the teachings of Islam and calls to put an end to communal, tribal, and sectarian divisions among Muslims.³³

Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev himself used the symposium as an occasion to remind people of the nature of traditional Kyrgyz Islam. In remarks from a local newspaper, which were reproduced in the preface to the symposium proceedings, Atambayev noted, “The Kyrgyz people were never religious fanatics. That our forefathers belonged to the Hanafi *madhab* was not a coincidence. I would like to stress one feature of the Hanafi *madhab*. In modern parlance: it was tolerant.”³⁴ Similarly, an analyst in the Kyrgyz Commission for Religious Affairs, commented: “Maturidism is [our] traditional Islam. It says that Islam and the state should live in harmony and that there is no necessity to build a caliphate.”³⁵ The “Conception of State Policy” also highlights the patriotic and quietist character of Maturidism, noting that “[t]his school, which is shared by the majority of the citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic, has a historically proven capacity for tolerance, good-neighborliness,

and respect in conditions of ethnic and religious diversity.”³⁶

The defection of what constitutes moderate Islam in Kyrgyzstan today therefore effectively conforms to the government’s preferred qualities: politically inert, loyal to the state and the existing order, and unreceptive to extremist ideologies like “takfirism” or calls to establish a caliphate in Central Asia. It is important to recognize, however, that the fact that traditional Kyrgyz Islam is rooted in the venerable Hanafi tradition imbues it with a theological legitimacy that is independent of its political utility. However, the traditional Kyrgyz Islam promoted by the state and the Muftiate is not the only form of moderate, culturally authoritative Islam in Kyrgyzstan.

Traditionalists

According to a report published by the State Commission for Religious Affairs, Islam, “[h]aving become an integral part of our culture and history...exists in harmony with the customs and traditions that spread in Kyrgyzstan over the course of centuries.”³⁷ From the perspective of the state and the Muftiate, “tradition” refers to moderate, tolerant Hanafism. But for many Kyrgyz, the concept of tradition also refers to a broad constellation of beliefs and practices that are linked to the concept of *kyrgyzchylyk*, which translates roughly as “the essence of Kyrgyzness.”

Although it is a somewhat vague concept, *kyrgyzchylyk* typically includes practices like divination, performing *ziyarat* to *mazars*,³⁸ attending to the spirits of the ancestors, and various other practices, many of which are linked with the Kyrgyz people’s nomadic past. Importantly, for many Kyrgyz such tradition-

30 “Kontseptsiya gosudarstvennoy politiki Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki v religioznoy sfere na 2014-2020 gody,” 34.

31 F. Yusupov, “Musul’manin ne terrorist – terrorist ne musul’manin, paralleli mezhdu dzhikhadom i terrorizmom,” Muftiyat KR, March 17, 2016, <http://muftiyat.kg/ru/article/musulmanin-ne-terrorist-terrorist-ne-musulmanin-paralleli-mezhdu-dzhikhadom-i-terrorizmom>.

32 To accuse someone of *takfir* is to accuse them of being an unbeliever, even of they call themselves a Muslim. “Takfirism” is thus not a coherent ideology, as the name might suggest, but rather a label that refers to a broad spectrum of purist or extremist viewpoints that categorize many, if not most, other Muslims as having been corrupted by un-Islamic ideas and practices.

33 “Ekstremizm zhana takfirizm koomgo keltirgen korkunuchu”: I el aralyk simpoziumu,” Muftiyat KR, April 16, 2015, http://muftiyat.kg/sites/default/files/books/simozium_2015_final_akyrky.pdf.

34 Ibid., 3.

35 Personal communication.

36 “Kontseptsiya gosudarstvennoy politiki Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki v religioznoy sfere na 2014-2020 gody,” 17.

37 Chotaev, Isaeva, and Tursubekov, “Metodicheskie materialy,” 19.

38 *Ziyarat* is the practice of performing a pilgrimage to a *mazar*, or a sacred place. *Mazars* can include the graves of ancestors or saints, as well as natural sacred sites like springs, trees, or stones, which are said to have a special holy quality. Visiting *mazars* is an important aspect of religious practice throughout Central Asia.

al practices are also closely intertwined with Islam. Although the two are not necessarily conceived of as being identical, the boundaries that separate one from the other are often indistinct. It is important to note, however, that this “traditionalist Islam” does not constitute an organized movement or group; rather it should be understood as a perspective on the faith that is less concerned with *bid‘a* than it is with honoring Kyrgyz customs and traditions.

Not surprisingly, many practices associated with *kyrgyzchylyk*, and thus with traditionalist Islam, are frequently excoriated as “un-Islamic” or as “shamanism” by textualists and others. For example, members of the Tablighi Jama‘at sometimes argue that people who engage in fortune telling derive their powers from *djinni*, or evil spirits.³⁹ The supernatural powers of healing and fortune telling manifested by clairvoyants, from this perspective, are simply intended to mislead people and tempt them into *shirk* (idolatry or polytheism). Similarly, the Muftiate itself has argued, “There are still many superstitions in Kyrgyzchilik [sic] that go against Islam and are sinful...The one who commits *shirk* certainly can expect to be thrown into the fires of hell.”⁴⁰

Traditionalism’s historical connection with Kyrgyz culture and identity, however, also imbues it with prestige and authority. Many traditionalists view both textualist interpretations of Islam and the normative Hanafism promoted by the Muftiate as posing a threat to authentic Kyrgyz Islamic customs. As one traditionalist argues, “Pure Qur’an is good. But today’s Islam is a negative influence. It is destroying all our traditions. Women have started wearing the *hijab*. People are wearing Pakistani clothes. The number of mosques has grown in villages. Mullahs are prohibiting crying and saying *koshok* [mourning of the dead] at funerals. Our ancestors accepted *pure* Islam. It didn’t contradict our culture.”⁴¹

Suggestions that traditional practices are somehow not consistent with Islam are often met with confusion and scorn. As one practitioner argues, “[W]e perform *namaz*, read and recite the Qur’an, we

often do feasts of sacrifice, and perform alms. [Islam] is in our blood, and it is passed to us from our ancestors from seven generations ago.”⁴² Indeed, despite pressures from the Muftiate to conform to normative Hanafism, one observer notes that people with “pieces of crucial local knowledge – knowledge of texts in Farsi and Chagatay Turkic, knowledge of rituals at *mazars*, local vernacular poetry, and songs and epics – have asserted their voices as purveyors of real and legitimate Central Asian Islamic traditions.”⁴³

Traditionalism thus represents another authoritative modality of Islamic belief and practice in contemporary Kyrgyzstan, one that has strong roots in culture, history, and tradition. At the same time, however, traditionalism occupies a peculiar position outside the boundaries both of extremism and normative moderate Hanafism. But, since traditionalists do not constitute an organized group or movement, they have not attracted the attention of the state. Consequently, disputes over belief and practice between traditionalists and the Muftiate tend to play out on the theological and rhetorical planes, rather than in the realms of politics and national security.

Conclusion

The meta-discourse about the nature and threat of Islamic extremism, both in Central Asia and elsewhere, is likely to continue unabated. However, as the furor over President Obama’s refusal to blame “radical Islam” in wake of the June 2016 massacre in Orlando has made clear, the act of labeling extremism is not neutral.⁴⁴ Some have accused the President of ignoring the reality of the threat posed by extremists, while others, including the President himself, have countered by pointing out that simply using the label “radical Islam” achieves little of substance. Much the same argument could be made regarding the habit of classifying Islam in Central Asia into moderate and extremist varieties: as the foregoing

39 Personal communication.

40 Quoted in Noor Borbieva, “Parallel Worlds: Male and Female Islam in the Central Asian Republics” (paper presented at the International Conference “The Turks and Islam,” Bloomington, Indiana, 2010), 7.

41 Personal communication.

42 Ibid.

43 Vernon Schubel, “Islam’s Diverse Paths: Seeking the ‘Real Islam’ in Central Asia,” in *Sacred Sites of Ysyk-Köl: Spiritual Power, Pilgrimage, and Art*, ed. Gulnara Aitpaeva and Aida Egemberdieva (Bishkek: Aigine, 2009), 281.

44 Clementine Amidon, “Why We’re Debating the Term ‘Radical Islam’ in the Wake of Orlando,” *Huffington Post*, June 17, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kicker/why-were-debating-the-ter_b_10488686.html.

has demonstrated, just what these labels mean is not always self-evident, and their apparent homogeneity begins to break down upon closer inspection.

In the end, “moderate” and “extremist” are essentially political categories, not descriptive or analytical ones. Such labels not only mask the considerable diversity of religious practice and theological perspectives in Central Asia, but they also work to perpetuate dominant geopolitical metanarratives about the region as a zone of danger and instability. Understanding Islam’s role in contemporary Central Asia will therefore require us to reassess the value of

these labels and the ideological baggage they come freighted with. Once we have freed ourselves from the necessity of deciding who counts as an “extremist” and who counts as a “moderate” we can begin to turn our attention to the more difficult – and more rewarding – project of trying to make sense of the ways in which different actors mobilize Islamic authority, mapping the fault lines that separate disparate modalities of belief and practice, and observing how these contestations shape policy, theology, and public discourse.

Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Kyrgyzstan

Noah Tucker¹ (2016)

Overview: Kyrgyzstan and ISIS

Kyrgyzstani government estimates of the number of citizens who have traveled to Iraq and Syria to participate in the conflict there – primarily, it claims, in the ranks of ISIS – vary from 200 to over 400, and domestic pundits have at times offered estimates that exceed this number significantly. As of February 2016, however, only a single Kyrgyzstani citizen has publicly identified himself as a member of ISIS, and the group has released only one short video message targeting the country. A small number, 5 to 10, of unidentified ethnic Uzbek Kyrgyzstanis have also appeared in ISIS videos. The independent UK-based International Center for the Study of Radicalization, which tracks foreign fighter flow into Syria and Iraq using a multi-source methodology, estimated that only 100 citizens of Kyrgyzstan were participating in the conflict as of early 2015: observations of Central Asian jihadist media conducted for this project would support these lower numbers. Most Kyrgyzstani citizens participating in the Syrian conflict appear to be ethnic Uzbeks fighting in or allied with Jabhat al Nusra (ANF), whose Uzbek battalion is led by Southern Kyrgyzstani commander from Osh.

Public and state attention and social media discussion about the Syrian conflict, however, focus almost exclusively on ISIS and treat the potential expansion of the Islamic State as the country's primary security threat. In July 2015 the Kyrgyzstani National Security Service (GKNB) claimed, without offering any significant evidence, that it killed most of the members of the region's first ISIS cell in a Bishkek raid. It said also they disrupted terrorist attacks allegedly planned on the public and against the Russian air base at Kant, asserting that longtime political enemies associated with the ousted Bakiyev regime and Russia-based organized crime networks had "merged" with ISIS to plan the attacks. Overall,

online activity by Kyrgyzstani citizens self-identified with ISIS, including recruiting operations and media messaging, is exponentially lower than neighboring Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, or Kazakhstan but public and state discourse about the alleged ISIS threat – facilitated, as in Tajikistan, by a relatively free but deeply partisan media environment – is fervent, fractured, and conspiratorial: public participants in the social media discourse about ISIS in Kyrgyzstan not only dispute the numbers of citizens who have joined the group, but whether or not it exists at all.

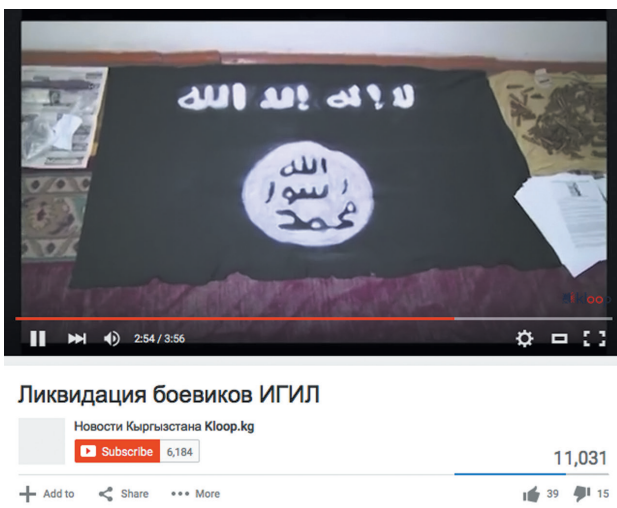
According to research by the Digital Islam Project, identifiable Kyrgyzstani participants in the Syria conflict are primarily politically and economically marginalized ethnic Uzbeks from southern Kyrgyzstan whose messaging, recruiting, and social media activity is primarily in the Uzbek language and largely ignored by the Kyrgyzstani media. Little domestic coverage has appeared acknowledging that al-Qaida's Syria affiliate has a Central Asian battalion led by an ethnic Uzbek from Osh, Amir Abu Saloh, who previously assumed the *nom-de-guerre* Abu Saloh Oshiy. Paradoxically, high profile cases of ethnic Uzbeks accused of joining or supporting the Syrian conflict are often, according to many local and international experts, based on very weak evidence and with strong political incentives to continue prosecutions against southern ethnic Uzbek figures of social significance rather than targeting real violent extremist networks. These targets have included influential moderate imam Rashod Kamalov, the only high-profile Uzbek imam in the south who was not successfully removed in the power shift that occurred in the aftermath of the ethnic conflict in 2010.

In spite of all the state and media attention on alleged recruiting activities by ISIS within the country, only a single semi-official ISIS recruiting message has been produced that targets the Kyrgyzstani public directly in any language, in sharp contrast to the group's efforts to recruit Uzbekistani, Kazakhstani, and Tajikistani members. The July 2015 message, released by al-Furat Media Center, a semi-official ISIS studio mostly associated with Russian language

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messages from fighters from the Caucasus (and which also produced earlier messages by defected Tajikistani Colonel Gulmurad Halimov), depicted only a single narrator, a young Kyrgyz man who mixed native Kyrgyz with Arabic scripture fluently. In contrast to typical ISIS videos, the recruiting message was filmed in a quiet wooded setting, showed no weapons, and depicted no violence or conflict; the content concentrated on eschatological themes and urged Kyrgyz Muslims to abandon “man-made laws” like “so-called democracy” that allegedly force Muslims to compromise strict interpretations of basic religious duties (specifically citing beards and hijab) and to emigrate to the “Islamic State” in order to avoid eternal damnation.

The video emerged at a fortuitous moment for the Kyrgyzstani security services and their effort to make a case that ISIS is an imminent threat to the country: only days before, GKNB special forces killed six people in two parallel operations in Bishkek and its suburbs and arrested several others. Following the operation, security officials announced they had uncovered an ISIS flag in one of the raided residences – both of which were tied to former convicts who had no demonstrated prior links to militant Islamist groups. They claimed they had uncovered plans to launch attacks on public prayers during the next day’s Eid al Fitr celebrations in Bishkek’s central square



The black banner Kyrgyzstani security services claim they recovered in the Bishkek raid on July 16, 2015.

and against the Russian base at Kant, but offered no evidence to support these claims other than a few weapons and a modest quantity of ammonium nitrate (commercial fertilizer). Days later, security officials further claimed the group, which they described as “an ISIS cell,” was similarly tied to an longtime political opposition member and former MP Maksat Kunakunov from ousted President Bakiyev’s Ata Jurt party and a known organized crime figure with links to *vor v zakone* (thief-in-law, a full member of the Moscow-based Brother’s Circle crime syndicate) Kamchi Kolbaev named Tariel Djumagulovan, who allegedly planned to finance the Islamic State’s activities in the country with a series of bank robberies.²

Kyrgyzstan’s Unique Media Environment: The “Island of Democracy” as the “Center of Geopolitics”

Difficult to verify claims that ISIS has become a clear and present danger inside Kyrgyzstan did not emerge in a vacuum and have not been limited to security officials. Since late 2014, many Kyrgyzstani pundits and some politicians have warned that Kyrgyzstan is the “prime target” for ISIS expansion in Central Asia and argue that Kyrgyzstani citizens are uniquely vulnerable to recruitment, although the country lacks a border with any other state in which the group’s militants are active and its population is targeted by recruiters online far less often than neighboring states. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the “evidence” providing rationale for many of these theories is not rooted in responses to activities of the militant extremist groups or intelligence about them, but instead are based in the widespread assumption, frequently evoked by the country’s media and politicians, that Kyrgyzstan is at the center of a great-power conflict between Russia and the United States (and to a lesser extent China and now the expanding “Islamic State”).

Within the Kyrgyz online and social media environment, this notion of centrality in a great-power conflict is often referred to in shorthand with the Russian term *geopolitika* (“geopolitics,” usually with connotations and other language that echo the Putin administration’s concepts of “unipolar vs. multipolar

² Kyrgyzstani security services have in the past frequently made uncorroborated claims that attempt to link political opposition figures or domestic unrest to international Islamist militant groups, including unsupported claims that the 2010 ethnic violence, which also featured a primary role for organized crime figures who control the country’s robust drug trafficking networks, was planned by the Taliban and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in collusion with ousted members of the Bakiyev regime.

geopolitics” and Alexander Dugin’s “Fourth Political Theory”). The country’s partisan media, suspected Russian information operations, and local politicians alike frequently attribute domestic developments – ranging from significant political upheavals like the 2005 and 2010 “revolutions” and outbreaks of ethnic violence to small protests or even the existence of homosexuals in Kyrgyz society – to great-power politics; the hyperbolic discourse about the alleged imminent advance of ISIS fits a political narrative of perpetual victimhood but also highlights the vulnerability (as Nick Megoran has elaborated) that many ethnic Kyrgyz feel as a tiny, post-colonial state heavily dependent on foreign aid.³

Popular discourse surrounding Manas Transit Center played an important part in locating Kyrgyzstan at the center of the “geopolitical struggle” for more than a decade before the US ended its lease in 2014; popular rumors included claims that the United States had deployed nuclear weapons to the base in order to conduct a nuclear first strike on Iran, that Iranian forces had targeted the base for a strike against the United States, and that the US intelligence services orchestrated the 2005 and 2010 coups against Akaev and Bakiyev in order to prevent the base (subsequently referred to as a transit center) from closing. After the lease agreement concluded in 2014 and Kyrgyzstan’s parliament declared it would not be renewed, the pundits and social media users have continuously predicted the United States would orchestrate a “third revolution” against the Akayev regime, potentially using Islamist terrorist groups as catalysts, citing “the US revolution in Ukraine” and later the electricity protests in Yerevan as “evidence” of American plans to “sow chaos” in the region; a routine diplomatic shipment in April 2015 sparked a firestorm of speculation that the US Embassy in Bishkek was importing weapons or counterfeit money to supply protestors who would overthrow the government.

The appointment of senior civil servant Ambassador Richard Miles at Charge d’Affaires ad interim in Bishkek gave birth to the nickname “father of revolutions” and the “ambassador of chaos” on Kyrgyzstani social media and forums because his term as ambassador to Georgia coincided with the “Rose Revolution” in 2003. The announcement of Ambassador Sheila Gwaltney’s appointment prompt-

ed Vesti.kg to describe her as “like a Gray Cardinal, a sort of Lady X, who is behind the revolutions that have occurred in the territory of the former USSR” and social media users to predict she would usher in a “Rainbow revolution” in Kyrgyzstan because of a track record of supporting gay rights.

Discourse about ISIS and its allegedly imminent threat to the security of Kyrgyzstan takes place firmly within this context and is influenced by actors who promote a decidedly Russo-centric view of geopolitics. Among the most popular source of what is claimed to be unique “insider information” on ISIS’s plans for Kyrgyzstan is independent “religion expert” Kadyr Malikov, who operates a small think-tank called Religion, Rights and Politics and has been a frequent face of “anti-homosexual” measures in line with those passed in Russia. Malikov has long been a primary source for reports that speculate that Kyrgyzstan is an unknowing host to a large number of extremist “sleeper cells,” and by October 2014 Malikov led speculation in the press that these cells were now “turning toward ISIS;” popular tabloids like Bishkek Russian-language *Delo No* cite claims by Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov and the Russian Orthodox site Pravoslavie.ru that the U.S. and Western intelligence agencies fund and control ISIS in order to “destabilize the situation” and prevent Muslim-majority countries from falling out of the “unipolar geopolitics dominated by the United States.”

In January 2015, Kyrgyzstani press and social media exploded with discussion when Malikov said his “sources” had informed him ISIS designated \$70 million to specifically “destabilize the situation in Southern Kyrgyzstan” and in the rest of the Ferghana Valley. Although the claims were repeated throughout the region and captured broad public attention, no evidence (or even a source) has ever been presented to support them. In a strange turn of events, in November 2015 Malikov claimed that a street attack, classified by police as an “act of hooliganism” was in fact an assassination attempt by ISIS supporters he claimed were determined to silence him because of his “opposition” to the group. Several of the country’s more popular Kyrgyz-language media outlets issued harsh criticism for the Interior Minister for not “acknowledging” that the attack was an “act of terrorism” before any evidence from the investigation was

³ Scott Radnitz’s recent work on the instrumentalization of conspiracy theories by Kyrgyzstani politicians is an excellent study of the role these myths play in the Kyrgyzstani information environment and the way they are often perpetuated by actors within the state itself.

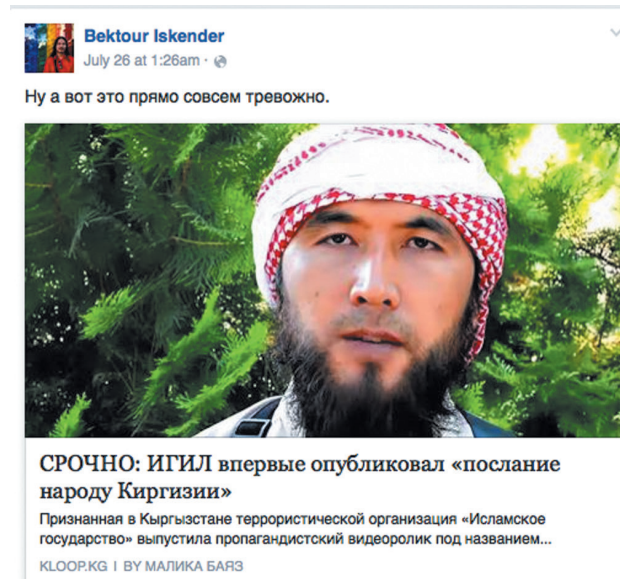
released, demonstrating perhaps how willing some actors in the media environment are to accept uncorroborated claims that ISIS militants are active inside Kyrgyzstan.

Public Responses

Public responses to ISIS on Kyrgyzstani social media are shaped by this uniquely (in the region) partisan media environment: The July 25, 2015 release of what many believe to be the first Kyrgyz-language ISIS video message and the claim by security services that they had disrupted the kind of “sleeper cell” predicted for months by Malikov and other pundits sparked conspiratorial responses from many Kyrgyzstani social media users. Productive public debate about ISIS continues to be almost impossible in the region and Kyrgyzstan in particular because there is no general agreement on whether or not the group and its messages are real, whether it is an Islamist militant group or a U.S. government operation, or why the group’s ideology appeals to some Central Asians.

As a growing body of academic research has found in other contexts as well, in spite of the proliferation of eyewitness evidence created by social media, social networks and digital media are not exempt from the social and political debates that define discourse and determine accepted narratives in other contexts. No amount of evidence is sufficient to sway deeply held opinions in many cases, and the suspicion that all media is often falsified – as well as a sometimes misguided awareness that information can be released online as part of state-sponsored information operations – leads many Kyrgyzstani social media users to immediately discount digital evidence that does not conform to their previously held beliefs.

The three hour shootout and subsequent residential fires in central Bishkek between security services and suspects later identified as alleged “ISIS cell” members was widely documented by neighborhood residents and eyewitnesses as it happened, posting videos and photographs to social media of a police operation that many felt was chaotic and poorly planned. Videos uploaded by eyewitnesses to the beginning of the raid show that few measures were taken by police to protect the public and police were slow to cordon off the area even after the shooting began. As state and security service officials began to hail the operation as a success that demonstrat-



Bektour Iskender, Kloop’s founder and editor and one of Kyrgyzstan’s most influential social media users, was among those who treated the ISIS threat as legitimate, with the understanding that the group is a real violent Islamist organization. On their coverage of the first ISIS message targeting Kyrgyzstan: “This is actually really scary.”

ed Kyrgyzstan’s ability to combat terror, many social media users cited the videos and the long criminal records of many of the suspects as evidence that the raid was more a symbol of ineffective policing.

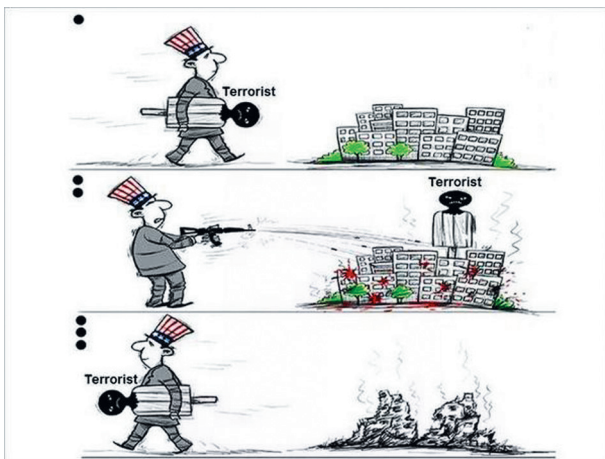
In what was likely an effort to counteract these rumors, police released their own video that successfully drew social media attention showing the aftermath of the raid, including graphic footage of dead bodies of the slain suspects and the ISIS flag and the weapons purportedly found in the residence. Responses to the evolving claims of security services that well-known opponents of the Atambayev government had suddenly been linked to a Syria-based terrorist organization that planned a spectacular attack on the country and against a Russian air base were met with suspicion and at times with open contempt: the influential political science scholar Aleksandr Knyazev, a strong defender of Russian interests in the country, mocked the claims that a few career criminals could have possibly planned to “attack an enormous Russian air base with a couple of sacks of fertilizer” and cited it as one of many examples of regional governments manipulating public perceptions of the ISIS threat for political purposes, including efforts to convince Russia to grant more military aid.

In response to the July 2015 release of the first ISIS message targeting Kyrgyzstan, social media users and Kyrgyzstani commenters on Kloop – the

blog and social media outlet that first broke the news of the video a full day before other media when its journalists discovered it on Twitter – ignore the distinct shift in messaging tactics from ISIS and fall into two camps: those who react with what appears to be genuine fear, including speculation that the wooded setting and lack of weapons may indicate it was filmed inside the country by secret members of the Islamic State, and a large proportion of users who descend deep into the well of contradictory conspiracy theories to the point that some argue that the video itself does not exist. Kloop’s editor and founder, Bektour Iskender (above), was so inundated by irate conspiracy messages in response to the article that he was prompted to post one at length to his personal Facebook page. The response accused Kloop of creating the video themselves with “USAID funding” in order to “take revenge” on Kyrgyzstan for denouncing its cooperation agreement with the United States, citing the high production values for the video and the speaker’s “excellent diction and grammar” as “evidence” that it was an elaborate hoax. Other Facebook users claimed that the video was created by the Russian Federal Security Service to justify stationing additional troops in Kyrgyzstan or opening a new military base in the country, or that the video and “Facebook trolls” sharing the news are evidence of the “3.7 million dollars” that the United States had supposedly invested in information operations in Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan’s domestic media environment plays a role in driving distrust online – while media is relatively more free in Kyrgyzstan, many popular outlets are controlled by political elites themselves and their allies, frequently feature paid content, and are perceived by the public as deeply biased. As documented by academic research in other contexts, social media users frequently become “instant experts” and arm-chair forensic video analysts in ways that frequently reverse victimhood or reinforce social hierarchies instead of challenging them. This process has been documented from the early development of social media long before the Arab Spring brought participant documentation in social media to the world’s attention.

Kyrgyzstani social media, particularly the long-standing domestic forum Diesel.elcat.kg (the country’s most popular social media platform), is a primary site in which community of users can twist narratives around and interpret evidence to fit their previously held beliefs: users marshal amply available supporting articles from the Russian internet and information operations to argue that ISIS is supported by Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Israel and that threats or attacks against these states are twisted around to represent evidence of the conspiracy because “that’s part of the act.” In these narratives, the terrorist threat against Kyrgyzstan is regarded as real but the identity of the true aggressor is switched from ISIS to the United States and the very absence of evidence to support these claims is held up as the best possible evidence of conspiracy.



From the Diesel thread dedicated to ISIS in discussion already in October 2014, around the same time a series of interviews by Malikov and other articles in the press began to intensify rumors about the ISIS threat to Kyrgyzstan. The picture was posted by a Bishkek user active on the forum for over a decade in response to another user who argued that the United States, acting as “the world’s police,” is “at least doing something to stop ISIS,” with the comment “They created them [ISIS] themselves and then bomb them themselves... ISIS is an American project.”

State Reactions to ISIS

State responses to the ISIS threat have done less to steer public discussion than in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, in no small part because Kyrgyzstan’s media environment is more pluralist than neighboring states and state-owned outlets and state-approved messages have far less influence, especially on social media. In spite of this difference, state responses in Kyrgyzstan have been nearly identical to those in neighboring states and consistent with the post-Soviet approach to religious freedom, treating religious activity as a potential threat that must be carefully managed and monitored by the state. Responses by state officials to the alleged ISIS cell and video messaging, particularly from Prime Minister Temir Sariyev, have outlined an initial strategy for counteracting the threat of extremism by identifying and eliminating “foreign

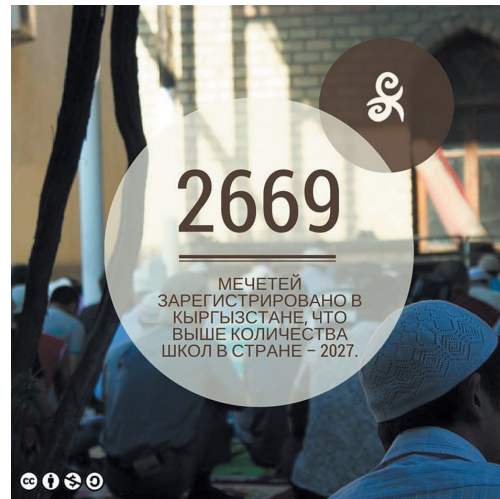
influence” from “Kyrgyz Islam,” specifically singling out practices visible in public space, including *hijab* and beards. This approach has received consistent support from sectors of the Kyrgyz-language media as well as Russia-funded local projects that embrace a return to some more resembling Soviet-style governance and values. Support for those same values is also visible in social media discussion, which has since the events of summer 2015 consistently had factions attributing Kyrgyzstan’s vulnerability to terrorism to claims that since the post-Soviet transition, “mosques now outnumber schools.”

Statements by PM Sariiev criticizing hijab as a “foreign adaptation” and news that hijab may be banned in schools in Kyrgyzstan beginning in the fall of 2015 provoked an international backlash among reformist Muslims on social media and within Kyrgyzstan’s own parliament. Though the extent to which Kyrgyzstani authorities may attempt to enforce restrictions on Islamic dress in public spaces remains to be seen, many social media users expressed resentment at the implication that what they saw as an expression of piety indicated support for terrorism or a betrayal of their national identity.

Even as state responses strike many as tone-deaf and essentially identical to an outdated Soviet approach, Kyrgyzstan’s relatively pluralist political climate, facilitated by social media, allows political opposition figures, including some ethnic Kyrgyz politicians, to criticize the ruling government’s actions against Uzbek leaders from the south. Former chairman of the National Opposition Movement and sitting MP Ravshan Jeyenbekov, for example, posted a video to his personal Facebook page of a Rashod Kamalov sermon (already widely circulated in Uzbek networks) in which he condemns the Islamic State, questioning government charges that Kamalov recruited for the organization. Jeyenbekov argued in response to pushback in the comments to his post that Kamalov’s only “crime” was his criticism of corruption within Kyrgyzstan’s law enforcement organizations.

Policy Takeaways

Although state reactions in Kyrgyzstan are markedly less conspiratorial and divided than those in the public reflected on social media, by focusing only on external cultural markers and ascribing the appeal of Islamism as a political system to “foreign influ-



Two representative memes that emerged from the debate that began in the summer about whether or not mosques outnumber schools in Kyrgyzstan (a claim that many disputed), whether this was good or bad, or if these were categories that could even be compared. Above, an infographic states that registered mosques outnumber schools by more than 600. Below is a response from a social media user in the comments, challenging the idea that secular education alone can solve the country’s social problems (“what are YOU teaching your child?” – the presumably ethnic Russian children on the left are sucking on beer bottles).



A Kyrgyz language meme circulated on Facebook and Odnoklassniki in response to PM Sariiev’s comments on hijab: “[Save those who believe and do good works, and remember Allah much, and vindicate themselves after they have been wronged.] Those who do wrong will come to know by what a (great) reverse they will be overturned!” [Sura Ash-Shu’ara, 227 (Pickthall)].



Another pro-hijab meme that circulated on domestic forums like Super.kg and on social media, including Odnoklassniki and vKontakte. "This is how our grandmothers dressed – and you are still trying to insist that hijab is a national dress of Arabs???"

ence” officials have done little or nothing to counteract conspiracy theories (many of which blame the United States for ISIS expansion) or to engage with Islamist criticisms of corruption, inequality and injustice that resonate with marginalized sections of the Kyrgyzstani population.

Instead of addressing these grievances, particularly among Uzbeks in the south, for whom imam Rashod Kamalov was perhaps the most influential figure left in a position of authority following the 2010 ethnic conflict, they are conflated with ISIS as a source of “foreign influence” and treated as an isometric threat.

The state must learn to differentiate between reformist Muslims, peaceful Islamists, and foreign-sponsored violent extremist organizations. The Kyrgyzstani state’s refusal or inability to do this – especially among ethnic minority populations – will likely do little to help ensure domestic stability, although it should also be emphasized that ISIS messaging resonates at such low levels among the public that it is extremely unlikely that the group itself could mobilize support outside of isolated small groups or individual, lone-wolf operations.

The relative freedom of the Kyrgyzstani media environment, combined with its stark politicization, leaves many citizens without sources they could agree on to present them with objective information. Non-commercial and apolitical media could become an important tool in combatting rampant conspiracy theories that distort the country’s information environment and make it difficult for citizens to make informed choices and participate in grassroots efforts to counteract mobilization by extremist groups of all stripes.

The Strange Case of Jaysh Al-Mahdi and Mr. ISIS: How Kyrgyzstan's Elites Manipulate the Threat of Terrorism for Their Own Benefit

Franco Galdini and Zukhra Iakupbaeva^{1, 2} (2016)

If the 'Global War on Terror' (GWOT) emanated from the United States (US), its consequences have been felt far and well beyond its borders, due to US adventures in Afghanistan and Iraq and their disastrous consequences for those countries, combined with autocratic regimes borrowing the same discourse of the fight against terrorism in order to stay in power and to reduce even further the already limited space for dissenting voices. This is certainly true in the Middle East and Central Asia, two regions whose study in Western policy circles post-9/11 has been skewed by a security prism because of their Muslim majority populations and the assumption that any Muslim is, by default, susceptible to radicalization.

Kyrgyzstan, long hailed as an island of democracy in a tough Central Asian neighborhood, has not been immune to this trend. The fight against terrorism has been and continues to be a powerful discourse for the country's elites and security apparatus used to secure funds internationally and silence popular discontent domestically, while averting attention from more pressing matters. Significantly, terrorism is on everyone's mind but the security services actively discourage research on the issue, preferring a near-total monopoly on information that the population is supposed to accept as revealed truth.

While the Soviet legacy of suspicion vis-à-vis religion still informs the elites' threat perception—resonating with the older, educated, Russophile city dwellers—it fails to account for the last 25 years of independence during which Islam has witnessed a revival in Kyrgyzstan as an important cultural and

religious identity marker for the general population. There is a clear continuum between Western discourses on terrorism and the Kyrgyz government's version in that, to use Professor Richard Jackson's words, much of this discourse is "politically biased, but more importantly, it functions ideologically to reinforce and reify existing structures of power in society, particularly that of the state, and to promote particular elite political projects."³

This article endeavors to contribute to the literature by illustrating how elites in Kyrgyzstan manipulate the threat of terrorism to fit their domestic agenda, while trying to maximize their interests with international donors. It presents the results of research into two specific incidents in Kyrgyzstan that raise serious questions about the sincerity of the authorities' claims, while showing the myriad of ways in which they have misrepresented the facts for their own benefit. The two cases have been selected because, to date, one represents the only example of an alleged home-grown terrorist group in Kyrgyzstan since it achieved independence in 1991, while the other is the only Islamic State (ISIS) cell to have been dismantled in the country.

The first incident regards Jaysh al-Mahdi (JM), an alleged terrorist group that was active in 2010-11, before its members were either killed or captured. The latter were then tortured into confessing to terrorism offenses and most were given hefty jail sentences, including imprisonment for life. Apart from the fact that JM may be a Shia group in Sunni Kyrgyzstan, it became active at a time of high political instability in the country, which had experienced a violent coup d'état in April 2010 followed by clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south in May to June of the same year. The then-Interim Government (IG) ma-

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2 Zukhra Iakupbaeva is an independent journalist and researcher based in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and the Kyrgyzstan correspondent for the *Conway Bulletin*. Zukhra holds a B.A. degree in Political Science from the American University of Central Asia. She works as a Programme Manager at the Archa Initiative foundation, which works to preserve Bishkek Botanical Garden.

3 Richard Jackson, "Knowledge, Power and Politics in the Study of Political Terrorism," in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, ed. Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (New York: Routledge, 2009), 69.

nipulated the threat of terrorism exemplified by JM in order to justify its crackdown on opponents, thus tightening its grip on power and ultimately surviving. Parallel to this, in the ensuing years, the Kyrgyz government managed to secure millions of dollars in US military aid, notably in the form of Special Forces training in counter-terrorism.

The second incident concerns a July 2015 shoot-out in the capital, Bishkek, in which the security services claimed to have killed or captured members of an ISIS cell. As little evidence was provided, many questioned the official narrative, especially when it became apparent that several 'ISIS terrorists' were actually part of a criminal gang. Furthermore, in the months that followed, the authorities started fusing and confusing members of ISIS and JM, effectively implying that they simultaneously belonged to a Shia millenarian militia and a Sunni extremist group.

During this time, Kyrgyzstan finalized its accession to the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), a decision that was increasingly contested given the Kremlin's military adventurism in Ukraine and the ensuing Western sanctions crippling Russia's economy. Public opinion was conveniently too pre-occupied with ISIS and JM to pay attention to the near absence of solid information concerning the pros and cons of Kyrgyzstan's joining the EEU. But again, it was domestic considerations that drew the authorities to push the discourse of the fight against terrorism. With the October 2015 elections looming, the President's Social Democratic Party (SDPK) could run on a ticket of stability by presenting itself as tough on terrorism. At the polls, the SDPK won almost a third of all parliamentary seats, becoming the biggest party in the country.

A couple of provisos are in order here. While the article highlights how elites in Kyrgyzstan have articulated a specific security discourse on terrorism to benefit from it—ensuring their political survival, securing external funding, silencing domestic dissent and diverting attention from other issues affecting the general population—the authors are aware that this is not the *only* discourse fit for purpose. Labeling non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as 'foreign agents' as well as the naming and shaming of people with alternative lifestyles (such as the LGBTQ

community) has been conspicuously used by elites in past years to crack down on opponents and silence dissent by promoting a witch hunt against purported enemies of the state.⁴ Terrorism, however, has been a powerful discourse among the others, and perhaps the most powerful, not least because of the international context of the GWOT.

Finally, while some of the contradictions identified in the paper may be ascribed to the amateurism of some institutions in Kyrgyzstan, including the security services, the sheer amount and extent of the inconsistencies found in the two cases analyzed a clear pattern. Moreover, the systematic torture and/or physical elimination of terror suspects in both cases, as well as pressure on the judiciary to deliver guilty verdicts in the JM one, seem to confirm that the Kyrgyz authorities chose to push the discourse on the terrorism threat even when the evidence was ice-thin and despite the fact that the official line presented severe inconsistencies. That they were poised to benefit from such a line cannot be only and always coincidental.

Islam in Kyrgyzstan: From Soviet Rule to Independence to the GWOT

Islam came to Central Asia with the Arab conquests of the 8th century AD, which introduced the region to a plurality of trends within Islamic thought, from the Hanafi Sunni school to a variety of Sufi orders, with the Naqshbandiya being the most influential and widespread among the latter.⁵ Islam maintained a prominent function in Central Asian life through the centuries, but this changed sharply with the rise of the Bolsheviks in Russia following the October 1917 revolution, which ushered in a 70-year period of Soviet rule in the region.

Under the official state policy of atheism, religious repression became the hallmark of the Soviet Union's approach to Islam. In 1927, the Soviets launched a massive campaign to unveil Muslim women and girls, a custom they perceived as backward and thus to be eliminated on the path to creating a new social order. In history books, the campaign is remembered as the *hujum*, a term that in Turkic

4 Franco Galdini, "Kyrgyzstan's NGO and LGBT Crackdown," *The Diplomat*, March 17, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/03/kyrgyzstans-ngo-and-lgbt-crackdown/>.

5 "Central Asia: Islam and the State," *International Crisis Group Asia Report* No. 59, 2003, 1, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/059-central-asia-islam-and-the-state.aspx>; Farhat Alvi, "The Significant Role of Sufism in Central Asia," University of the Punjab, [http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/uoc/PDF-FILES/\(2\)%20The%20Significant%20Role%20of%20Sufism%20in%20Central%20Asia%20\(Dr.%20Farh.pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/uoc/PDF-FILES/(2)%20The%20Significant%20Role%20of%20Sufism%20in%20Central%20Asia%20(Dr.%20Farh.pdf).

languages translates as ‘assault,’ indicating the strong popular resistance it encountered.⁶

Repression intensified, particularly after the adoption of the 1929 law ‘On Religious Associations,’ which coincided with the wholesale closure of mosques and Sharia courts in the region. As Martha Brill Olcott put it, “[d]uring the 1930s, thousands of mosques were declared decrepit, then closed. Many were destroyed or, worse, used for some kind of sacrilegious purpose. The Jome (Gumbaz) Mosque in Namangan, for example, was made into a wine factory.”⁷

By the 1940s, however, “thinking that [it] may play a useful role in the war effort, Stalin relaxed his persecution of religion slightly, ordering the creation of state-supervised Religious Councils.”⁸ The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) was established in 1943 in Tashkent, in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, laying the foundation of what would become the state-led spiritual administrations in Central Asia’s independent republics—the so-called Muftiate.⁹ By the 1960s Central Asian Islam had become Sovietized—not eliminated, but outwardly subordinated to and routinized by the Soviet state.¹⁰ As in much of the rest of the region, the SADUM’s representative in Soviet Kyrgyzstan—called a *qadi*—administered the state-sanctioned Islam under the supervision of the Soviet security apparatus. During the 1980s, Islam in Central Asia benefitted from the new policies of *perestroika* (‘restructuring’) and *glasnost* (‘openness’) introduced under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, which signaled a more open attitude toward religion.

Post-independence Kyrgyzstan continued to pursue a policy of openness in the religious sphere, leading to a staggering revival of Islam in people’s everyday life:

According to data by the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA), while in 1990 there were 39 mosques operating in Kyrgyzstan, in 2014 that number reached 2,362

mosques and 81 Islamic schools, [as well as] 68 registered Muslim centers, foundations and association involved in educational, awareness-raising and charitable activities and the construction of places of worship.¹⁰

In parallel to this renaissance, however, disquiet grew among the Kyrgyz authorities, whose worldview was (and is) still considerably informed by the Soviet legacy of suspicion towards religion. As a result, the government tried to maintain a certain degree of control over religion via the Muftiate and other institutions. The SCRA, for instance, was created in 1995 with the goal of registering all religious organizations in the country.¹¹

Suspicion only increased after the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)—a terrorist group hailing from neighboring Uzbekistan—conducted a series of incursions into Kyrgyzstan’s south-western Batken province in 1999 and 2000, forcing the government to deploy “the Southern Group of Forces comprising approximately six thousand troops from various components of the armed forces” to repeal it.¹²

The country’s authorities, however, never excelled at adopting a nuanced approach to the disparate Islamic groups now present on their territory, using instead accusations of extremism and/or terrorism to discredit opponents and crack down on any dissent. The example of the banned organization Hizb ut-Tahrir is emblematic in this regard. Emmanuel Karagiannis found that:

[I]n the past senior officials have been quick to lump Hizb ut-Tahrir together with the IMU or other terrorist groups, in an attempt to discredit it. This merely undermines government propaganda as there have been several occasions when officials initially blamed Hizb ut-Tahrir for terrorist or other violent attacks, but were subsequently forced to retract. Such statements undermine trust in the authorities and boost those who claim that the government manipulates the issue.¹³

6 Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 69.

7 Martha Brill Olcott, *In the Whirlwind of Jihad* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 61.

8 *Ibid.*, 62.

9 Eric McGlinchey, “Autocrats, Islamists, and the Rise of Radicalism in Central Asia,” *Current History* (2005): 336, http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglinc/final_mcglinc_current_history.pdf.

10 “The Concept of State Policy in the religious affairs for 2014-2020 of the Kyrgyz Republic,” <http://www.religion.gov.kg/ru/Концепция%20государственной%20политики%20Кыргызской%20Республики%20в%20религиозной%20сфере%20на%202014-2020%20годы.pdf>, as translated in Franco Galdini, “Islam in Kyrgyzstan: growing in diversity,” *Open Democracy*, October 22, 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/franco-galdini/islam-in-kyrgyzstan-growing-in-diversity>.

11 “Central Asia: Islam and the State,” 25.

12 “Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001,” US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10319.pdf>.

13 Emmanuel Karagiannis, “Political Islam and Social Movement Theory: The Case of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Kyrgyzstan,” *Religion, State and Society* 33, no. 21 (January 2007): 140, http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/rss/33-2_137.pdf.

With the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States and the launching of the GWOT shortly thereafter,¹⁴ a subject such as Central Asian Islam—which had theretofore been all but ignored in Western circles—suddenly came into sharp focus.¹⁵ To support the war effort in Afghanistan, the US leased the Manas airbase out of Manas International Airport in Bishkek in December 2001, placing Kyrgyzstan firmly within the GWOT.

Meanwhile, the discourse emanating from elites in Washington and other Western capitals appeared to identify Muslim populations as more at risk of radicalization—and, by association, violent extremism and terrorism—than any other population due to a toxic, yet ill-defined, Islamic or Islamist ideology. In other words, rather than governments directing themselves towards an analysis of the complex set of political, economic and historical factors leading to the September 11 attacks, the idea was taking root that Muslims are “robots programmed only by Islam. Some [experts thus] supported ‘deradicalisation’ programmes, to install new software into the robots’ minds.”¹⁶

Such assertions resonate widely with Central Asian elites, as the authorities find validation of their repressive policies in the discourse of the fight against terrorism. In the words of Carnegie Centre’s Aleksey Malashenko, “[r]adical Islam long ago became instrumental and has been systematically used by secular leaders [in Central Asia] to achieve their own goals.”¹⁷ As we shall see, in spite of its relatively free political and media environment, Kyrgyzstan is no exception to this trend.

With the creation of the so-called Islamic State in parts of Iraq and Syria in 2014, the debate on the extent to which Central Asian Muslims are vulnerable to radicalization, and how many have left the region to join ISIS, is all the rage. Broadly, one can

identify two opposing camps in the discussion: on the one side, government officials and Western security experts tend to believe that the threat of radicalization is real, widespread and growing;¹⁸ on the other, a few renowned Central Asia academics argue that most of the evidence for it is thin, circumstantial and, crucially, largely provided by government sources whose perception may be biased by their secular outlook and political-economic interests.¹⁹

This paper positions itself on the latter side of this debate with Kyrgyzstan as a case study. It presents two empirical cases where the Kyrgyz authorities claimed to have eliminated two terrorist groups, namely Jaysh al-Mahdi in 2010-11 and ISIS in 2015-16, broaching the numerous and substantial contradictions in the official story regarding these events. It then proceeds to place them within a frame of political economic circumstances prevalent in Kyrgyzstan at the time, indicating the multiplicity of ways in which elites were poised to benefit domestically and internationally from exaggerating the threat of terrorism.

The Strange Case of Jaysh Al-Mahdi

The year 2010 was a momentous one for Kyrgyzstan. The country experienced massive political unrest that culminated in the overthrow of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who had himself come to power on the heels of the Tulip Revolution five years earlier. While the latter had been a largely bloodless affair, in 2010 events spun out of control. On April 7, protesters clashed with security forces in Bishkek and stormed the presidential office building, known as the White House. By the end of the day, 86 protesters had been killed and scores more wounded.²⁰

14 “The Global War on Terrorism: The First 100 Days,” US Department of State, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/wh/6947.htm>.

15 Vitaly V. Naumkin, “Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan,” *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series*, July 1, 2003, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/7ch968cn#page-1>.

16 Nir Rosen, “Al Qaeda was always a fringe group with no roots in the Arab world,” *The National*, May 6, 2011, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/al-qaeda-was-always-a-fringe-group-with-no-roots-in-the-arab-world#page1>.

17 Aleksei Malashenko, “Islam, Politics, and the Security of Central Asia,” *Russian Politics and Law* 42, no. 4 (2004): 7.

18 See, for example, “Syria Calling: Radicalization in Central Asia,” *International Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing* No. 72, 2015, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia>.

19 John Heathershaw and David W. Montgomery, “The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalisation in the Central Asian Republics,” *Chatham House Research Paper*, 2014, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20141111PostSovietRadicalizationHeathershawMontgomery.pdf; see also author’s interview with Alisher Khamidov, Associate at the Central Asia Program at George Washington University, Bishkek, February 27, 2015.

20 Anna Matveeva, “Violence in Kyrgyzstan, Vacuum in the Region: The Case for Russia-EU Joint Crisis Management,” *LSE Civil Society & Human Security Research Unit Working Paper*, 2011, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/CSHS/pdfs/workingPapers/violenceInKyrgyzstan.pdf>; and “Kyrgyzstan capital bloodied, looted and chaotic after overthrow of Bakiyev,” *The Guardian*, April 8, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/08/kyrgyzstan-revolt-over-kurmanbek-bakiyev>.

With the political arrangements in the country shattered, the opposition—which formed an Interim Government (IG) on April 8 with the promise of holding elections within the following six months—struggled to fill in the power vacuum created by the previous administration's collapse. Already in May, episodes of violence had shaken the southern provinces of Jalal-Abad and Osh, where the IG's grip seemed tenuous at best, exposing a deepening rift between the country's northern and southern Kyrgyz elites vying for control. Meanwhile, the leaders of the sizable Uzbek minority tried to navigate the fluid situation in order to better their community's standing after years of marginalization under Bakiyev.

Amid the instability, violence flared up once again in June 2010, when during four fateful days Kyrgyz and Uzbeks fought in the streets of Osh and Jalal-Abad cities and provinces, in what became known as the Osh Events. The result was devastating: “hundreds of people [were] killed and thousands injured; thousands of commercial assets and homes [were] burnt to the ground; and approximately 400,000 people [were] internally displaced or made refugees in neighboring Uzbekistan.”²¹

High volatility remained a feature of daily political life in Kyrgyzstan for the rest of 2010, even as it held a constitutional referendum on June 27 and landmark parliamentary elections on October 10. With elections failing to produce a clear winner, a ruling coalition was agreed to only by mid-December. A government was effectively installed at the start of 2011 under the new constitution.²²

The series of smaller-scale incidents that marked this transition period, therefore, fit the pattern of intra-elite conflict and instability beleaguering the country after the April revolution and the Osh Events.²³ Among them was an explosion that rocked the Sports Palace in Bishkek on November 30, which was at the time was “the venue for the emotional tri-

al of those accused of ordering and executing violence during Kyrgyzstan's April 7 uprising”—namely President Bakiyev and several members of his family and entourage—as well as for “eight low-ranking members of the country's special forces Alfa group.”²⁴ Following the blast, the trial was adjourned to a later date.

The authorities' reaction to this event, however, was confused and confusing for the general public, with different officials issuing contradictory statements on the identity of the perpetrators. At a press conference the same day then-Security Council Secretary Marat Imankulov blamed supposed ‘nationalist-separatists’ for the Sports Palace attack, adding that it “aimed at disrupting the court proceedings on the April 7 events.” Imankulov linked the explosion to a series of other incidents that took place in Bishkek and Osh during the previous week, including the arrest of a group suspected of preparing several attacks in the country, stating that they were “links in one chain.”²⁵

This echoed the declarations of Minister of Interior Zarylbek Rysaliev, who at another press conference the previous day, November 29, had stressed that the people arrested had no connection to international terrorist organizations: “This group is of a purely nationalist-separatist persuasion. [These] people were planning to carry out terrorist attacks in Bishkek, Osh and other southern localities with the aim of destabilizing the socio-political situation.”²⁶ In post-Osh Events parlance, the ‘nationalist’ and ‘separatist’ labels apply to two categories of people only: pro-Bakiyev elements and the Uzbek minority, who conventional wisdom has turned into the main culprits for the May-June violence, as elaborated below.

Imankulov was immediately contradicted by the deputy head of the State Committee for National Security (GKNB), Kolbai Musayev, who alleged that the perpetrators were linked to the Islamic Jihad

21 Franco Galdini, “The June 2010 ‘events’ four years on: past, present, future,” *Central Asia Security Policy Briefs* No. 15, August 2014, http://www.osce-academy.net/upload/file/Policy_Brief_15.pdf. The best day to day account on the May-June events remains “A chronicle of violence: The events in the south of Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 (Osh Region),” *Freedom House Report* No. 2, 2012, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Report_2_12_ENG_net.pdf.

22 Erica Marat, “Kyrgyz Parliament Forms New Coalition,” The Jamestown Foundation, December 16, 2010, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37287&no_cache=1#.V5SKJmUhZAY.

23 For a complete list of these incidents, most of which will be blamed on Jaysh al-Mahdi, see Appendix 1.

24 David Trilling, “Confusion Reigns After Fresh Violence in Kyrgyzstan,” *EurasiaNet*, November 30, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62464>.

25 “Za vzryvom v Bishkeke i intsidentom v Oshe stoyat natsional-separatisty – Sovbez KR,” *Kyrtag*, November 30, 2010, http://kyrtag.kg/news/za_vzryvom_v_bishkeke_i_intsidentom_v_oshe_stoyat_natsional_separatisty_sovbez_kr/; and “M. Imankulov: Za vzryvom v Bishkeke i intsidentom v Oshe stoyat natsional-separatisty,” *AKIpress*, November 30, 2010, <http://kg.akipress.org/news%3A297091>.

26 Daniyar Karimov, “Seriya teraktov, predotvrashchennykh silovikami v Kyrgyzstane, gotovilas’ gruppy natsionalisticheski-separatistskogo tolka,” *24.kg*, November 29, 2010, <http://arch.24.kg/investigation/87751-seriya-teraktov-predotvrashchennykh-silovikami-v.html>.

Union (IJU) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).²⁷ The former a splinter of the latter, both groups are active in Afghanistan and are classified as terrorist organizations in Kyrgyzstan.

No concrete proof of the connection between international terrorism and the happenings in Kyrgyzstan was provided, but it quickly became obvious that the authorities had settled on the terrorism explanation, though the origin of the threat morphed from international to internal—again with little corroborating evidence. In the following weeks, GKNB Chairman Keneshbek Dushebayev went on a media offensive, claiming that terrorists wanted “to turn the Central Asian region into a blazing torch of destabilization for the entire world” and that “a serious terrorist threat hangs over Kyrgyzstan.”²⁸

Speaking at a press conference on December 29, Dushebayev toed the IJU line. By January 17, 2011, however, in another meeting with the press he revealed for the first time the existence of a new home-grown terrorist group, Jaysh al-Mahdi (JM), responsible for most of the attacks that took place between September 2010 and January 2011. He added that two JM members had been killed and eleven captured, while three remained on the run.²⁹ Much had happened in the intervening weeks, including visits from top US officials to Kyrgyzstan, host of the strategic Manas air base.³⁰ The following paragraphs illustrate the internal and external incentives that prompted the discourse at the top of the country’s security apparatus to align so quickly with the GWOT, by immediately referring to the Afghanistan-based IMU and IJU, while pointing out the deep contradictions marring the official narrative on JM.

Enter JM

Dushebayev was never shy to controversy. In June 2010, he made headlines for alleging that “rela-

tives of former president Kurmanbek Bakiyev conspired with Islamic militants to destabilize southern Kyrgyzstan.”³¹ He produced no evidence to support his claims, which were nonetheless reproduced almost verbatim in the final report of the National Commission of Inquiry (NIC) into the Osh events:

[T]he nationalist leaders of the Uzbek community, [who]—considering that the current situation in the country may allow them to achieve their objectives—began to artificially put an emphasis on the national question, involving in their activity large masses of people. These efforts ultimately coincided with the wishes of President Bakiyev and his supporters, namely to severely destabilize the situation in the country.³²

These episodes indicate how a pattern of blaming instability in the country on national and international co-conspirators—the Bakiyevs, the nationalist/separatist Uzbeks, and terrorist groups—without providing evidence was established, in an attempt to shield the IG from criticism while it struggled to consolidate power following the April revolution and the Osh Events.

The JM narrative fits neatly into this pattern. “The IG needed something [that allowed] the public to let off steam in order to avoid a big conflagration,” a former GKNB official with almost two decades in the service told the authors on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.³³ “Those days, the situation was explosive. Every day we heard news about acts of banditry and looting, as well as raiding of properties belonging to the Bakiyevs being redistributed among the elites. People held the IG responsible for the constant insecurity,” he added.

In other words, the specter of terrorism served to divert attention from the IG’s failures in re-establishing law and order to the issue of national secu-

27 Bektur Iskender, “Vozle bishkekskogo dvortsa sporta progremel vzryv, est’ slegka ranenye,” *Kloop*, November 30, 2010, <http://kloop.kg/blog/2010/11/30/srochno-voze-bishkekskogo-dvorca-sporta-progremel-vzryv-est-ranenye/>.

28 Alisher Khamidov, “Kyrgyzstan: Officials Making a Terrorism Case of Just Sowing Panic?,” *EurasiaNet*, December 22, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62624>; and “K. Duishebayev: Nad Kyrgyzstanom visit ser’eznaya terroristicheskaya ugroza,” *AKIpress*, December 29, 2010, <http://kg.aki-press.org/news:309731>.

29 “Kyrgyz Security Chief Blames Terrorist Group For Recent Bombings,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 17, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan_bombings_duishebaev/2278858.html.

30 Olga Dzyubenko, “U.S. vacates base in Central Asia as Russia’s clout rises,” *Reuters*, June 3, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kyrgyzstan-usa-manas-idUSKBN0EE1LH20140603>.

31 Deirdre Tynan, “Kyrgyz Provisional Government Alleges Bakiyev-Islamic Militant Link,” *EurasiaNet*, June 24, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61401>.

32 “Kyrgyzstan: opublikovano zaklyuchenie natsional’noy komissii po rassledovaniyu iyun’skikh sobytiy,” *Fergana News*, January 20, 2011, <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=6871>.

33 Authors’ interview with former GKNB official, Bishkek, May 2016. All subsequent quotes are taken from this interview.

rity. By first blaming the IMU, the GKNB linked to the discourse of the GWOT while reviving very real memories of the group's summer 1999 "hit-and-run battles with the Kyrgyz army in the [south-western] Batken region."³⁴ Then, JM brought the threat even closer to home. The former GKNB official, however, questions the group's very existence, pointing out the service's botched job in handling the flow of information as possible proof that JM may be a fabrication: "From the start, it was obvious that no proper research had been done to establish who these people were. Imankulov and Dushebeyev kept contradicting each other; there was no coherence in their statements."

Holes in the Official Story about JM

Whether fabricated or not, the official version regarding JM creates more questions than it gives answers. Between the first arrests at the end of December 2010 and Dushenbayev's press conference on January 17, 2011, a total of 21 people were initially implicated in the JM case, according to data provided by the GKNB. Two were killed by Alfa Special Forces during an operation to capture them in the village of Arashan, some 25 kilometers south of Bishkek.³⁵ This inaugurated a worrying "shoot first, ask questions later" trend within the Kyrgyz security services in terrorism-related searches.

Equally worrying is the fact that the majority of those detained—13 people—were tortured to extract a confession, some so savagely that they had to be hospitalized after the first interrogation. In order to exert psychological pressure on the accused, in some instances the GKNB resorted to threatening to harm their family members. Lawyers were not allowed to

attend interrogation sessions for up to two months from the date of arrest.³⁶ Again, this established a pattern of torture of terrorism suspects as well as impunity for perpetrators that continues to this day.³⁷

The mother of one of the detainees, Edil Abdrakhmanov, described how GKNB investigators "put a bag on [her son's] head, stunned him with electroshock, kicked him. [Edil] fainted during interrogation, he wasn't fed for three days, his blanket was taken away." The wife of another, Bakyt Kenzhegulov, recounted that GKNB operatives had threatened her husband, saying he would not see her again. When she met him, she "noticed traces of blood on his head, swelling of the hands, [he] looked very tired [and] could not stand on his own. To [my] question: 'Did you beat him,' the investigator cynically replied: 'A little bit.'"³⁸

The cases of Abdrakhmanov and Kenzhegulov are particularly relevant as they both participated in the April revolution and, during the Osh events, were among a group entrusted by the IG with delivering humanitarian help to the population of Osh city.³⁹ When this information emerged, it created a media sensation but failed to force the IG to investigate the allegations of torture.⁴⁰ In an open letter to Interim President Roza Otunbayeva and then Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev, their relatives—along with the family members of others accused in the JM case—asked for truth and justice.⁴¹ To this day, their call remains unanswered, as does the question of how two revolutionaries and IG-anointed activists with no previous criminal record became terrorists in the space of just a few months.⁴²

Even more questions surround a December 20 YouTube video showing five masked, armed men de-

34 Roger D. Kangas, "Uzbekistan," in *Power and Change in Central Asia*, ed. Sally Cummings (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

35 "Kyrgyz Interior Minister says 2 terrorists killed, 1 detained in special operation outside Bishkek," *AKIpress*, January 6, 2011, https://akipress.com/_en_news.php?id=41798.

36 For a complete list of all people implicated at different times with JM, ISIS, or both, as well as other information about them, e.g. torture, please see Appendix 2.

37 The problem is pervasive in the country and goes beyond terrorism suspects. A 2015 Human Rights Council report during Kyrgyzstan's Universal Periodic Review expressed concerns about the 'widespread practice of torture and ill-treatment, in particular for the purpose of extracting confessions, [the] failure of Kyrgyzstan to investigate fully the many allegations [thereof], [and the] use of forced confessions as evidence in "Universal Periodic Review – Kyrgyzstan," Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, January 19, 2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/KGSession21.aspx>.

38 Saniya Sagnayeva, "Human Rights Organization Memorial," unpublished manuscript, 2011. The document was given to the authors by one of the lawyers for the defense.

39 "MK-Aziya: Terakty v Kyrgyzstane splanirovalo pravitel'stvo?," *Fergana News*, February 2, 2011, <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=6889>.

40 Renat Shamsuddinov, "Mify Vremennogo Pravitel'stva ob ugroze terrorizma v Kyrgyzstane," *Kyrgyzskoe kompromat TV*, January 26, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPE6AZh-Q7Q>.

41 "Obrashchenie rodstvennikov grazhdan, zaderzhannykh po podozreniyu v terrorizme," *AKIpress*, February 14, 2011, http://mnenie.akipress.org/unews/un_post:614.

42 Abdrakhmanov and Kenzhegulov are not the only one who participated in the April 7 revolution, including the storming of the Presidential building in Bishkek, and ended up being involved as defendants in the JM's case. See Sagnayeva, "Human Rights Organization Memorial!"

clarifying the creation of JM and swearing an oath of allegiance to Taliban leader Mullah Omar.⁴³ The GKNB refers to the video for the first (and last) time during the same press release in which it announces having disrupted JM, on January 17, 2011.⁴⁴ However, while the name Mahdi clearly refers to Shia theology, the armed militants offer their allegiance to the Taliban, a Sunni movement.⁴⁵ Religious education in Kyrgyzstan suffers from a lack of funding and qualified cadres, so it is common for people to have a very superficial knowledge of Islam. But the man sitting in the far left corner, who speaks first in the video, is a native Arabic speaker who should presumably know the difference between Sunni and Shia.⁴⁶ This fact raises further doubts about the official version of events, which mentions only Kyrgyz and one Russian as JM members, but no Arabs.⁴⁷ Given the backlash from the families of the accused at the time, why didn't the GKNB clearly identify the masked men among the detained suspects as a way of putting suspicions to rest?

Finally, in an interview with one of the authors, now retired Major General Imankulov pointed out:

[O]n the notebooks of JM's members we found that they had visited extremist websites. They had exchanged emails with an al-Qaeda branch, though I cannot recall in which country. The latter had written back that they would recognize Jaysh al-Mahdi if they showed their muscle, i.e. carried out attacks. This is the reason why they struck.⁴⁸

What better platform to claim responsibility for the bombing of Bishkek synagogue in September and the Sports Palace in November than a YouTube video announcing the group's creation? This would have certainly given the newly-established group credibility in the eyes of foreign jihadists. Instead, the video contains nothing beyond the usual jihadist platitudes of joining the fight against infidels and living by the law of Allah in Arabic, Russian and Kyrgyz. Interestingly, Imankulov confirmed that the Sports Palace attack was only meant to create panic, rather than cause civilian casualties.⁴⁹ He described "seeing the bomb used. First of all, it was placed in a manhole, in order to severely limit the explosion. If you want to blow something up, you don't put the explosive in a hole. Second, it didn't have any shards to hurt people."

A terrorist group that avoids civilian casualties is certainly an anomaly. Still, none of the attacks allegedly mounted by JM resulted in deaths: the Bishkek synagogue was empty at the time an explosive device went off in the courtyard, while the car bomb outside a Bishkek police station failed to detonate.⁵⁰ The GKNB claims that the group killed a citizen and three policemen in two other separate incidents, but while criminal, these acts hardly account for terrorism.

Who Benefits?

At the January 17, 2011 press conference, GKNB Chairman Dushebayev made the sensational claim that JM intended to strike at the US Embassy in

43 "Pledging Bay'at to Amir-ul-Momineen Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid," YouTube video, March 20, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtxWWZKcVfE>.

44 "Kyrgyzstan: Glava GKNB nazval ekstremistkuyu organizatsiyu, stoyashchuyu za poslednimi gromkimi prestupleniyami," *Fergana News*, January 17, 2011, <http://www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=16222>.

45 In Shia eschatology, it is believed that "the son of the eleventh imam [is] alive, that he [is] in "occultation," and that he [is] to reappear as mahdi (Ar. "the Guided One") at "the end of time" See "Islam in Iran vii. The concept of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/islam-in-iran-vii-the-concept-of-mahdi-in-twelver-shiism>.

46 The authors asked three unrelated native Arabs to listen to the video and give their opinion about the first speaker. While differing in their identification of the militant's place of origin, all were positive that he is someone whose mother tongue is Arabic.

47 "Kyrgyz Security Chief Blames Terrorist Group For Recent Bombings," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 17, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan_bombings_duishebaev/2278858.html.

48 Author's interview, Bishkek, July 7, 2016. All subsequent quotes are taken from this interview.

49 This was also reported at the time of the incident. "Secretary of the Security Council: Kyrgyzstan tightens security measures to preserve public order," *Trend*, November 30, 2010, <http://en.trend.az/casia/kyrgyzstan/1789603.html>.

50 The Bishkek synagogue was attacked once before during the April revolution, suggesting that this incident may be also linked to the political instability prevailing in the country at the time. Moreover, Bishkek Police spoke of a device being hurled into the courtyard by a single person, which contradicts Abrakhmanov's 'confession' of a more sophisticated plan executed with Kenzhegulov's help. Memorial reports that Abrakhmanov's 'confession' reads like "the testimonies recorded under dictation of the investigators and tailored to fit terrorism charges, which are found in dozens of fabricated criminal case in different CIS countries." See "Explosive device hurled into empty synagogue courtyard in Kyrgyzstan," *San Diego Jewish World*, September 12, 2010, <https://sdjewishworld.wordpress.com/2010/09/12/explosive-device-hurled-into-empty-synagogue-courtyard-in-kyrgyzstan/>; "Bishkek Police Investigate Attack on Synagogue," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 10, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Bishkek_Police_Investigate_Attack_On_Synagogue/2154212.html; Urmat Kenzhesariyev, "Vzryyv v stolitse imeyut kavkazskiy sled?" *Vechniy Bishkek*, no date, <http://members.vb.kg/2011/01/19/territ/1.html>; and Sagnayeva, "Human Rights Organization Memorial"

Bishkek and the Manas Transit Centre, the US-leased air base at Manas International Airport. The statement, which resonated in international media,⁵¹ coincided with a meeting between PM Atambayev and US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Susan Elliott. During the discussion, “Elliott suggested that both sides cooperate in tackling drug trafficking, terrorism and religious extremists in Kyrgyzstan.”⁵² Dushebayev had just put the country on the map in the GWOT. Apart from the many inconsistencies, at the time intelligence company STRATFOR picked up on the suspicious timing of the press conference, arguing that:

[I]t is in the interests of the Kyrgyz authorities to exaggerate, and perhaps even fabricate, the threat of terrorism in the country. [B]ut the true nature of violence in Kyrgyzstan is more likely linked to the simmering ethnic tensions than transnational terrorist activity.

[A]lso, claims by security officials that the detained terrorist group would deploy a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device first at a police station and then at the Manas air base is, to say the least, an odd and unusual tactic for such a group to employ.

[U]nder the current circumstances, it is much more likely that the Kyrgyz government and security forces are manipulating the terrorist threat in order to justify their own crackdowns and to get outside support from countries like the United States, as well as Russia.⁵³

It worked. By the end of 2011, freelance journalist Joshua Kucera reported:

According to the most recent State Department budget documents justifying military aid to [Central Asia], [a] ssistance to Kyrgyzstan “will be used to provide equipment to military forces to enhance their ability to protect the country from terrorist threats. The US Government will work directly with Kyrgyz Security Forces to identify

shortfalls in equipment necessary to complete the security mission.”⁵⁴

US training of Kyrgyzstan’s security services grew exponentially over the following two years up to 2014, when the Manas air base closed in accordance with the timetable to end NATO’s presence in Afghanistan.⁵⁵ Although some of the aid must be viewed as a way of currying favor with the Kyrgyz authorities, given the strategic importance of Manas air base to the US military effort in Afghanistan, terrorism was also a top US priority in the region in the context of the GWOT, as Susan Elliott pointed out. The subject had been raised at talks between then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Interim President Otunbayeva during the former’s visit to the country on December 2, 2010—incidentally two days after the Sports Palace bombing—and again when the latter met with US President Barack Obama at the White House in March 2011.⁵⁶

But for the IG and the security apparatus, the main benefits of inflating the terrorism menace were domestic. In the same post, STRATFOR indicates:

[While] violence has gone down considerably in Kyrgyzstan, [the] country has been in a continued state of instability. Low-level protests continue almost daily, and the country’s transition [under] President Roza Otunbayeva has been far from smooth. The Kyrgyz government and security forces, therefore, have played up the threat of terrorism and extremism in order to justify security crackdowns and exert control over the restless country.⁵⁷

In the wake of the April revolution, the GKNB elite Alfa units were a demoralized force facing trial—and public shame—for killing and injuring hundreds of civilians in an unsuccessful attempt to quell a popular revolt. In a way, the whole service was being tried for failing to protect national security, especially af-

51 Richard Orange, “Militants ‘planned to blow up US embassy and airbase’ in Kyrgyzstan,” *Telegraph*, January 18, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/kyrgyzstan/8266848/Militants-planned-to-blow-up-US-embassy-and-airbase-in-Kyrgyzstan.html>.

52 “Kyrgyzstan, US agree on resuming bilateral consultations,” *Trend*, January 18, 2011, <http://en.trend.az/casia/kyrgyzstan/1813276.html>.

53 “Kyrgyzstan Plays Up the Terrorist Threat,” *Stratfor*, January 17, 2011, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/kyrgyzstan-plays-terrorist-threat>.

54 Joshua Kucera, “Central Asia: US Special Forces Help Train Praetorian Guards,” *EurasiaNet*, December 19, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64736>.

55 “Volume I Section III-V - South Central Asia,” US Department of State, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/213456.pdf>; “Volume I Section IV-V - South Central Asia,” US Department of State, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/230217.pdf>.

56 “Remarks with President Otunbayeva after Their Meeting,” US Department of State, December 2, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/12/152274.htm>; “Readout of the Meeting of the President and National Security Advisor with Kyrgyzstani President Roza Otunbayeva,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 7, 2011, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/07/readout-meeting-president-and-national-security-advisor-kyrgyzstani-pres>.

57 “Kyrgyzstan Plays up the Terrorist Threat.”

ter the pogroms that rocked southern Kyrgyzstan in summer 2010.

By promoting a narrative of a growing terrorism threat, the GKNB and their special units rebranded themselves as the vanguard defense of the nation in the fight against extremism, an image that endures today. In the words of the former GKNB official, “you should remember that almost 3,000 people were in attendance at the Sports Palace for the April 7 events trial. Most were relatives of victims; emotions ran sky-high. It was Alfa Special Forces on trial. The explosion helped to shift the mood.” In this context, the IG’s political survival was guaranteed, along with the transfer of power and resources to the new elites. The cost to Kyrgyzstan, however, has been significant, as little in the way of the promised reforms has been achieved. In Crisis Group’s Deirdre Tynan’s words:

[T]he new interim government said it would deliver reform, accountability, and an end to the staggering corruption of the Bakiyev era. It said it would dismantle the schemes that concentrated political and economic power in the hands of a clannish few. It did not. Under any circumstances, this would be a massive undertaking, but President Almazbek Atambayev, elected to the post in October 2011, has not overseen a real effort to combat political or economic corruption. The spoils have simply been redistributed.⁵⁸

Trial and Sentence

On July 19, 2013, after more than two years of trial, 13 people were convicted on terrorism charges in connection with the JM case. Abdrakhmanov, Kenzhegulov and a third suspect, Daniyar Kadyraliev, were given life in a very strict corrective colony along with property confiscation; the other defendants received sentences between four and 23 years in detention.⁵⁹

According to two lawyers for the defense who knew the presiding judge, Ernis Chotkorayev, the judge had come under tremendous pressure to deliver a guilty verdict. Both confirmed in separate interviews that the judge is well known for being just and impartial, a rarity in Kyrgyzstan. On the day of the

sentence, however, one of the lawyers went to see him in his office and remarked:

[H]is attitude had totally changed. He threw a fax paper on the table. It was a letter from the General Prosecutor’s Office Council on the Selection of Judges, in which they were questioning his conduct in the trial. “What am I supposed to do?” he told me. “I want to help and I saw what kind of a mess this trial has been, but I cannot do it now. I don’t want to lose my job.”⁶⁰

The end of the trial should have signaled the end of the JM case. After all, already in 2011 the GKNB had “claimed to have eliminated the group [Jaysh al-Mahdi], which conducted several small-scale attacks in late 2010.”⁶¹ Despite this, the Kyrgyz government and security apparatus have continued using the threat of terrorism to divert attention from more pressing issues affecting the general population, securing their survival at the helm while silencing dissent. In 2015, JM resurfaced along with the Islamic State (ISIS), and once again, the official version of events presented major contradictions, bringing into serious question its credibility.

A Strange Case Becomes Even Stranger: JM and Mr. ISIS

On July 16, 2015, explosions and heavy gunfire ripped through Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek. News spread fast about an ongoing special operation mounted by the GKNB Alfa elite forces with police support in the city’s southern district. Speaking to the media immediately afterwards, GKNB spokesperson Rakhat Sulaimanov explained that the security services had neutralized an “international terrorist group preparing to launch attacks in Bishkek,” adding that an investigation was still under way to ascertain the group’s identity and the location of the attacks.⁶² The details came the following day, however, when Sulaimanov revealed that six members of the Islamic State had been eliminated and seven more captured in the course of two parallel

58 Deirdre Tynan, “Tracing Political Circles in Kyrgyzstan,” *International Crisis Group Blog*, April 6, 2016, <http://blog.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/2016/04/06/tracing-political-circles-in-kyrgyzstan/>.

59 “Kyrgyzstan: v Bishkeke vynesen prigovor po delu o terroristicheskoy gruppe “Jayshul Mahdi”,” *Fergana News*, July 19, 2013, <http://www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=20977>.

60 Author’s interviews with lawyers for the defense, Bishkek, February 9 and 11, 2016.

61 “Country Reports on Terrorism 2011 – Kyrgyzstan,” US Department of States, July 31, 2012, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/501fbcaf.html>.

62 “GKNB provodit kontrterroristicheskuyu operatsiyu v Bishkeke,” YouTube video, 1:28:07, posted by *Kloop*, July 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9mDPUXEE38>. For Sulaimanov’s statement, see 1:21:10.

operations in the capital. Security services had dealt a pre-emptive blow to the group, as it emerged that it was preparing to bomb the July 17 mass prayer gathering to mark the end of Ramadan in Ala-Too Square in Bishkek, as well as the Russian Kant airbase some 20 kilometers east of the city.⁶³

The announcement reverberated widely in local and international media, particularly as it was the first time that an ISIS cell had been allegedly discovered not only in Kyrgyzstan, but in the wider Central Asian region.⁶⁴ Sulaimanov claimed that the ISIS terrorists “had received finances from Syria to buy chemical components for explosives,” and that “[s]ignificant amounts of cash, seven assault rifles, five pistols, and a large number of grenades were found in their hideout,”⁶⁵ along with 500 kilograms of ammonium nitrate.⁶⁶ The latter doesn’t feature in the short video the GKNB released as supporting evidence to these allegations, which instead shows an immaculate ISIS flag lying on the floor among various tools, weapons and ammunitions.⁶⁷

What’s in a Story?

Very soon, the official version of events began to exhibit substantial cracks. First of all, it transpired that at least four of the six ‘ISIS terrorists’ were actually criminals well known to law enforcement agencies. For instance, the supposed cell leader Janbolat Amanov (or Amirov, depending on the source)⁶⁸ was a Kazakh citizen wanted by police in Kyrgyzstan for escaping from prison, where he was serving a three-year sentence for forgery and illegal border crossing.⁶⁹

More significantly, among the killed was Tariel Dzhumagulov, also known as Tokha, a prominent

member of the post-Soviet underworld whose brush- es with the law included “disorderly conduct, robbery, possession of firearms and extortion,” as well as membership of Kamchybek Kolbayev’s organized crime group.⁷⁰ In 2012, the US Department of the Treasury had put Kolbayev under sanctions:

Kamchybek Kolbayev acts for or on behalf of the Brothers’ Circle [crime syndicate] by serving as [their] “overseer” for its Central Asian activities, including narcotics trafficking. In June 2011, President Obama identified Kolbayev as a significant foreign narcotics trafficker under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act. Kolbayev is wanted in Kyrgyzstan for organized crimes and crimes involving the use of weapons/explosives, and organized/transnational crime.⁷¹

The presence of one more Kazakh citizen among the dead suggests that the ‘ISIS cell members’ may instead have been part of a criminal cartel involved in cross-border activities. This appeared to be confirmed during a September 7 press conference held by the relatives of the people killed during the special operation, frustrated at the fact that the GKNB wouldn’t return the bodies of their loved ones as Kyrgyz law allows in terrorism cases.⁷²

One family member declared that “our children aren’t terrorists, they prayed five times a day, so how could they blow up their co-religionists in Ala-Too square? Yes, they were bullies in their youth, but not terrorists.” Another added: “Had they announced that [our children] were members of an organized crime group, we wouldn’t have said anything. But they are calling them terrorists. This is unaccept-

63 “Kyrgyzstan Claims Neutralized IS Members Planned Attacks,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 17, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan-islamic-state-clashes/27134456.html>.

64 “GKNB: Ubitye “boeviki” – chleny “Islamskogo gosudarstva”,” *Kloop*, July 17, 2015, <http://kloopkg.wpengine.com/blog/2015/07/17/gknb-ubitye-boeviki-chleny-islamskogo-gosudarstva-foto/>; Olga Dziubenko, “Kyrgyz security police say they foiled two Islamic State attacks,” *Reuters*, July 17, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kyrgyzstan-security-idUSKCN0PR12520150717>.

65 “Kyrgyzstan Claims Neutralized IS Members Planned Attacks,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 17, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan-islamic-state-clashes/27134456.html>.

66 Anton Lymar, “Anti-terror,” *24.kg*, August 12, 2015, <http://www.eng.24.kg/community/176694-news24.html>.

67 “Likvidatsiya terroristov v Bishkeke,” *Bulbul*, July 20, 2015, <http://bulbul.kg/video:37266>.

68 “Sredi ubitykh v Kirgizstane predpolagaemykh terroristov bylo dva kazakhstantsa,” *Kazakhstan Today*, July 21, 2015, https://www.kt.kz/rus/crime/sredi_ubitykh_v_kirgizstane_predpolagaemykh_terroristov_bilo_dva_kazahstanca_1153607512.html.

69 “Kyrgyzstan: perestrelka v tsentre Bishkeka,” *Central Asia TV News*, June 26, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMWEInGsGFo>.

70 “Den’ 20 iyulya: terroristom IGIL okazalsya vsem izvestnyy “chernyy,”” *For.kg*, July 21, 2015, <http://www.for.kg/news-332456-ru.html>.

71 “Treasury Imposes Sanctions on Key Members of the Yakuza and Brothers’ Circle Criminal Organizations,” US Department of the Treasury, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1430.aspx>.

72 See Article 36 of the Law “On Countering Terrorism” of the Kyrgyz Republic. This may be in breach of international law, namely of Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights concerning “the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.” On the case of Osama bin Laden and how “funeral rites are also closely related to the exercise of the right to one’s religion and belief,” see Helen Duffy, *The ‘War on Terror’ and the Framework of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 772.

able.⁷³ This is in line with the JM case, where most of the accused were also conservative Muslims. This appears to be all the evidence the authorities need to start using the terrorism buzzword, automatically connecting outward expressions of religiosity with an imminent threat. It so happens that this narrative allows the elites to exaggerate (or fabricate) the threat and benefit from it.

During the July 16 operation, the firefight set an aging poplar tree alight,⁷⁴ causing a raging fire that burnt five buildings in the area to the ground, including the alleged terrorists' safe house. An international journalist who arrived at the scene that same evening commented:

[A]s to them discovering anything intact, the very suggestion is beyond ridiculous. The fire was very extensive and lasted well into the night, so for them to find a pristine [ISIS] flag, not to speak of [a] large amount of flammable material still in one piece was plainly a flagrant falsehood.⁷⁵

But even if we take the GKNB's allegations on the weapons and explosives found in the hideout at face value, things still don't add up. As Noah Tucker reports:

[T]he influential political science scholar Aleksandr Knyazev, a strong defender of Russian interests in [Kyrgyzstan], mocked the claims that a few career criminals could have possibly planned to "attack an enormous Russian air base with a couple of sacks of fertilizer" and cited it as one of many examples of regional governments manipulating public perceptions of the ISIS threat for political purposes, including efforts to convince Russia to grant more military aid.⁷⁶

The only thing Knyazev misses is that Russia is far from a passive player in Central Asia, as explained below.

Finally, as with the Osh events, a connection was established with ousted President Bakiyev. A few days

after the operation, former member of Parliament for the Ak Jol party and Bakiyev ally Maksat Kunakunov was arrested amid much fanfare with the accusation of having provided weapons to the ISIS cell. According to the authorities, Kukakunov was the mastermind behind a far-fetched plan to destabilize the situation in Kyrgyzstan, with the ISIS cell members poised to orchestrate a series of robberies to fund future terrorist attacks.⁷⁷

In parallel to evidence-thin theories of collaboration between the Bakiyevs and extremist elements to wreak havoc in the country, as already described in part 2 in connection to the Osh events, the authorities have for years pushed the idea of an alliance between criminal and terrorist groups. In May 2012, Radio Azattyk reported how:

Kyrgyzstan's special services have noticed that in recent years, instead of criminal gangs in the conventional sense, new [criminal] groups are formed on the principles of religious organizations. According to them, this can be clearly seen in the extremist organization Jaysh al-Mahdi.⁷⁸

As it so often happens, little to no evidence of this 'new trend' and how JM fits in it was presented. The authorities may have had in mind the fact that a number of convicts appear to convert to Islam while serving time, as a way of escaping drug addiction and finding solace in religion. The alleged JM leader Sovetbek Islamov, killed in an Alfa Special Forces operation on January 5, 2011, was one such convert, as confirmed by retired Major General Imankulov who hails from the same town as Islamov and knew him as a drug addict and petty criminal before he became religious while in jail.⁷⁹

But the direct link the authorities draw between outward expressions of religiosity and extremism explains more about the former's biases than Muslim citizens' propensity to violent radicalization. More importantly, while the link between extremist groups and the criminal underworld has not been proven,

73 "Roditeli ubitykh v khode spetsoperatsii v Bishkeke lits zayavili, chto ikh deti byli "blatnymi," no nikak ne terroristami," *Novosti Evrazii*, September 7, 2015, <http://eurasnews.ru/kirgiziya/родители-убитых-в-ходе-спецоперации-в/>.

74 "Kyrgyzstan: Authorities Present Their Case for Claimed IS Cell," *EurasiaNet*, July 21, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/74326>.

75 Author's email exchanges with international journalist who requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the case, May 4, July 11, 2016.

76 Noah Tucker, "Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Kyrgyzstan," *CERIA Brief* No. 14, February 2016, <http://centralasiaprogram.org/blog/2016/02/16/public-and-state-responses-to-isis-messaging-kyrgyzstan/>.

77 "Maksat Kunakunov – sponsor IGIL Kyrgyzstana," *KG TV*, July 20, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKiAI5F2MU>.

78 Kubanychbek Zholdoshev, "Set' Hakkani poyavilas' v Kyrgyzstane," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 16, 2012, http://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_haqqani_terror/24582498.html.

79 Author's interview, Bishkek, July 7, 2016.

the symbiotic relation between the latter and much of the establishment in Kyrgyzstan has been a known entity for years.

Coincidentally, also in May 2012 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) published an extensive report entitled “Opiate Flows Through Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia.” In it, UNDOC argues that while “there are no observed direct connections between extremist groups and drug trafficking, [...] [similar to Afghanistan] large parts of the political and law enforcement establishment in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are seriously undermined by the involvement in the drug trade.”⁸⁰

Media reports are rife with allegations of collusion between the upper echelons of politics and the underworld of criminality in Kyrgyzstan, including under current President Atambayev.⁸¹ The ice-thin case about ISIS’s presence in the country in collusion with crime bosses can serve as a useful way of averting attention from the authorities’ possible links to the latter—but this isn’t the only benefit of pushing the threat of terrorism in the country.

Who Benefits? Different Times, Same Strategy

Many developments occurred between the JM sentence and the special operation to crush ISIS in Bishkek. Internationally, attention had turned to the self-styled Islamic State, a monster that outgrew its predecessor al-Qaida in Iraq—itsself spawned from the chaos that followed the country’s US-led invasion and occupation—by feeding on the collapse of central power in Syria to establish control over a vast territory straddling the two countries’ northern border.⁸² Despite President Obama proclaiming the end

of the GWOT,⁸³ the rise of ISIS has effectively meant that the fight against terrorism continues to this day, lending credence to the argument that the GWOT is indeed an ‘endless war.’⁸⁴

Domestically, an important counterbalance to Russia’s resurgent influence in the country and the region was lost with the US departure from the Manas Transit Centre in summer 2014. Russia had renewed its lease of Kant airbase for another 15 years in 2012, where it has since continued building up its military muscle in view of turning it “into the Central Asian base for the nascent joint air forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organization,” or CSTO, a Moscow-dominated security outfit.⁸⁵ With Kyrgyzstan’s accession to the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in August 2015, the country appears to be firmly within the Kremlin’s sphere of influence.

The July 2015 special operation in Bishkek took place against a background of great uncertainty about the country’s entry into the EEU, which at the time had been repeatedly postponed due to technical hurdles.⁸⁶ While the elites invested considerable political capital behind Kyrgyzstan’s membership into the union,⁸⁷ opposition had been mounting against a project many perceived as Putin’s brainchild to ultimately tie the country’s future to Russia’s. An International Republican Institute (IRI) poll in May 2014 found that “[s]upport for joining Russia’s Customs Union [the EEU precursor] dropped 13 points from IRI’s February 2013 poll, and is now supported by just less than half of respondents (49 percent). Twenty-one percent strongly disapprove of joining the union, up from just 10 percent.”⁸⁸ Apart from a loss of sovereignty, resistance to EEU entry

80 “Opiate flows through northern Afghanistan and Central Asia,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, May 2012, http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Afghanistan_northern_route_2012_web.pdf.

81 Anna Yalovkina, “Kyrgyz Politics Still Too Close to the Mob?,” *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, July 14, 2015, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kyrgyz-politics-still-too-close-mob>; Vitaly Volkov, “Eksperty: Kirgizskiy vitse-prem’er otvetit za vora v zakone,” *Deutsche Welle*, May 24, 2013, <http://www.dw.com/ru/эксперты-киргизский-вице-премьер-ответит-за-вора-в-законе/a-16834762>.

82 Franco Galdini, “The IS Blowback,” *Warscapes*, August 24, 2014, <http://www.warscapes.com/opinion/blowback>.

83 Paul D. Shinkman, “Obama: ‘Global War on Terror’ Is Over,” *U.S. News*, May 23, 2013, <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/05/23/obama-global-war-on-terror-is-over>.

84 Glenn Greenwald, “The ‘war on terror’ – by design – can never end,” *The Guardian*, January 4, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/comment-isfree/2013/jan/04/war-on-terror-endless-johnson>; Chalmers Johnson, “America occupies the planet: The grim realities of our endless War on Terror,” *Salon*, August 11, 2015, http://www.salon.com/2015/08/11/america_occupies_the_planet_the_steep_consequences_of_our_endless_war_on_terror_partner/.

85 Joshua Kucera, “Russia Reinforces Air Base in Kyrgyzstan with New Attack Jet,” *EurasiaNet*, December 9, 2014, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/71266>.

86 Catherine Putz, “Kyrgyzstan (Finally) Joins the Eurasian Economic Union,” *The Diplomat*, May 22, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/05/kyrgyzstan-finally-joins-the-eurasian-economic-union/>.

87 “PM: Kyrgyzstan integration in Eurasian European Union to trigger entrepreneurship,” *TASS Russian News Agency*, September 21, 2015, <http://tass.ru/en/economy/822426>.

88 “IRI Kyrgyz Poll: Support for Joining Russia’s Customs Union Drops, Corruption Remains Pervasive Problem,” International Republican Institute, May 14, 2014, <http://www.iri.org/resource/iri-kyrgyz-poll-support-joining-russia’s-customs-union-drops-corruption-remains-pervasive>.

was growing in parallel to the escalation of the war in Ukraine. Putin's military adventurism caused concerns of a similar fate for Kyrgyzstan, as did the Russian economic downturn under the weight of Western sanctions imposed as a result of the Ukraine standoff.⁸⁹

Still, despite its vital importance, the subject was hardly debated and little information trickled down to the public on the pros and cons of accession.⁹⁰ Instead, people were subjected to a barrage of news on terrorism in general, and ISIS in particular, which had the effect of diverting public opinion from the very real issue of the EEU. While the media in Kyrgyzstan are freer than in neighboring countries, a 2008 study by the Danish NGO International Media Support (IMS) found that:

[J]ournalists in Kyrgyzstan know little about political extremism and terrorism. In crises situations, they often lack skills to tackle such issues. Therefore they habitually reproduce official statements without looking for an opportunity to supplement these with their own investigations or third party analysis and comments.⁹¹

And if the authorities in Bishkek are to be believed, Kyrgyzstan is facing a massive terrorism crisis.⁹² Speaking at a conference in November 2015, the Interior Ministry head of counter-terrorism alleged—apparently without irony—that the country had suffered 300 terrorist attacks in the first 10 months of 2015, the equivalent of one attack per day.⁹³ The hysteria peaked with the July special operation and remained sky-high until the close of the year, due to a spectacular prison break by alleged JM and ISIS terrorists and a two-week operation to apprehend them.⁹⁴

As was the case with JM, domestic priorities were paramount to the authorities' argument that they were fighting the enemy of the day in the GWOT, namely ISIS. The fact that the Kyrgyz government put forward the same line-up of co-conspirators allegedly behind the 2010 Osh events—criminal elements, terrorist groups and former Bakiyev associates—appears to confirm that they were preparing the ground for the upcoming October 2015 parliamentary elections.

Unsurprisingly, incumbent President Atambayev's electoral message was for voters to 'choose stability,'⁹⁵ the buzzword of his own Social Democratic party (SDPK) which he clearly favored in the elections.⁹⁶ At the same time, in the run up to October and following the July operation the President strove to present himself and the government as tough on terrorism or, in other words, as the candidates able to preserve stability.⁹⁷ The strategy worked and in the October 4 poll the SDPK won almost a third of all seats in the Jogorku Kenesh (JK), the Kyrgyz Parliament, becoming the country's most popular party.⁹⁸

More broadly, the election results were a victory for Moscow, as all parties re-elected to the JK were pro-Russian.⁹⁹ Russian media played an important role in promoting the idea of a growing terrorist threat in Kyrgyzstan, emanating from Afghanistan and ISIS. As Kyrgyzstan's political, economic and military patron, the Kremlin's interests coincided with those of the authorities in Bishkek in exaggerating the threat of terrorism to sideline discussions about the EEU and, crucially, present Russia as the country's main partner in the fight against the scourge of violent extremism.

The July 16 special operation and an October 11-12 prison breakout were given a great deal of attention

89 Franco Galdini and Elyor Nematov, "Kyrgyzstan: Putin's Eurasian Economic Union and Its Discontents," *The Diplomat*, May 20, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/05/kyrgyzstan-putins-eurasian-economic-union-and-its-discontents/>.

90 Peter Leonard, "Kyrgyzstan Joins Eurasian Union, Takes Leap into the Dark," *EurasiaNet*, August 7, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/74591>.

91 "The Examples of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: Political Extremism, Terrorism, and Media in Central Asia," International Media Support Report, August 2008, <https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/ims-political-extremism-kyrgyzstan-kazakhstan-2008.pdf>.

92 "Kyrgyzstan Says It Has Been Hit by 'Wave of Terrorism,'" *EurasiaNet*, December 11, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/76516>.

93 Franco Galdini, "Kyrgyzstan Is Manipulating the Threat of 'Terrorism' for Its Own Benefit," *Muftah*, February 11, 2016, http://muftah.org/kyrgyzstan-manipulating-terrorism-threat/#.V5o_kGUhZAY.

94 This is the subject of the following sub-heading.

95 "V Kyrgyzstane pobedila prezidentskaya partiya," *Ozodlik*, October 5, 2015, <http://rus.ozodlik.mobi/a/27288427.html>.

96 Olga Dzyubenko and Dmitry Solovyov, "Pro-Russian parties seen winning Kyrgyz parliamentary poll," *Reuters*, October 4, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kyrgyzstan-election-idUSKCN0RY00320151004>.

97 "Kyrgyzstan steps up a fight against terrorism and extremism," *Mir 24*, September 10, 2015, <http://mir24.tv/news/politics/13230851>.

98 "Kyrgyz Republic: Parliamentary Elections 4 October 2015," OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, January 28, 2016, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/219186?download=true>.

99 Charles Recknagel, "Kyrgyz Voters Choose Russia," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 5, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyz-elections-voters-choose-russia/27289387.html>.

in Russian language media, especially those targeting the audience in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁰⁰ This happened in parallel to coverage of Moscow's provision of increased anti-terrorism training and military hardware to their counterparts in Bishkek (and Central Asia), whether bilaterally or within the framework of the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).¹⁰¹ The media campaign reached a climax in 2016, when Rossiya TV channel aired a report entitled "Kyrgyzstan has become a 'factory of cadres' for ISIS," which featured the July 16 special operation in Bishkek.¹⁰²

So successful was Russia's rebranding as Kyrgyzstan's partner in the war on terrorism that by the end of 2015 a Eurasian Development Bank's annual survey indicated that 86% of the population in the country had a positive attitude towards Eurasian integration, the highest among EEU member states—a definite turnaround from previous trends.¹⁰³ Aside from the obvious benefits for elites in Moscow and Bishkek, however, people in Kyrgyzstan were being jailed and/or killed on very dubious charges of belonging to JM and ISIS, their families torn asunder and their relatives bereft of even the possibility of grieving for their loved ones at their funeral, given the state policy of not returning their bodies.

If the GKNB amateurism can explain some inconsistency in the official line, the extent of the contradictions marring it is so pervasive to warrant a conscious decision by the authorities to go the extra mile to push the terrorism story. This became even more evident as events unfolded after some JM and ISIS detainees mounted a prison break in October 2015. In the weeks and months that followed, the au-

thorities fused and confused JM and ISIS in a back and forth that would be comical if it hadn't involved so many deaths.

Coming Full Circle: How JM Became ISIS, and Vice-Versa

On the night of October 11-12, 2015, JM detainees and ISIS inmates mounted an escape from a maximum security prison (SIZO 50) near Bishkek, killing four officers of the State Prison Service (GSIN) in the process. While five were captured shortly afterwards, a massive manhunt was organized to apprehend the four still at large. Two weeks later, six were dead and three faced charges of, inter alia, terrorism and breaking out of prison to join ISIS in Syria.

Life-sentence JM detainee Bakyt Kenzhegulov was among the group of five who were almost immediately recaptured. Along with two others, he died of a heart attack on October 20, 2015—or that is the official story.¹⁰⁴ Retired Colonel and GSIN veteran Ernst Isaev saw the three as they were transported to a prison hospital hours before dying: "they had been beaten so badly that they could hardly stand on their legs. GSIN operatives had just enough time to take them to hospital where they died from the beatings."¹⁰⁵

The other two in the group of five were convicts Muzaffar Urinov and Bolot Kurbanakhunov, one serving life for murder and the other for robbery and murder, respectively.¹⁰⁶ But in a pattern similar to the July 16 special operation against a criminal-gang-turned-ISIS-cell, by the time they appeared in court the two faced charges of terrorism and wanting to join ISIS in Syria, which they denied.¹⁰⁷ In June 2016,

100 A search on the Kremlin's media branch Sputnik.kg in Russian for news items where the July 16 special operation and the October 11-12 prison escape had been mentioned gave as a result 65 and 149 articles, respectively, between summer 2015 and January 2016.

101 See "Russia Plans Anti-Terrorism Drills Involving CSTO, SCO Countries," *Sputnik*, October 1, 2015, <http://sputniknews.com/military/20151001/1027826231/Russia-Plans-Anti-Terrorism-Drills-Involving-CSTO-SCO-Countries.html>; Viktor Litovkin, "Ekspert: ODKB sosredotachivaetsya na bor'be s terrorizmom," *Sputnik*, December 21, 2015, <http://sputnik.by/analytics/20151221/1019168619.html>; "Russia Actively Rearming Kyrgyz Army against Daesh Threats," *Sputnik*, December 23, 2015, <http://sputniknews.com/military/20151223/1032198201/russia-kyrgyzstan-army-shoigu.html>.

102 Eldiyar Arykbaev, "Telekanaly Rossii nazvali Kyrgyzstan kuznitsey kadrov dlya IGIL," *Kloop*, February 25, 2016, <http://kloop.kg/blog/2016/02/25/telekanaly-rossii-nazvali-kyrgyzstan-kuznitsey-kadrov-dlya-igil/>.

103 "Integration Barometer of the EDB 2015," Eurasian Development Bank, October 16, 2015, http://www.eabr.org/r/research/centre/projectsCII/integration_barometer/?id_16=48993.

104 "Pobeg iz SIZO-50: v SIZO-50 skoropostizhno skonchalsya odin iz sbezhavshikh, kotorogo v tu zhe noch' zaderzhali," *AKIpress*, October 20, 2015, <http://svodka.akipress.org/news:144150/>; "Pobeg iz SIZO-50: skonchalsya tretiy zaderzhannyi beglets Muratbek Zhumaliev," *AKIpress*, October 21, 2015, <http://svodka.akipress.org/news:144182?from=kgnews&place=impnews>.

105 Author's interview, Bishkek, February 11, 2016.

106 For Urinov, see "Ubiytstva taksistov," *Chalkan TV*, February 10, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yexcz1Gj_nM. For Kurbanakhunov, see "4 rodnnykh brata i ikh otets podozrevayutsya v sovershenii ogrableniya bankov i ubiystve dvukh militsionerov," *AKIpress*, October 20, 2005, <http://kg.akipress.org/news:22910?place=nowread>.

107 Rinat Shamsutdinov, "Podsudimye v sude po delu o pobege iz SIZO-50 zaverili, chto ne sobiralis' v Siriyu," *AKIpress*, May 27, 2016, http://24.kg/obschestvo/32616_podsudimye_v_sude_po_delu_o_pobege_iz_sizo-50_zaverili_chto_ne_sobiralis_v_siriyu/.

both were given another life sentence, despite reports that they may have been tortured.¹⁰⁸

Among the four on the run was Azamat Musuraliev, who was being investigated for theft,¹⁰⁹ but whom the authorities suddenly accused of being a JM member following the prison escape.¹¹⁰ According to the Kyrgyz Ministry of Interior, Musuraliev was killed upon recapture as he resisted arrest.¹¹¹ A military expert who studied a video and pictures of his dead body,¹¹² however, pointed out that all 8 or 9 bullet impacts “entered from the back. It seems that the victim has also a wound in the back of his head.”¹¹³ This may indicate an execution, in line with the shoot-first and ask-questions-later mentality mentioned in relation to JM previously.

Another escapee, Altynbek Itibayev, also remained at large, when a “special operation to liquidate him”¹¹⁴ was mounted and pictures of his bullet-ridden body started appearing online.¹¹⁵ Itibayev had been arrested during the anti-ISIS operation on July 16,¹¹⁶ and yet authorities now accused him of being “an active member of the banned group JM,” who had been involved in the bombing of the Sports Palace in November 2010.¹¹⁷ There is only one glitch in this story: from April 2009 to October 2013 Itibayev was held in detention by the GKNB for murder and could

not possibly be roaming around Bishkek planning terrorist attacks.¹¹⁸

Moreover, while in 2010-11 one could argue that the name JM was given with no specific reference to Shia eschatology, this could not be the case any longer in 2015, as the State Commission for Religious Affairs had published a report clearly identifying JM as a Shia organization.¹¹⁹ How, then, could someone like Itibayev be first accused of being part of a Sunni radical organization like ISIS, only to be linked a few months later to a Shia millenarian movement? The authorities never felt it necessary to answer this question.¹²⁰

Finally, life-sentence JM detainees Daniyar Kadyraliev and Edil Abdrakhmanov managed to escape. Kadyraliev was later killed upon arrest. When Abdrakhmanov was recaptured, he was found lying on the ground in the middle of an empty field. He had been shot in the leg and there was an ISIS flag next to him. Without apparent irony, one media outlet thus titled its report: “JM group’s leader caught near Bishkek with ISIS flag.”¹²¹ While the media obviously failed to scrutinize the authorities’ ever-more improbable claims, during the trial the latter proceeded to accuse Abdrakhmanov—someone who had been sentenced to life for membership in the JM terrorist organization two years prior—of wanting to join ISIS in Syria.¹²² Itibayev’s problem applies to

108 “Pobeg iz SIZO #50: E. Abdrakhmanova, M. Urinova, B. Kurbanakhunova prigovorili k pozhiznennomu lisheniyu svobody,” *AKIpress*, June 29, 2016, <http://svodka.akipress.org/news:825731>; Iana Baiburina, “GSIN i GUBOP izbili khozyayku kvartiry, gde skryvalsya beglets iz SIZO #50,” *Knews*, June 9, 2016, <http://knews.kg/2016/06/09/delo-begletsov-iz-sizo-50-hozyajku-kvartiry-gde-skryvalsya-beglets-izbili-sotrudniki-gsin-i-gubop/>.

109 “Pobeg iz SIZO #50: A. Musuraliev prokhdil po delu o krazhe materialov ugolovnogogo dela po maroderstvu,” *Gezitter*, October 20, 2015, http://waw.gezitter.org/society/44537_pobeg_iz_sizo-50_a_musuraliev_prokhdil_po_delu_o_kraje_materialov_ugolovnogogo_dela_po_maroderstvu/.

110 “Iz SIZO-50 sovershili pobeg 9 chelovek, tri sotrudnika GSIN ubity,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 12, 2015, <http://rus.azattyk.org/a/27301104.html>.

111 “Pobeg iz SIZO-50: Azamat Musuraliev zastrelen pri zaderzhanii, – MVD,” *AKIpress*, October 20, 2015, <http://svodka.akipress.org/news:144145>.

112 “Azamat Musuraliev zastrelen pri zaderzhanii,” *AKIpress*, October 20, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_3nWOBxv0Q. For pictures of Musuraliev’s body, see Marat Uraliev, “Azamat Musuraliev ubit v Sokulukskom rayone,” *Zanoza*, October 20, 2015, http://zanoza.kg/doc/326436_v_sokulykskom_rayone_ybili_sbejavshego_iz_sizo_50_azamata_mysralieva.html.

113 Author’s email exchange with military expert, March 21, 2016.

114 “Special operation for liquidation of fugitive prisoner finished, Itibayev killed – Interior Minister,” *AKIpress*, n.d., <http://akipress.com/news:567153/>.

115 “Operation to eliminate fugitive prisoner in Bishkek, Oct. 22,” *AKIpress*, October 23, 2015, <http://akipress.com/photo:357/>.

116 Makhinur Niyazova, “Stali izvestny lichnosti predpolagaemykh terroristov, ubitykh i zaderzhannykh v khode spetsoperatsii GKNB,” *24.gk*, July 20, 2015, http://24.kg/kriminal/16464_ia_24kg_stali_izvestnyi_lichnosti_predpolagaemykh_terroristov_ubityih_i_zaderjannyih_v_hode_spetsoperatsii_gknb/.

117 Authors’ observations in Bishkek following the SIZO 50’s escape; see also “Doše begletsa: kak Itibaev resheniem suda okazalsya na svobode,” *Sputnik*, October 21, 2015, <http://ru.sputnik.kg/incidents/20151021/1019495373.html>.

118 This was confirmed to one of the authors by Itibayev’s brother Meder and his lawyer Kadizha Zazazova. Author’s interviews, Bishkek, February 26 and March 3, 2016, respectively. Open sources confirm this: Kybanychbek Mukashev, “Tak kto zhe zastrelil Sanzharbeka Kadyralieva?,” *Vecherniy Bishkek*, April 13, 2011, http://members.vb.kg/2011/04/13/panorama/5_print.html.

119 “State Policy in Religious Affairs and Main Religious Currents in Kyrgyzstan,” State Commission of Religious Affairs (SCRA), 2015, http://www.religion.gov.kg/ru/metodi4ka_ru.pdf.

120 Several emails to the GKNB asking for an explanation specifically on this point went answered. Author’s email to GKNB, July 2016.

121 “Glavarya grupirovki “Zhaisul” Makhdi” poymali pod Bishkekom s flagom IG,” *Mir 24*, October 22, 2015, <http://mir24.tv/news/society/13417216>.

122 Rinat Shamsutdinov, “My hoteli dat” sotrudnikam DPS dengi, no oni tak i ne podoshli k nam,” *24*, May 27, 2016, http://24.kg/obschestvo/32615_edil_abdrakhmanov_myi_hoteli_dat_sotrudnikam_dps_dengi_no_oni_tak_i_ne_podoshli_k_nam/.

Abdrakhmanov, only in reverse: the first went from ISIS to JM, while the second moved from JM to ISIS.

It does not end here. In December 2015 media reports spoke of two further ‘terrorists’ eliminated in yet another special operation. Linking to official sources from the Kyrgyz authorities, including the GKNB, the suspects were identified as members of Tokha’s group (i.e. an ISIS cell),¹²³ as members of JM,¹²⁴ or both.¹²⁵ It is unsurprising, then, that in a press release dated June 29, 2016, the Ministry of Interior claimed to have neutralized a four-member JM cell involved in “armed assaults to support the activities of the group, as well as the recruitment of citizens for ISIS.”¹²⁶

In their desire to be seen at the forefront of the fight against terrorism domestically and internationally, the authorities have come full circle. JM has been fused and confused with the current enemy of the day in the GWOT, ISIS, with no concern for coherence, truth and, most importantly, human life.

Conclusion

The paper explored two specific cases in which the Kyrgyz authorities claimed to have identified and neutralized two terrorist groups operating in the country, namely Jaysh al-Mahdi—an allegedly home-grown formation bent on destabilizing the country between 2010 and 2011—and an Islamic State cell—aiming to wreak havoc in Kyrgyzstan during the summer of 2015. It subjects these allegations to critical scrutiny by identifying the contingent political-economic circumstances under which the purported terrorism threat appeared in the country, while perusing an array of open source material, as well as eyewitness accounts and in-depth interviews with family members, lawyers, human rights defenders, former security officers and politicians.

The official line in both cases suffers from such glaring contradictions that it casts serious doubt on the professionalism of some Kyrgyzstan’s institutions, especially in law enforcement and intelligence, as well as on the Kyrgyz government’s sincerity in exposing the truth. This point is reinforced by the widespread torture of suspects to extract confessions and the pressure on the judiciary to deliver guilty sentences, not to speak of the elimination of many of those implicated in these cases.

In both instances, the available evidence suggests that the authorities have grossly exaggerated the threat of terrorism in the country, in order to benefit domestically and internationally from the perception of being at the forefront in the fight against it. By consciously adopting the language of the GWOT, the Kyrgyz elites have managed to curry the favor of different international patrons at different times—the US in 2010-11, Russia in 2015—and receive military aid, especially in the field of counter-terrorism.

But it is domestically that the main gains from manipulating the terrorism threat have been observed. In 2010-11, the country was rocked by political instability and the new interim government’s grip on power was fragile at best. The JM case offered the new elites the political cover to crackdown on dissent, marginalize and silence political opponents, and establish control. The strategy worked, and roughly the same intra-elite, power-sharing arrangements remain in place to this day.

In 2015, the ISIS menace served the purpose of sidelining political opponents and presenting the incumbent President’s Social Democratic party as the party of stability in view of upcoming parliamentary polls, while silencing debate on the key political issue of Kyrgyzstan’s accession to the Eurasian Economic Union. Once again, the strategy delivered the desired outcomes, as the SDPK triumphed in the elections. Power at the helm was consolidated, while by the end of the year most people’s confidence in the EEU

123 “Likvidirovany boeviki, vozmozhno, prichastnye k ubiystvu uchastkovogo,” *Vecherniy Bishkek*, December 11, 2015, http://www.vb.kg/doc/330806_likvidirovany_boeviki_vozmozno_prichastnye_k_ubiystvu_uchastkovogo.html.

124 Kanykei Manasova, “V Bishkeke svideteli ukazali na prichastnost’ k ubiystvu militsionera dvukh likvidirovannykh nakanune boevikov,” *24.kg*, December 11, 2015, http://24.kg/obschestvo/24551_v_bishkeke_svideteli_ukazali_na_prichastnost_k_ubiystvu_militsionera_dvuh_likvidirovannykh_nakanune_boevikov/.

125 “Kyrgyzstan,” International Crisis Group, January 4, 2016. Two unnamed suspects shot dead by Special Forces 10 December in Bishkek after opening fire on officers; suspects said to be responsible for 19 November murder of Bishkek policeman, declared to be members of extremist group Jaysh al-Mahdi linked to Nov 2010 bomb blast in Bishkek and to July 2015 anti-terrorist operation in Bishkek, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch/crisiswatch-database.aspx?CountryIDs=%7BE357B437-385B-4246-995E-53B525830C7E%7D>.

126 “10 GU MVD: obezvrezhena prestupnaya gruppa religiozno-ekstremistskoy organizatsii, imeyushchaya radikalnyy vzglyad takfiristsko-salafistskogo tolka,” Ministry of Interior, June 29, 2016, <http://mvd.kg/index.php/rus/mass-media/all-news/item/1989-10-gu-mvd-obezvrezhena-prestupnaya-gruppa-chlenov-religiozno-ekstremistskoj-organizatsii-imeyushchaya-radikalnyj-vzglyad-takfiristsko-salafistskogo-tolka>.

had bounced back as Russia burnished its image of a reliable partner for the country in the fight against terrorism.

The consequences for the country, however, have been dismal. The desire for radical change that spurred the April revolution was soon lost to intra-elite political angling, and little has been achieved since in terms of reforms. Instead, one predatory political class has been substituted by another. Torture has remained pervasive, as has the use of confessions extracted under torture in court and impunity for perpetrators. Judicial independence has been fur-

ther weakened. The frequency with which the security apparatus appeared to shoot and kill suspects instead of apprehending them is further confirmation that the rule of law has been suspended for certain categories of citizens, eroding the legitimacy of state authority in the eyes of the general population. Ominously, as Kyrgyz government officials and their foreign sponsors concur on the fact that terrorism is a top policy priority for the country, and the region,¹²⁷ the foreseeable future seems to hold more of the same for the population of Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

127 "Kyrgyz Parliament Approves New Prime Minister," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 13, 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyz-parliament-approves-new-prime-minister/27672380.html>; Catherine Putz, "Security Tops German Foreign Minister's Agenda in Central Asia," *The Diplomat*, March 30, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/03/security-tops-german-foreign-ministers-agenda-in-central-asia/>.

Appendix 1. List of Incidents Attributed to/Linked to JM by the Kyrgyz Authorities, 2010-11

Year: 2010

When	Where	What	Damage/Injuries/Deaths
June 3 & 10	Tokmok town	Two bombings	Three women and one child injured by shards of glass
September 9	Bishkek city	Jewish synagogue attack	Destruction of property 217,732 KGS (~3,250 USD) paid in compensation
November 29	Osh city	Osh clashes allegedly with IMU militants	Five militants reportedly killed
November 30	Bishkek	Bombing at Bishkek Sports Palace	Damage to the building, no victims 64,000 KGS (~900 USD) paid in compensation
Night of December 19 & 20	Bishkek	Reconnaissance operation opposite the US Embassy in Bishkek, murder	One citizen (A. Alferov) murdered as he allegedly witnessed the group's reconnaissance
December 24	Sokuluk town	Burglary and car-jacking	20,000 USD and a Land Rover are stolen
December 25	Bishkek, Ministry of Interior	Botched bombing with IED placed inside the Land Rover stolen the night before	No damage, no victims

Year: 2011

When	Where	What	Damage/Injuries/Deaths
January 4	Bishkek	Murder of three policemen in the city's 8th micro-district	Three policemen (S. Jeenbekov, A. Sulaimanov and P. Ysmanov) murdered 500,000 KGS (~7,500 USD) paid in compensation to each policeman's family
January 5	Arashan/Besh-Kungei village	Special operation by GKNB Alfa elite forces	2 alleged JM members (Sovetbek Islamov and Azim Sultankulov) killed 1 alleged JM member (Edil Abdрахmanov) captured 1 Alfa officer killed

Appendix 2. People Accused of Being Part of JM, ISIS or Both by the Kyrgyz Authorities, 2010-16

Year: 2010

#	Name	Date of Arrest	Torture	JM, ISIS, or both	Sentence	Date of Release/ Current Status
1	Aibek Korgonbekov	December 27, 2010	Yes	JM	8 yrs	Released on August 20, 2015 Left the country
2	Azim Sultankulov			JM		Killed upon arrest, January 5, 2011
3	Bakyt Zainiddinov	December 24, 2010	Yes	JM	No	Released with no charges (date unknown)
4	Igilik Usekeyev	December 27, 2010	Yes	JM	22 yrs	In prison
5	Khairat Saliev			JM, ISIS		On the run Declared dead 'while fighting in Syria' by the authorities. Distant relative confirmed to authors he is alive and living abroad
6	Kazybek Usekeyev	December 27, 2010	Yes	JM	No	Released with no charges (date unknown)
7	Maksat Tuitukov	December 24, 2010	Yes	JM	No	Released with no charges (date unknown)
8	Maratbek Chek-irokoyev	December 27, 2010 January 19, 2011 (second time)	Yes	JM	22 yrs	In prison
9	Murat Doolotkaziev	December 27, 2010	Yes	JM	23 yrs	In prison
10	Sovetbek Islamov			JM		Killed upon arrest, January 5, 2011
11	Yntymak Bektursunov	December 24, 2010	Yes	JM	No	Released with no charges (date unknown)

Year: 2011

#	Name	Date of Arrest	Torture	JM, ISIS, or Both	Sentence	Date of Release / Current Status
1	Akbarali Khataimov	January 11, 2011		JM	23 yrs	In prison
2	Altynbek Itibayev	January 17, 2011	Yes	ISIS, JM		Killed upon recapture on October 22, 2015, after escaping from SIZO 50
3	Bakyt Kenzhegulov	January 4, 2011	Yes	JM	Life	Died of alleged heart attack while in custody on October 20, 2015, after being immediately recaptured following his escape from SIZO 50
4	Damirbek Batyrbashiyev	January 19, 2011		JM	4 yrs	Released on June 11, 2015
5	Duishonbek Turdaliyev	January 14, 2011		JM	4 yrs	Released (date unknown)

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6	Edil Abdra-khmanov	January 5, 2011	Yes	JM, ISIS	Life	In prison
7	Ruslan Dootkulov	September 26, 2011	Yes	JM	23 yrs	In prison
8	Saidzhafar Asirov	January 8, 2011	Yes	JM	23 yrs	In prison

Year: 2012

#	Name	Date of Arrest	Torture	JM, ISIS, or Both	Sentence	Date of Release / Current Status
1	Daniyar Kadyraliev	February 7, 2012	Yes	JM	Life	Killed upon recapture on October 16, 2015, after escaping from SIZO 50
2	Kubanychbek Medetbekov	August 7, 2012	N/A	JM	7 yrs	Released on June 11, 2015

Year: 2015

#	Name	Date of Arrest	Torture	JM, ISIS, or Both	Sentence	Date of Release / Current Status
1	Adimanas Kurbanbaev	July 16, 2015		ISIS		Under investigation
2	Aman Arystanov			ISIS		Killed during special operation in Bishkek on July 16, 2015
3	Azamat Musuraliev	August 5, 2015		JM	Still under investigation	Killed upon recapture on October 20, 2015, after escaping from SIZO 50
4	Bekmamatuulu Mirslan	July 16, 2015		ISIS		Under investigation
5	Tariel Dzhumagulov			ISIS		Killed during special operation in Bishkek on July 16, 2015
6	Erkinbek Kadyrov	July 16, 2015		ISIS		Under investigation
7	Kanatbek Itibayev			ISIS		Killed during special operation in Bishkek on July 16, 2015
8	Orynbasar Nurpazilov			ISIS		Killed during a special operation in Bishkek on July 16, 2015
9	Turdubek Chonmuraev			ISIS		Killed during special operation in Bishkek on July 16, 2015
10	Zhanbolat Amanov			ISIS		Killed during special operation in Bishkek on July 16, 2015
11	Muzaffar Urinov	Sentenced to 19 yrs and life for murder in 2012		now ISIS	Given another life sentence	In prison after being immediately recaptured following his escape from SIZO 50

12	Bolot Kurbanakhunov	Sentenced to life in 2005 for robbery and murder		now ISIS	Given another life sentence	In prison after being immediately recaptured following his escape from SIZO 50
13	Name unknown			ISIS, JM		Killed during special operation in Bishkek on December 10, 2015
14	Name unknown			ISIS, JM		Killed during special operation in Bishkek on December 10, 2015

Year: 2016

#	Name	Date of Arrest	Torture	JM, ISIS, or Both	Sentence	Date of Release / Current Status
1	Altynbek Zhumagaziev	April, 2016		Fin supp to ISIS	Under investigation	Detained
2	Baktybek Zhumataev	April, 2016		Fin supp to ISIS	Under investigation	Detained
3	Bakytbek Batyrkanov	April, 2016		Fin supp to ISIS	Under investigation	Detained
4	Erkinuulu Sanzhar	April, 2016		Fin supp to ISIS	Under investigation	Detained
5	Erkinbek Kadyrov	April, 2016		Fin supp to ISIS	Under investigation	Detained
6	Sovetbek Isaev	April, 2016		Fin supp to ISIS	Under investigation	Detained
7	Ulan Niiazbekov	April, 2016		Fin supp to ISIS	Under investigation	Detained
8	Kutmanbek uulu Baisalbek	June 16, 2016		JM, ISIS	Under investigation	Detained
9	Beknazar Mamyrov	June 16, 2016		JM, ISIS	Under investigation	Detained
10	Elaman Smanbekov	June 16, 2016		JM, ISIS	Under investigation	Detained
11	Aibek uulu Erlan	June 16, 2016		JM, ISIS	Under investigation	Detained

About the Central Asia Program (CAP)

The Central Asia Program (CAP) at George Washington University promotes high-quality academic research on contemporary Central Asia, and serves as an interface for the policy, academic, diplomatic, and business communities.

The Central Asia Program focuses on the wider Central Asian space, which includes the five post-Soviet Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Xinjiang, Mongolia, as well as the Volga-Ural region, Kashmir, and Balochistan.

The program calls for a multidisciplinary approach combining the fields of political science, sociology, anthropology, economics, history, globalization studies, development studies, and security studies. It provides a platform for different, and even sometimes contradictory, points of view on contemporary Central Asia.

Research on Central Asia tends to be carried out all too often by geographically compartmentalized groups. Central Asia Program strives to bring together counterparts from the United States, Europe, Russia, Asia, and Central Asia by promoting various forms of interaction and initiating joint projects.

Recognizing the increasing importance of Central Asia in the 21st Century, the Central Asia Program is a dynamic initiative that seeks to be at the forefront of the debate on the region.

For more on the Central Asia Program, please visit:
www.centralasiaprogram.org.

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**CENTRAL ASIA
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KYRGYZSTAN: Political Pluralism and Economic Challenges is part of a series dedicated to the 5th anniversary of the Central Asia Program.

Kyrgyzstan has been the most studied country in Central Asia, due to its openness to Western observers and the substantial presence of foreign institutions in its higher education system. Withstanding the pressure of its paradoxical politics, the country combines political pluralism and diverse parliamentary life with state violence, a public administration that is penetrated by criminal groups, and rising street vigilantism. Kyrgyzstan's economy is also struggling, between the mining rent curse, agricultural survival and migrants' remittances. In the past few years, Kyrgyz authorities have begun to follow Uzbekistan's path, placing excessive stress on the theme of Islamic radicalization in order to justify the status quo and the role of law enforcement agencies.

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