



Kyrgyzstan: Prospects for Pluralism¹

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INTRODUCTION

Kyrgyzstan has made significant strides toward democratic development since gaining independence in 1991. It is the only country in Central Asia that has conducted free and fair elections and it has a diverse civil society and independent media. The capital city Bishkek hosts political debates, a vibrant modern arts and cultural scene, international influences and entrepreneurial activity. The non-governmental organization (NGO) community and individual civic activists are energetically engaged in the political process, voicing concerns of the broader population, which has broadly supported democratic reforms. Opportunities for government-civic collaboration have expanded, generating debates on important policy issues.

However, concrete progress related to pluralism has lagged. Kyrgyzstan's southern region has a drastically different political culture than the north, one that is more authoritarian and less tolerant of ethnic minorities. In June 2010, ethnic violence in southern

Kyrgyzstan took the lives of 470 people and displaced 400,000, predominantly ethnic Uzbeks. Following the violence, far more ethnic Uzbeks than ethnic Kyrgyz were prosecuted for instigating violence. In the wake of the violence, ethnic Uzbeks were squeezed out of local government and harassed in the business sector. Calls to restrict the political rights of ethnic minorities and favour the ethnic majority have been loud and steady since 2010.

Aside from inter-ethnic violence, tensions based on individual and other group identities exist throughout the country. These fault lines include linguistic divides between Kyrgyz speakers and non-speakers (including Russophone ethnic Kyrgyz), regional cleavages, the political underrepresentation of women, rural–urban–newly urban differences, and economic gaps between rich and poor. Some of the divisions have been aggravated by democratization, as the open political scene mobilizes groups of different backgrounds. Other tensions are the result of uneven economic development and political representation that favours specific groups.

What kind of democracy could Kyrgyzstan adopt that would include people with drastically different backgrounds? Conversely, what causes everyday discrimination, deep-seated intolerance and even deadly violence between ethnic groups? Essentially,

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1 This paper was commissioned by the Global Centre for Pluralism. The contents are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Centre.

what are the sources and challenges of pluralism in Kyrgyzstan? This paper addresses these questions through a historical and political analysis of Kyrgyzstan's society. It will identify factors that both encourage pluralism and stifle diversity. "Pluralism" is defined here as an "ethic of respect that values human diversity" and "a set of practices and outcomes as well as intentions".²

This paper is based on research and analysis that was conducted in 2013.³ The paper first provides an overview of Soviet policies of nation creation in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan's borders were determined by the Soviet regime in the 1920s and 1930s in collaboration with local elites. During the seventy years of communist rule, the identity of the ethnic Kyrgyz, the titular population of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic, was reinforced and refined through a combination of propaganda and coercion.

The section also examines how political leaders tried to reconcile ethnic nationalism and inclusive civic identities after the collapse of the Soviet regime. Specifically, the paper looks at various top-down projects adopted by the country's four presidents to define the relationship between the majority ethnicity and ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan. The paper also explores how the government and population responded to perceived challenges to Kyrgyzstan's territorial integrity, the corresponding need to ensure the survival of the Kyrgyz as an ethnic group linked to this particular territory, as well as attempts to

establish the symbolic and physical dominance of the Kyrgyz majority in all sectors of life.

Both regional and domestic factors fueled fear among ethnic Kyrgyz about the survival of a Kyrgyz homeland. Regionally, Uzbekistan has proved both unpredictable and militarily superior, while neighbouring Tajikistan's rapidly growing population made some Kyrgyz uneasy. Domestically, Kyrgyzstan's future seems uncertain due to unfounded fears of claims for territorial autonomy among ethnic Uzbeks and the reluctance on the part of both minorities and russified Kyrgyz to absorb state-enforced attributes of "kyrgyzness". Minority groups see their future as uncertain, given their lack of political representation and protection.

The second section analyzes the origins of inter-ethnic tensions in southern Kyrgyzstan in 1990 and 2010. It surveys a wide range of historical, political and economic factors that contributed to the tensions, drawing on investigative reports, analytical reviews and expert interviews⁴ on the violence in Osh.

Next, the paper examines elements of collective and individual identity. Specifically, it maps identity markers related to socio-economic development, residence (urban/rural), religion, education, age and gender.

A survey of major political events in Kyrgyzstan lays a foundation for the paper, emphasizing how Kyrgyzstan's democratic development and pluralism practices have not been a continuous process. In the first years of independence, President Askar Akayev promoted political and economic openness. This fueled entrepreneurial activity in the early 1990s, which was then stifled by his swing to authoritarianism and refusal to cede power in the 2000 elections. Observers widely interpreted Akayev's ouster in March 2005 to be the product of opposition elites vying for power and access to economic resources.⁵ His successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, however, quickly adopted the same corrupt strategies and resorted to even harsher methods of political oppression.

A new political space emerged following the 2010 ouster of Bakiyev. However, any post-2010

2 Beverly Boutillier (2012), "Defining Pluralism", *Pluralism Papers*, No. 1, Global Centre for Pluralism, 11.
http://www.pluralism.ca/images/stories/home_page/20120120-Defining_Pluralism_FINAL_EN.pdf.

3 The reader should note that the sociopolitical landscape of Kyrgyzstan is dynamic and that new findings, debates and key players continue to (re)define the events and responses under discussion.

4 All those interviewed gave their consent to be quoted. In some cases, their privacy has been protected.

5 Erica Marat (2012), "Kyrgyzstan: A Parliamentary System Based on Inter-elite Consensus", *Demokratizatsiya*, 20(4), 325-344; Scott Radnitz (2010), *Weapons of the Wealthy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

achievements in building democracy may be more by default than design. Unlike neighbouring states, Kyrgyzstan's economy is considerably decentralized, and it has multiple political arenas spread across the country. After two violent regime changes, largely masterminded by competing rich political elites seeking to protect personal interests, Kyrgyzstan's major political actors agreed to cooperate on new regulations to avoid yet another regime change. The constitution adopted in June 2010, two months after Bakiyev's ouster, was designed to prevent the emergence of a single dominant political force that could capture the country's major economic resources and stifle political opponents.⁶

The paper concludes with a summary of factors that encourage and obstruct pluralism in Kyrgyzstan.

I. THE MAKING OF SOVIET KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan, a territory that defines the boundaries of an eponymous people, but includes dozens of other ethnic minorities, was a creation of the Soviet regime, envisioned by the Bolsheviks and elaborated with the help of ethnographic research regarding the indigenous population's physical features, language and lifestyle. By the time the Bolsheviks advanced into Central Asia in the 1920s, Russian methods of state administration had already penetrated the region and russified local leaders. Building on imperial Russian theories about the need to modernize indigenous

peoples, the Bolsheviks recast these efforts into an anti-imperial struggle for a nation-state.

The Soviet's "divide-and-rule" approach to Turkestan, the territory between Eastern Siberia, Afghanistan and the Caspian Sea, was driven by the need to secure control over the region. The Bolsheviks drew on European understandings of the nation and state, imposing Marxist-Leninist ideology through propaganda and coercion and by collaborating with local elites.⁷ Today's national territories are largely the result of a twenty-year effort in the 1920s and 1930s to define the Soviet territory and reflect Soviet collaboration with regional elites. Ultimately, the goal was to move toward the great communist future with clearly defined nations strongly linked to a specific territory.

Soviet ethnographers were instrumental in identifying potential nations from the myriad of local clans and tribal structures.⁸ Before the 1920s, the peoples of Central Asia had multiple identities that reflected religious, ethnic, linguistic and territorial traits, such as Muslim, settled and Turk.⁹ These identities were not mutually exclusive. Ethnographers took charge of the national formation process by grouping indigenous populations according to racial traits, physical type and anthropological observations. This ethnographic knowledge helped to standardize and generalize language, culture and history from a multitude of local identities into a few coherent national entities. A Soviet citizen was to identify with one, and only one, identity marker and ethnic group, regardless of whether their family was ethnically mixed.

The Bolsheviks forged the idea of "The Great Friendship of the Peoples" as a central, unifying theme linking the forward-thinking peoples of the Soviet Union. In the rewriting of pre-Bolshevik history, nationalities were portrayed as co-existing peacefully.¹⁰ Any inter-ethnic hostilities in tsarist Russia were either conveniently left out or presented as class struggles between the oppressed and the oppressor. This approach also downplayed ongoing confrontations between Russians and other groups. Russians (the "older brothers", according to Lenin) were defined as a nation with a strong degree of self-determination. Unlike the Kyrgyz,

6 The country's first constitution was adopted in 1993 and subsequently amended four times, each strengthening the powers of President Askar Akayev. In 2007, the parliament adopted a constitution that significantly reduced presidential powers. However, two months later, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev held a referendum to adopt his version of the constitution that increased executive powers to an unprecedented level.

7 Francine Hirsch (2005), *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

8 Ibid.

9 Ali Igmen (2012), *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

10 Lowell R. Tillet (1969), *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

whose nomadic background was seen as ‘backwards’, the Uzbeks were categorized as a more advanced nation with a strong urge for self-determination.

The process of nation creation in Central Asia followed the pattern used by the Soviets in Belarus and Ukraine. The perceived lack of strong national identity among the Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Uzbeks was compensated for by creating the standard attributes of a Soviet nation: defined territory, a national flag, anthem, emblem, language, flagship economic sector (cotton, grain, industry), an academy of sciences and a national university. The territorialization and ethnicization of the population facilitated the assimilation of smaller ethnic groups under the umbrella of larger groups.¹¹ Minorities that spoke a different language and differed in lifestyle, but were linked to a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), had special schools set up by Moscow that offered education in their own language. However, Soviet propaganda penetrated every part of the region, including infrastructure, architecture, education and mass media,¹² and these modernization efforts were channeled through the collectivization and industrialization of local and republican economies.

The Kyrgyz SSR was established in December 1936, following a series of Soviet partitions and border reconfigurations between 1919 and 1936. It was initially created as the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast within the Russian Federation, and then became the autonomous republic of Kirgizia (which is present-day Kazakhstan). Republic borders defined by the Soviets were seldom coterminous with land inhabited by major ethnic groups and often defied logic.¹³ “Ethnic pockets” were drawn in neighbouring

republics, such as Samarkand, predominantly populated by Tajiks but included in the Uzbek SSR; Osh, populated by Uzbeks but included in the Kyrgyz SSR; and Uzbek-populated Chimkent, which was placed within the Kazakh SSR.

The territorial boundaries were negotiated with local officials in the 1920s through the lens of Marxist-Leninist ideology, which contained an essentialist understanding of nation and territory. Disputes over the assignment of territories between Uzbek, Kazakh and Kyrgyz officials were solved primarily to satisfy the concerns of local elites and to ensure that economically important areas were evenly split between the republics in disputed areas. In the Ferghana Valley, the majority Uzbek populated towns of Osh and Jalalabad were given to the Kyrgyz SSR because of their economic significance and proximity to majority-Kyrgyz areas.¹⁴ Densely populated Andijan and Margilan were included in Uzbek SSR territory. Numerous petitions from Uzbek and Kyrgyz authorities contesting the 1924 border delimitation used the concept of “nationality” to justify why certain territories should be included in either the Uzbek SSR or the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR).

Propaganda and the establishment of modern schools by Bolsheviks, in collaboration with *Jadids*, Muslim modernist reformers who also believed in the importance of the nation-state, prevailed until the mid-1920s. In the late 1920s, however, the *Jadids* condemned anti-religious Soviet propaganda and turned to resistance. Some fled Central Asia, while others were executed. The *basmachi* movement, which emerged in 1916 in response to the tsar’s conscription of Muslims to fight in World War I, resisted the Bolsheviks’ advance into Turkestan. They were wiped out by the Bolsheviks in the early 1930s.

The Bolsheviks regarded the nomadic lifestyle and Islam as signs of backwardness that impeded the modernization and self-determination of the Kyrgyz. They forcibly settled nomads in collective farms. In the 1920s, Muslim clergy were either oppressed or gradually co-opted into Bolshevik administrative structures.¹⁵ Soviet resistance

11 Olivier Roy (2000), *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*. New York: New York University Press.

12 Igmen (2012).

13 Roy (2000); Steven Sabol (1995), “The Creation of Soviet Central Asia: The 1924 National Delimitation”, *Central Asia Survey*, 14(2), 225-41.

14 Hirsch (2005), 167-170; Arne Haugen (2004), *The Establishment of National Republics in Central Asia*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

15 Roy (2000).

to Islam as a system of beliefs and cultural norms took a more ominous turn in the 1930s, when Stalin ordered the destruction of religious schools and mosques and exiled or purged clergy and *Jadids*.¹⁶ Throughout the Soviet era, Islam was repressed by socialist ideology and expressions of religion were prosecuted. As part of the campaign to modernize local culture, women were forced to give up the veil and embrace European dress, a practice known as *Hujum*.¹⁷ This so-called liberation of Muslim women was meant to transform them into good proletarians through coercion and propaganda.

The first generation of Soviet Kyrgyz emerged by 1930 as ethnic urbanized intellectuals. They were oriented much more toward Moscow than to local Kyrgyz communities and readily propagated Soviet ideals. They served as indigenous role models; modernized Kyrgyz who sought their ethnic group's self-determination as articulated by the Party. Poets, historians and journalists praised their settled lifestyle, their embrace of Lenin's ideas and rule of the proletariat class. In return, the new intelligentsia was rewarded with jobs in the republic's party hierarchy. Kyrgyz cultural expressions were allowed, but not in the upper levels of the party.

The idea that a people are connected to a specific

territory was further reinforced in the post-World War II period when Central Asian scholars were encouraged to deepen the historical record of their nations through autochthonism. This approach, which "valorized the titular nation", flourished in Central Asia thanks to the local intelligentsia which represented the dominant ethnic group.¹⁸ The historiography produced by this national intelligentsia relied on a deliberate orientation of historical events that aligned with both ethnogenesis and the formation of the Soviet state. Indigenous resistance to Bolshevism was vilified, while resistance to the tsarist regime and displays of patriotism against the Nazi regime were glorified.

The composition of Kyrgyzstan's population has long been in flux, due to migration both within the country and across Soviet borders. According to the all-union census of 1926, the population of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast was less than a million, with 67 percent self-identifying as ethnic Kyrgyz, 11 percent as Uzbek and 11 percent as Russians. Collectivization and industrialization brought in Russians from the 1930s through the 1950s, until the Kyrgyz became a minority population.¹⁹ The greatest influx of Russians, various peoples of the Caucasus, Koreans, Volga Germans and other ethnic groups, took place during World War II as part of Stalin's program to move industrial sites from European parts of the Soviet Union eastward. Industrialization also relocated many ethnic Kyrgyz from mountainous areas to collective farms and cities.

In the 1959 census, the Kyrgyz made up only 40.5 percent of the population and were mostly represented in rural and high-mountain areas, while Russians made up a full third of the population.²⁰ Frunze, Bishkek's Soviet-era name, was predominantly populated by Russians or Russian-speaking minority groups. By 1950, the Russian language had become the "second language" across the Soviet Union, satisfying one of Khrushchev's traits of "internationalism."²¹ Education and formal schooling became critical for upward social and geographical mobility among the recently nomadic populations in Kyrgyzstan.²²

16 Adeeb Khalid (2007), *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 56-70.

17 Douglas Northrop (2003), *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Marianne Kamp (2008), *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling Under Communism*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

18 Laruelle, Marlene (2008), "The Concept of Ethnogenesis in Central Asia: Political Context and Institutional Mediators (1940-1950)", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 9(1), 169-188.

19 Z.I. Kudabayev, Michel Guillot and M.B. Denisenko, eds. (2004). *Naselenie Kyrgyzstana*. Bishkek: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.

20 Ibid.

21 William Fierman (2009), Identity, Symbolism, and the Politics of Language in Central Asia, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61(7), 1207-1228.

22 Alan DeYoung, Rakhat Zholdoshalieva and Umut Zholdoshalieva (2013), "Creating and Contesting Meanings of Place and Community in the Ylay Talaa Valley of Kyrgyzstan", *Central Asian Survey*, 32(1).

Between the post-Stalin era and independence, migration trends reversed. Although the size of the total population continued to increase, Russians and other Slavic ethnic groups left Kyrgyzstan for other parts of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The early 1990s marked the peak of this exodus, when roughly 140,000 people, mostly urban residents, permanently left Kyrgyzstan for Russia and other CIS countries,²³ due to lack of economic prospects and low standards of living.²⁴

Traditionally, ethnic Russians were appointed first secretaries of the non-Russian republics. However, in 1950, Iskhak Razzakov, a Russian-educated Kyrgyz, became First Secretary of the Kyrgyz SSR and led the republic until 1961. He was succeeded by Turdakun Usubaliev, who ruled until 1985. These long tenures reflected Moscow's policy of brokering informal pacts with Central Asian leaders to secure positions of power in return for loyalty to Moscow. In the Kyrgyz SSR, the choice of Razzakov, originally from the Ferghana Valley, and Usubaliev, originally from Naryn, also reflected Moscow's attempt to balance between southern and northern elites. Absamat Masaliyev, from Osh oblast (region), was appointed to lead the republic in 1985. Masaliyev, however, lost his influence inside the Kyrgyz Supreme Council in the summer of 1990, when Gorbachev failed to intervene and support the leader following ethnic strife between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh and Uzgen.²⁵ Instead, parliament selected a relatively young academic, Askar Akayev, to lead the republic.

After independence, Masaliyev challenged Akayev in the 1995 presidential election, garnering significant support in southern Kyrgyzstan.

The impact of Soviet nation-building from the 1920s to the 1950s is still evident in Central Asia, in terms of border delimitations, the structure of local languages and even in material cultural artifacts. Writing about Soviet state-building, Rogers Brubaker argues that "no other state has gone so far in sponsoring, codifying, institutionalizing, even (in some cases) inventing nationhood and nationality on the sub-state level, while at the same time doing nothing to institutionalize them on the level of the state as a whole."²⁶ The Soviet Union's institutionalized definition of nationhood continues to structure national identities in the successor states as well.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the successor states used the same templates to promulgate political attitudes among the masses and to treat nations as "concrete collectivities". The idea of ethnogenesis, that ethnic groups evolve and go through stages of development, was further promoted by academic Yulian Bromley from 1966 to 1989, when he headed the Institute of Ethnography at the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The study of ethnogenesis as a social science survived the collapse of the Soviet regime and is still used in academies throughout the CIS, thanks to its coherent explanations and abundance of literary works.

II. THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD: BETWEEN NATIONALISM AND THE IDEA OF CITIZENSHIP

Kyrgyzstan's first president, Akayev, sought to fill the void created by the disintegration of Soviet ideology with a new discourse that would identify Kyrgyzstan as an independent country. As a newly elected, soft-spoken young academic, Akayev was in a weak position compared to his counterparts, Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan and Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, who had both been first secretaries under the Soviet Union. In contrast, Akayev was new to politics, having risen to power quickly when parliament failed to re-elect Masaliyev in 1990.²⁷ He

23 Matthias Schmidt and Lira Sagynbekova (2008), "Migration Past and Present: Changing Patterns in Kyrgyzstan", *Central Asian Survey*, 27(1), 111-127.

24 Aijaz A. Bandy and Farooq Ahmad Rather (2013), "Socio-economic and Political Motivations of Russian out-migration from Central Asia", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2013.03.004>.

25 Eric McGlinchey (2011), *Chaos, Violence, Dynasty: Politics and Islam in Central Asia*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press.

26 Rogers Brubaker (1994), "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account," *Theory and Society*, 23(1).

27 McGlinchey (2001).

promoted civic-based ideological projects, replicating the Soviet model of ethnic inclusion and pluralism under the banner “The Great Friendship of the Peoples”. As Akayev’s own popularity dwindled in the mid-1990s, however, he switched to a more ethnocentric approach.

Akayev approached ideology production as a dynamic process reflecting the popular moods in the country. This model offers a contrast to the more typical model used in neighbouring states, where ideological projects tended to be static and top-down. Across the region, state-produced ideological projects sought to “reconstruct relations between the state and society”.²⁸ While these official ideological constructions attempt to distance Central Asian states from their communist past, they were nonetheless greatly influenced by the Soviet way of defining a nation’s history and need for self-identity.

Akayev’s biggest shift away from Soviet historiographical traditions was recognizing separate concepts of citizenship, nationality and ethnicity. By acknowledging the ethnic minorities living in Kyrgyzstan, Akayev urged them to think of themselves as citizens. His liberal approach earned Kyrgyzstan a reputation as one of the most welcoming post-Soviet countries for Russian and other minority ethnicities.²⁹

28 Asel Murzakulova and John Schoeberlein (2009), “The Invention of Legitimacy: Struggles in Kyrgyzstan to Craft and Effective Nation-State Ideology”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61(7).

29 Erica Marat (2008), “Imagined Past, Uncertain Future: The Creation of National Ideologies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, 55(1).

30 Neil Melvin (2011), “Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence”. *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series* No. 3.

31 Erica Marat (2008), “National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan”, *Silk Road Paper*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program.

32 Nick Megoran (2012), “Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan: Understanding and Responding to Nationalism”, *Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper*, Chatham House, 2012/3.

33 Under the Soviet regime, Jews were categorized as an ethnic group.

34 Speech by Akayev, Kyrgyzstan’s People’s Assembly in Bishkek, January 22, 1994.

For example, Akayev encouraged the opening of Uzbek-language schools and universities in Osh and Jalalabad. By giving ethnic Uzbek (and other ethnic minority groups) the freedom to pursue economic activity, Akayev secured strong political support in the south.³⁰ In the early 2000s, Uzbeks began asking for greater political representation and for the Uzbek language to be granted official status.

Akayev’s celebrations of the 1,000th anniversary of the Manas epic and the 3,000th anniversary of Osh were strategically designed to generate support before the presidential elections in 1995 and 2000, respectively.³¹ By emphasizing the legacy of Manas, a Kyrgyz-centric literary hero, Akayev implicitly praised inter-ethnic harmony, while also appealing to the sentiments of ethnic Kyrgyz.³² The “seven maxims of Manas” postulated: (1) Unity of the nation, (2) Inter-ethnic harmony, friendship and cooperation, (3) National honour and patriotism, (4) Labour and knowledge; prosperity and well-being, (5) Humanism, generosity and tolerance, (6) Healthy life in harmony with nature, and (7) Strengthening and protecting Kyrgyz statehood. These maxims, although largely an intellectual invention of the Akayev era, are still recognized by voters and politicians in Kyrgyzstan.

The leader’s civic-based ideology acknowledged the contributions of various ethnic groups to development during the Soviet era. He appealed especially to Russian-speaking groups (Russians, Germans and Jews),³³ who traditionally comprised the highly educated urban population. Akayev’s program, “Kyrgyzstan is Our Common Home”, was also meant to stem the emigration of Slavic nationalities and Germans in the 1990s. Akayev summarized his approach as follows: “Let’s agree: Your country – is your Home. The same with our Kyrgyzstan – it is our common home. Home with a capital letter.”³⁴

In the early 2000s, ethnonationalist rhetoric became particularly prominent when Akayev ceded territories to China. The shooting of five demonstrators protesting border delimitation in the southern village of Aksy on March 17, 2002, propelled strong anti-Akayev nationalist opposition. The president

responded with ethnocentric ideological projects to mobilize the state apparatus to secure his hold on power. He was confronted by nationalist elites who accused him of corruption at the expense of national territorial integrity. For the next ten years, the government stopped producing top-down projects to foster ethnic and cultural pluralism. Instead, nationalism and the politics of exclusion have largely dominated the political discourse since 2002.

Akayev's successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, put much less emphasis on the need to produce state ideologies. His own position on the significance of inter-ethnic relations was unclear. Instead, he delegated ideological deliberations to a state secretary, a position specifically designed to deal with the creation of ideology.³⁵ Among those serving in that position were Dastan Sarygulov (2005-2006) and Adamkhan Madumarov (2006-2007), who both sought to popularize their own visions of pan-Kyrgyz ideology. Sarygulov is an active promoter of Tengrism, the ancient Turkic religion dating back to the 4th century BC. His project on Tengrism, although supporting tolerance toward other ethnicities and religions, incorporated strong ethnocentric tendencies and favoured pan-Kyrgyz and pan-Turkic views. Madumarov went even further, twisting Akayev's appeal to a "common home" by declaring that "Kyrgyzstan is indeed our common home, but other nations here are tenants".³⁶

Many politicians and groups were ready to promulgate nationalistic views and fill the Bakiyev regime's ideological void. Southern political leaders were

particularly keen on using nationalism to prevail over competing political forces.³⁷ Bakiyev himself sought to portray the north-south divide as the primary fault line of the Kyrgyz nation and regularly referred to the long period of rule by northerners. He cited regional division to legitimize his hold on power despite low public support and positioned himself as a leader striving to unify the nation.

As Bakiyev marginalized his allies, politicians from the north who had opposed Akayev, he increased representation of officials from southern parts of the country. His ministerial cabinet and his administration were mostly filled with cadres from the south who had little interest in promoting inter-ethnic balance in the political sphere.

Bakiyev ignored the needs of ethnic and other minority groups that sought protection and political representation. Under his regime, the number of ethnic Uzbeks in local and national government agencies declined. In the 2007 snap parliamentary elections, widely viewed as fraudulent, the share of ethnic minorities in the legislative branch increased, but Uzbek representation declined from 9.3 to 6.4 percent. The decline had significant consequences, as Bakiyev's new constitution had increased the number of MPs from 75 to 90. Uzbek members of parliament (MPs) fared even worse in the 2010 parliamentary elections. Of 120 MPs, only three were Uzbek (2.5 percent), while the share of Kyrgyz MPs hit a record high of 88 percent.³⁸

In August 2006, Muhhammadjan Mamasaidov, a long-standing Akayev supporter and prominent leader of the Uzbek community, was ousted from his position as head of the Republican National Uzbek Association. Entrepreneur Kadyrjan Batyrov emerged as an ideologue for the Uzbek community following the March 2005 regime change. He demanded greater attention to the issue of political underrepresentation, perhaps seeing a window of opportunity after the "Tulip Revolution" ousted Akayev. However, Batyrov and other activists were soon disappointed as Bakiyev's centralization of power and level of corruption soon outpaced Akayev's.³⁹ Bakiyev's

35 *Uzbekskaya obschestvennost' Jalalabada sdelala zayavlenie po povodu Kurultaya narodov Kirgizii*, *Ferghana.ru*, August 12, 2006.

36 Egamberdy Kabulov, "Kirgiziya: pravozaschitniki obespekoyeny usileniem v obschestve natsional'nykh tendentsii", *Ferghana.ru*, March 7, 2007.

37 Marlene Laruelle (2012), "The Paradigm of Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. Evolving Narrative, the Sovereignty Issue, and Political Agenda", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 45, 39-49.

38 Oleh Protsyk and Medet Tiulegenov. "Do Electoral Rules Matter? Ethnic Minority Representation under Different Electoral System Designs in Kyrgyzstan", Paper prepared for the 2012 Association for the Study of Nationalities 2012 World Convention, New York City, April 19-21, 2012.

39 Melvin (2011).

downfall in April 2010 opened a floodgate of pent-up ethnic tension that triggered the clashes of June 2010.

Neither Interim President Roza Otunbayeva nor her successor, Almazbek Atambayev, resurrected the 1990s practice of developing top-down ideological projects. Political programs on national unity became more subtle. The lack of state propaganda has been replaced with debates on what ideals Kyrgyzstan society should promulgate. Various thinkers, politicians and activists gave interviews, published books and made public statements on the role of the Kyrgyz as an ethnic group today. In the cacophony of ideas, those promoting the expansion of “kyrgyzness”, defined by language and Manas ideals, across the population (including russified ethnic Kyrgyz) prevailed over voices calling for pluralism.

As interim president from June 2010 to November 2011, Otunbayeva had limited ability to affect the ideological discourse. Following the 2010 violence, nationalist voices of all kinds became especially loud, finding mass media outlets to express their views and receptive audiences. She attempted to balance ethnic-nationalist rhetoric, while also calling for inter-ethnic peace. President Atambayev, in turn, has used symbols of national unification that are both inclusive of citizens and highlight the Kyrgyz, resorting to the politics of symbols when he needs popular support. Inclusion has not been an explicit priority.

In the run-up to the October 2011 presidential elections, Atambayev, then prime minister, appealed to both ethno-nationalist and civic-based ideals. Under his supervision, more statues of Kyrgyz figures (Manas and Chingiz Aitmatov) were erected in central Bishkek, in a location previously occupied by a monument signifying Liberty and, earlier, a statue of Lenin. His campaign posters, however,

resembled Akayev’s “common home” campaign and called for the unification of the nation, “Together we are – Kyrgyzstan”. In a speech commemorating the third anniversary of the fall of Bakiyev, Atambayev continued to use civic-based rhetoric: “We must build a new Kyrgyzstan where everyone can work, keep their family and set them on their feet, where everyone, irrespective of nationality, religion and social status, can feel equal and valuable”.⁴⁰ However, the president has made little effort to oppose expressions of Kyrgyz nationalism within the parliament, ministries and courts or to increase the number of ethnic minority representatives in government.

A significant, but largely overlooked development since 2010 includes a change of language in the constitution’s preamble. The preamble of the constitution, adopted two weeks after the 2010 violence, does not mention that ethnic Kyrgyz are subject to “national revival”, although there were suggestions to include such phrasing. This omission marks a significant shift from the Soviet notion of a dominant ethnic group that “makes up” the state. Instead, the constitution reiterates that all citizens have equal rights: “people of all ethnic groups forming the people of Kyrgyzstan [have] the right to preserve their native language and to create conditions for its study and development”. Also significant is the fact that, along with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan grants Russian the status of official state language.

Post-June 2010 Initiatives

In April 2013, President Atambayev signed the Concept of Development of National Unity and Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Kyrgyz Republic.⁴¹ He first issued the document in January 2012, one of his first policy initiatives as president. Representatives of all parliamentary factions and members of civil society helped draft the document. It takes an essentialist and anachronistic view of ethnicity, especially of the Kyrgyz, as belonging to a specific territory and sharing common cultural traits. Diversity of identities within the ethnic category is not acknowledged, and ethnicity is posited as the most important individual

⁴⁰ “President’s Appeal to the Nation on the 3rd Anniversary of the April Revolution”, 24.kg, April 7, 2013.

⁴¹ *Concept of Development of the National Unity and Inter-Ethnic Relations*, April 10, 2013. http://www.president.kg/files/docs/kontseptsiya_ukrepleniya_edinstva_naroda_i_mejtnicheskikh_otnosheniy_v_kr.pdf.

and group identity. The document refers to Soviet concepts; the ideal of friendship of the peoples is defined as a historical phenomenon, while the Kyrgyz are defined as a state-making group, very much in the Marxist-Leninist tradition.

Yet, the Concept is still a bold attempt to reconcile lingering tensions after the June 2010 violence in Osh and prevent future outbreaks of violence.⁴² It seeks a balance between democratic principles and civil rights, on the one hand, and the official use of the Kyrgyz language across the nation, on the other. The Concept specifies that ethnic confrontations are threatening to the territorial integrity of the country. To avoid violence, all institutions of power, from national to local, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), must embrace the idea of “unity in diversity”. The diversity of the “people of Kyrgyzstan” is defined in ethnic, cultural, linguistic and age parameters. The unity of all ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan is defined as the most significant factor for the country’s “prosperity, stability, peace and concord”. The Concept is essentially aimed at addressing both the fear of discrimination of ethnic minorities and concerns with state survival of the ethnic majority. It attempts to develop a new civic identity based on knowledge of the Kyrgyz language and respect for cultural diversity.

Importantly, the Concept seeks to explain inter-ethnic tensions not through an ethnic lens, but by looking into economic, demographic and political transformations in Kyrgyzstan. Population growth among some ethnic groups and emigration by others has changed the demographic composition in the country. The Concept alleges that the rights of ethnic minorities were largely ignored after 2005. The new Concept is intended to be used as a blueprint for transforming the legal code and the

work of government agencies to foster diversity and national unity.

However, the positioning of Kyrgyz language as the foundation of a common civic identity is misplaced, due to the lack of both incentives and opportunities for ethnic minorities and russified Kyrgyz to learn the language. The number of textbooks and literary works in the Kyrgyz language is dwarfed by the amount of material in Russian. The state does not have the capacity to change the situation overnight, especially as many public officials are themselves not fluent in the Kyrgyz language. Furthermore, knowledge of the Kyrgyz language does not translate into better opportunities in the public sector nor does it guarantee that the civil rights of minorities will be protected.

After its publication in both Kyrgyz and Russian languages, the Concept has not yet propelled discussions on its viability or its ability to shape a peaceful future, and political experts remain skeptical about its potential impact.⁴³

Everyday Ethnicity

Studies of identity in ethnically mixed societies demonstrate that ethnic identity is situational in everyday life and often enforced top-down by government policies. The question is how often does ethnic identity guide individual and collective actions?

Using the example of Transylvania, Brubaker et al. demonstrate that collective action driven by ethnic identity is weak regardless of the nationalistic politics of national and local authorities.⁴⁴ The ethnicization of identity is situational and often used to hold others responsible or to “invoke insider status” to legitimize certain activities. In Kyrgyzstan, before the June 2010 violence, ethnic identity mostly played a secondary role in everyday life, with all ethnicities going on with their lives and dealing with similar economic challenges. As Liu explains, even when individuals primarily identify themselves as belonging to an ethnic group, other identities are not mutually exclusive. For example, brawls between young people in Osh seemingly along ethnic lines were common,

⁴² For detailed analysis of the document’s potential impact, see section X.

⁴³ Section X. offers more detailed analysis of the challenges to implementing the concept in Kyrgyzstan.

⁴⁴ Roger Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox and Liana Grancea (2008), *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 226-228.

Table 1 – Composition of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh Oblast and Osh City⁴⁸

Year	Ethnic group	Total Population	Of total population		% of total population	
			Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
1989	Kyrgyz	534,268	60,620	473,648	22.6	70.3
	Uzbek	299,620	131,409	168,211	49.1	25.0
1999	Kyrgyz	750,595	91,579	659,016	33.6	72.9
	Uzbek	365,646	152,525	213,121	56.0	23.6
1999 (without Osh City)	Kyrgyz	647,422	10,838	636,584	17.0	72.4
	Uzbek	261,776	49,585	212,191	77.5	24.1
1999 (Osh City)	Kyrgyz	103,173	80,741	22,432	38.7	93.8
	Uzbek	103,870	102,940	930	49.4	3.9
2009 (without Osh City)	Kyrgyz	758,036	15,253	742,783	17.4	73.1
	Uzbek	308,688	69,713	238,975	79.4	23.5
2009 (Osh City)	Kyrgyz	123,738	100,218	23,520	43.1	93.0
	Uzbek	114,036	112,469	1,567	48.3	6.2

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic

but they actually represented territorial claims, in areas between *mahallas* (Uzbek communities in urban areas) and apartment complexes, rather than ethnic conflict.⁴⁵ In other words, before the June 2010 conflict, ethnicity in Osh was just one of many interpretive frameworks and only became prominent in particular moments and contexts.

There are areas in Kyrgyzstan, primarily cities and suburbs, where different ethnic groups live in mixed communities, attend the same schools and use the same hospitals, shops, and other public services,

while retaining secluded cultural spaces. These separate spaces include homes, private schools, religious sites or doctors' offices. The separation of ethnic groups in these spaces is mainly geographical, where homogenous ethnic communities are rarely visited by members of other ethnic groups.⁴⁶ The separation of ethnicities can also be a matter of visual perception, especially in urban ethnically mixed spaces. In southern Kyrgyzstan ethnic belonging is attributed through a number of categories that may or may not be indicative of self-identification: language, accent, names, headwear, clothes and occupation. External observers can misread these traits and even locals can be misled about ethnic belonging. The perpetrators of the violence in June 1990, for instance, were not always confident if they were attacking an ethnic alien or someone from their own group.⁴⁷

Unlike the ethnic majority group, Kyrgyzstan's ethnic minorities are more likely to be involved in the business sector than the public sector. Some ethnic groups occupy identifiable niches. Koreans and Dungans are mostly involved in the agricultural

45 Morgan Y. Liu. (2012), *Under Solomon's Throne: Uzbek Vision of Renewal of Osh*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 7, 169, 208.

46 Ibid, 7.

47 Valery Tishkov (1995), "Don't Kill Me, I'm a Kyrgyz!": An Anthropological Analysis of Violence in the Osh Ethnic Conflict", *Journal of Peace Research*, 32(2), 133-149.

48 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, "Naselenie Kyrgyzstana: Itogi pervoi natsional'noi perepisi naseleniya Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki 1999 goda v tablitsakh, Book II (Part 1)", 2000; and "Perepisi naseleniya i zhilishchnogo fonda Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki 2009 goda, Kniga II (chas' pervaya)" (2010). The population of Osh province was 941,763 (1989), 1,175,998 (1999, without Osh city 943,566, Osh city 232,432) and 1,104,248 (2010 without Osh city) and 258,111 (2010 Osh city).

sector, while ethnic Uzbeks are engaged in the service and trade sector. The accumulation of economic goods, not political participation, becomes a viable way for an ethnic minority to ensure their security, and employment in the private sector becomes the only viable venue. Before violence erupted in June 2010, Uzbeks like Kadyrjan Batyrov regarded their economic power as a form of personal security and political influence. In the aftermath of the violence, while economic power is still associated with safety, that assumption is often challenged by local law enforcement agencies.⁴⁹

For an ethnic majority population, however, the wealth of ethnic minorities is often perceived as unfair and predatory. In such an environment, where all ethnic groups can engage in entrepreneurial activity but are discriminated against, uneven political representation is known to lead to tensions between ethnic majority and minority groups.⁵⁰ Nationalists in Kyrgyzstan point to neighbouring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where ethnic Uzbeks do not enjoy the same level of economic prosperity as they do in Kyrgyzstan.⁵¹ Indeed, violence might have been averted in other Central Asian countries because ethnic minorities are denied both market and political participation.⁵²

Kyrgyzstan's Ethnic Composition

Kyrgyzstan's population has increased by one million people since the early 1990s, mostly due to high birthrates among Kyrgyz and Uzbek populations. The number of Russians has sharply declined since 1989, making Uzbeks the largest minority group in the 2000s. Until the 1990s, Russians and other Slavic groups made up almost two-thirds of Bishkek's population, with Kyrgyz in the minority (22 percent) in their own capital. The share of Ukrainians, Germans and Tatars has significantly decreased over the past decade. There has also been a steady growth of Muslims from different ethnic groups.

The proportion of Kyrgyz to Uzbeks has remained constant at five to one since 1999, suggesting that growth of both has been compatible. The share of Dungans, Uighurs, Turks and Tajiks in the general population has also remained stable. Notably, over the course of two decades, the number of Kyrgyz grew from roughly half the population to an overwhelming majority (over 72 percent).

Regardless of ethnicity, the vast majority of the population speaks two or more languages. More people in the north are bi- or multilingual, while over a third of the population in the south speaks only one language. Kyrgyz is the most widely spoken language (88 percent), followed by Russian (67 percent) and Uzbek (29 percent). The data indicates that many non-Uzbeks speak the Uzbek language.

⁴⁹ Interview with two leaders of human rights NGOs, Bishkek, June 2013.

⁵⁰ Amy Chua (2004), *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability*. New York: Anchor Books.

⁵¹ Laruelle (2012).

⁵² "Tajikistan's Ethnic Uzbeks: Poor Like Everyone, But Sidelined More", *Eurasianet.org*, February 24, 2011.

Table 2. Ethnic Composition in Kyrgyzstan, 1989-2012.

Ethnic group	1989*		1999*		2009*		2012	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	Number	%	
Kyrgyz	2,229,663	52.4	3,128,147	64.9	3,804,788	4,006,009	72.2	
Uzbeks	550,096	12.9	664,950	13.8	768,405	796,291	14.3	
Russians	916,558	21.5	603,201	12.5	419,583	381,562	6.9	
Dungans	36,928	0.9	51,766	1.1	58,409	61,372	1.1	
Uighurs	36,779	0.9	46,944	1.0	48,543	50,346	0.9	
Tajiks	33,518	0.8	42,636	0.9	46,105	48,033	0.9	
Turks	21,294	0.5	33,327	0.7	39,133	39,913	0.7	
Kazakhs	37,318	0.9	42,657	0.9	33,198	32,981	0.6	
Tatars	70,068	1.6	45,503	0.9	31,491	28,656	0.5	
Azeris	15,775	0.4	14,014	0.3	17,267	18,046	0.3	
Koreans	18,355	0.4	19,784	0.4	17,299	16,711	0.3	
Ukrainians	108,027	2.5	50,442	1.0	21,924	16,657	0.3	
Germans	101,309	2.4	21,471	0.4	9,487	8,766	0.2	
Turkmens	899	>0.1	430	>0.1	2,005	2,037	>0.1	
Chechens	2,873	0.1	2,612		1,875	1,740		
Armenians			1,364		890	807		
Georgians			710		598	571		
Moldovans			778		505	430		
Jews			1,571		604	508		
Lithuanians			240		139	138		
Byelorussians			3,208		1,394	109		
Estonians			238		105	104		
Latish			195		82	62		
Other	49,740	1.2	46 750	1.0	38 964	39 039	0.7	
Total:	4,257,755		4,822,938		5,362,793	5,551,888		

* Years when censuses were conducted

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic

III. THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

Language policy has been one of the most contentious issues in Kyrgyzstan since independence. Kyrgyz was among the least-robust languages in the former Soviet Union, lacking the requisite vocabulary for day-to-day administrative communications.⁵³

53 Eugene Huskey (1995), "The Politics of Language in Kyrgyzstan", *Nationalities Papers*, 3, 549-72; Bhavna Dave (2004), "A Shrinking Reach of the State? Language Policy and Implementation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan" in Pauline Jones Luong (ed) *The Transformation of Central Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

54 Dave (2004).

55 Britta Kroth and Beatrice Schultzer (2003), "Multilingual Education for Increased Multiethnic Understanding in Kyrgyzstan". http://www.cimera.org/files/biling/en/MLG_Text1.pdf

Although ethnic Kyrgyz made up more than half of the union republic's population in 1989, Russian had been the *lingua franca* among educated elites since the 1950s. Uzbek is also widely spoken, especially in the south. When the Soviet regime collapsed in 1991, 84 percent of ethnic Kyrgyz in Bishkek spoke Russian as their primary language, and the majority probably had only a rudimentary understanding of the Kyrgyz language.⁵⁴ Russian continued to be the language of interethnic and intra-ethnic communication in the post-Soviet period. Although the government added Kyrgyz-language classes to schools and universities, this did little to increase the number of Kyrgyz speakers.⁵⁵ The level of Kyrgyz proficiency has improved only slightly among Bishkek's russophone residents.

Today, the Russian language creates a barrier between urban populations and rural and newly urbanized populations. Less than one percent of ethnic minority groups in northern urban areas, including Slavs, Caucasians, Dungans and Koreans, speak or understand the Kyrgyz language, and few want to learn it. They regard learning Kyrgyz as a tradeoff that would undermine the status of Russian and other minority languages. Such a zero-sum approach is partly connected to the lack of economic incentives for learning Kyrgyz among minorities who are able to conduct their daily lives exclusively in their native language. During the Akayev regime, MPs called for granting Uzbek language special status. However, both nationalist and moderate political factions ignored the request due to fears it would lead to secession or irredentism.

The weak status of the Kyrgyz language continues to worry nationalist politicians who believe Kyrgyz should be granted a higher status than other languages spoken in the country. Rigid language nationalists do not understand how greater pluralism would actually allow them to protect Kyrgyz traditions, while at the same time creating space for other histories, languages and ideas. The 1993 constitution defined Kyrgyz as the sole state language, as a result of pressures from such nationalists. Yet, in the years since independence, little has been done to promote the language through the educational system or to encourage its use among government officials in Bishkek. Insufficient state capacity, resources and planning have prevented the realization of the nationalists' dream.⁵⁶

In 2000, partly as a nod to the country's relationship with Russia and partly as an acknowledgement of reality, Akayev signed a law also granting the Russian language official status. However, neither the constitution nor Akayev's law have had a significant impact on how Kyrgyz and Russian are used at the state level. The use of Kyrgyz in the parliament and

government became more widespread because of an increase in the number of MPs and civil servants from southern and rural parts of the country, not a conscious switch to using Kyrgyz. Parliament provides simultaneous translation of deliberations into Russian or Kyrgyz for MPs and members of the mass media.

Following the 2010 violence, language continues to be deeply politicized in Kyrgyzstan, even among people who generally agree that all citizens must enjoy equal rights. The data shows that while more than 70 percent of the population agrees that ethnic minority groups should be allowed to preserve their cultural heritage and that measures must be implemented to end discrimination against minorities, only half the population thinks that minority groups should be allowed to study in or have access to television and radio programming in their own language.⁵⁷ Such disparities are indicative of how knowledge of the state language is not considered complimentary to minority rights to preserve their own linguistic heritage. That is, if Kyrgyzstanis must know Kyrgyz, creating conditions to learn minority languages is not an immediate necessity.

In the post-2010 environment, arguments for a greater status of the Kyrgyz language and other symbols of Kyrgyz culture have become strong instruments against Atambayev's government. According to one Kyrgyz government official, in order to neutralize the political opposition's nationalistic calls to impose the Kyrgyz language at the expense of minority languages, the president's administration needs to reposition itself as the primary promoter of the interests of ethnic Kyrgyz. That is, the administration needs to become the chief advocate for improving Kyrgyz language fluency across the country but, at the same time, ensure that the rights of minorities are respected.

Egemberdy Ermatov, head of the National Commission of the State Language, argues that over the 20 years since Kyrgyzstan's independence, the language issue has been politicized by nationalists who have done nothing to actually ensure that there

⁵⁶ Dave (2004).

⁵⁷ Handout, Presentation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for Central Asia (OHCHR ROCA) Reports on Minority Rights and Inter-Ethnic Relations, Bishkek, May 27, 2013. See next section for survey methodology.

are adequate facilities for language training.⁵⁸ At the same time, the issue is primarily pertinent to Bishkek and Chui oblast, where both ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic minorities have particularly underdeveloped Kyrgyz language skills. In most other parts of the country with high concentrations of ethnic Uzbeks, including Jalalabad and Osh, knowledge of the Kyrgyz language is actually widespread. To depoliticize language, Ermatov argues that, Kyrgyz language proficiency must be taken from the political domain and reframed as a development issue as “a means for communication, understanding and peacemaking”.⁵⁹

The president’s decisions in the summer of 2013 reflected the difficulty of trying to balance demands from the nationalistic opposition to promote Kyrgyz and the need to protect minority language rights. Atambayev refused to sign a parliamentary bill that would require the entire state administration to exclusively use the Kyrgyz language, claiming that the bill was not polished and contained numerous legal inconsistencies. At the same time, the president’s administration announced that it was allocating approximately \$213,000 (10 million Kyrgyz som) to promote the national language in schools and government agencies.⁶⁰ The funds will be used to improve pedagogy of the Kyrgyz language by incorporating modern technologies and translating foreign literature into Kyrgyz. Other initiatives to improve the teaching of Kyrgyz include developing a new online system to test Kyrgyz language proficiency. By addressing the fears of Kyrgyz speakers about

the language’s weak position in the country, the government hopes to ensure that linguistic pluralism will become more acceptable to citizens who fear the future of the state language.

In addition to these state-led initiatives, several Bishkek-based youth activists are working on projects to popularize the Kyrgyz language, including creating a Kyrgyz-language module for Google Translate and shooting movies in Kyrgyz about lesser-known Kyrgyz folk poets. In Bishkek, knowledge of the Kyrgyz language without fluency in Russian should not be equated with backwardness. Across the country, and particularly in Chui and Osh oblasts, persons fluent in a minority language but not Kyrgyz should not be regarded as unpatriotic. Rather, they simply may not have had the resources or economic incentive to learn the Kyrgyz language.

In effect, Kyrgyzstan’s political leadership is faced with the dilemma of finding the optimal balance between promoting the reach of the Kyrgyz language across the country and preserving linguistic and cultural pluralism. This is a challenge of both nation-building and strengthening democracy in the country.⁶¹ Neither the Eurocentric model of “one culture, one nation” and one language, nor the Indian experience of not having a national language, offers a viable model for pluralism in Kyrgyzstan.⁶² To face the challenges of post-colonialism and democratic development, Kyrgyzstan must find its own unique path.

IV. ELEMENTS OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Beyond ethnicity, there are other identities commonly used in Kyrgyzstan that signify membership in a group. For purposes of this paper, “identity” is defined as a category of analysis that can refer to both individual and collective self-understanding. This and the following sections provide information demonstrating how some identities are generated as a result of political interests.⁶³ The focus here is on non-ethnic markers of identity, such as region, religion, age and urban versus rural residency.

58 Interview, Bishkek, May 30, 2013.

59 Ibid.

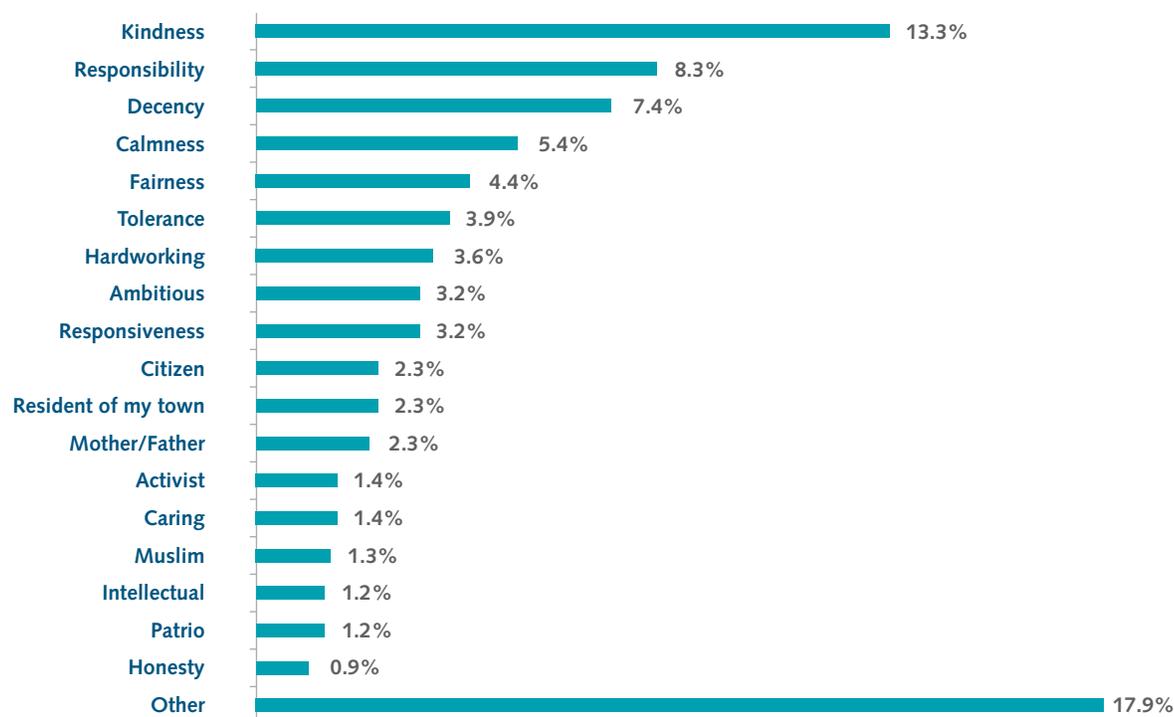
60 “Сообщает пресс-служба президента КР: Алмазбек Атамбаев подписал Указ “О мерах по развитию государственного языка и совершенствованию языковой политики в КР”, 24.kg, July 1, 2013.

61 Nick Megoran (2012), “Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan: Understanding and Responding to Nationalism”, *Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper*, December; Andrew Baruch Wachtel (2013), “Kyrgyzstan between Democratization and Ethnic Intolerance”, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, March.

62 Dave (2014).

63 In line with analysis by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000), “Beyond ‘Identity’”, *Theory and Society*, 29(1), 1-47.

Table 3. Characteristics Which Describe You as an Individual



Source: SIAR Research and Consulting

A study by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for Central Asia (OHCHR ROCA) indicates that while ethnic Kyrgyz (particularly those from the south) consider ethnicity the most important determinant of identity, members of other ethnic groups put more emphasis on citizenship. Ethnic identity is particularly important for ethnic Kyrgyz from southern Kyrgyzstan (70 percent).⁶⁴ This is almost twice the rate of ethnic Uzbeks, who rank citizenship-based identity (56 percent) ahead of ethnicity (38 percent). Russians, Dungans and Uighurs have the strongest civic identity compared to other ethnic groups. Furthermore, the majority of ethnic Kyrgyz (over 70 percent) want to keep ethnicity data on state-issued identification, while most ethnic minority groups prefer to keep this information

optional or to have it been eliminated altogether. The survey used stratified sampling of 3,600 respondents across Kyrgyzstan's seven oblasts and the capital city.

Despite existing inter-ethnic, regional, gender and economic divides, according to the OHCHR survey, 91 percent of the population is either "very proud" or "proud" to be a citizen of Kyrgyzstan. This is significantly higher than in other multi-ethnic post-Soviet societies; for example, in Latvia, 81 percent report being proud to be citizens; in Russia, 71 percent, and in Ukraine, just 61 percent.⁶⁵

Another nationwide survey of 1,000 randomly sampled households asked respondents to "name three main characteristics that identify you as an individual". The majority first mention deeply individual characteristics, but also see themselves as part of a larger collective. When prompted to define their own qualities as an individual, over 13.3 percent offered non-ethnic characteristics, such as "kindness", followed by "a citizen of my country" (8.3 percent) and "hard-working" (7.4 percent).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ OHCHR ROCA (2013).

⁶⁵ OHCHR ROCA (2013).

⁶⁶ SIAR Research and Consulting, based in Bishkek, administered a national survey in June 2013 with a sample of 1,000 respondents. Unpublished document.

Belonging to a group was mentioned more often in southern parts of the country. Notably, the “citizen of my country” characteristic was mentioned more often in the Osh region (16.5 percent) than in other parts of the country. Family identity markers (such as mother or father) were also particularly popular in Osh region (10 percent). The findings suggest that in situations where ethnic identity is not challenged, or is not at the forefront of interaction, deeply individualistic and positive identity markers come into play. They also suggest that a basis for pluralistic identity does exist, even if Kyrgyzstanis tend to resort to ethnic or linguistic identities when those are challenged, when they interact in a group setting or participate in collective action.

The “North/South Divide”

Patrimonial networks inside Kyrgyzstan’s parliament are often labeled as “northern” and “southern” political forces. These networks are by no means based on familial ties, but are strictly contingent upon regional identity. Northern networks include Chui, Issyk-Kul, Talas and Naryn oblasts, while southern networks include Osh, Jalalabad and Batken oblasts.⁶⁷ Northern MPs describe politicians from the south as traditional, nationalistic, engaged in organized crime, shrewd and backward.⁶⁸ Similarly, MPs from the south describe their colleagues from the north as disunited, engaged in money laundering, arrogant and reluctant to share power. Some common characteristics describing the north/south cultural differences of politicians included the following dichotomies: while politicians from the south are themselves members of organized

crime groups, those from the north are ready to collaborate with criminals for their own political ends; while southerners are traditional, northerners are russified; while southerners are better consolidated, northerners are individualistic; and while southerners are underrepresented in national politics, northerners live in constant fear that the masses in the south will revolt against the northern establishment.

Assumptions about north/south bias do exist and are often cited by politicians and confirmed in voting patterns. However, there are few specific examples of their influence on politics outside of elections. It is possible to speculate that regional identities become important when all other strategies to win choice political posts are exhausted. These stereotypical perceptions are common, but regionalism tends to come to the fore only during political crises (political arrests, regime change, elections) rather than in day-to-day politics. For example, the June 2010 violence demonstrated that during times of political uncertainty, the local population of Osh perceived competition over resources and political representation primarily through an ethnic lens. However, the alleged differences between the north and south are rarely mentioned openly during parliamentary sessions. The alignment along a southern identity seems stronger compared to that of the northern faction in parliament. Southern politicians have been able to unite against and in support of several cadre decisions. However, to date, there have been no visible manifestations of a northern alliance against southern political forces. Southern MPs have also clashed with each other on a number of issues such as control over resources in Osh and Jalalabad oblasts.⁶⁹

Furthermore, some party leaders from southern Kyrgyzstan have found shared interests with politicians from the north. Southern MPs are represented in all political parties and at times unite with northern MPs to promote southern candidates for key government positions. However, the *Ata-Jurt* party, regarded as representing predominantly southern Kyrgyzstan because most of its top members are from Jalalabad and Osh regions, has seen rifts

67 Pauline Jones Luong (2002), *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Power, Perceptions, and Pacts*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press; Gullette argues that politicians use regional identities to manipulate voters. See David Gullette (2010), *The Genealogical Construction of the Kyrgyz Republic: Kinship, State and ‘Tribalism’*. Brill - Global Oriental: Folkestone.

68 Multiple interviews with MPs and government employees conducted between 2010 and 2013.

69 Interview with three MPs, February 2012.

among its members. *Ar-Namys*, led by Felix Kulov, is regarded as the most multiethnic party because it recruited ethnic Russians and Uzbeks and russified Kyrgyz for its party lists. *Respublika* and the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) are led by northerners who try to distance themselves from regional and ethnic divides. Politicians from the north also populate mid-level ranks across parties.

Urban Youth

Studies of urban youth in Kyrgyzstan indicate interesting combinations of identities that are largely situational and often non-ethnic. Thanks to Kyrgyzstan's economic and political openness, the ideological vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union was quickly filled by Western, Russian and Islamic cultural messages. Young people, particularly in urban areas, are exposed to, and internalize, a variety of conflicting global and regional cultures.⁷⁰ The youth of Kyrgyzstan believe they are entitled to navigate and consume a range of cultural expressions. Their choices are not random, but rather represent a consumer's conscious preference for religious rhetoric, American cars or Russian pop music. Their choices span multiple cultural ideologies and cut across ethnic lines, and their selections are on vivid display in urban marketplaces.

Based on observations of youth culture in Bishkek, it seems that an ethnic identity is not essential for urban youth, particularly young men. Instead, young males organize themselves according to their neighbourhoods in Bishkek, where the fault line divides long-time residents and newer arrivals. In

central Bishkek, well-established urban communities made up of different ethnic groups live intermixed and identify themselves according to their neighbourhood and Russian-language fluency. In contrast, newly urbanized ethnic Kyrgyz cluster in isolated areas in Bishkek populated with individuals from their own region. Their mastery of Russian varies, and they often face hostility from both ethnic Kyrgyz and other residents. These two groups frequent different entertainment spaces, restaurants and shopping centres and use different public facilities, such as schools and hospitals.

Young men in Bishkek are likely to align with urban peers from their neighbourhood, regardless of ethnic background. In central Bishkek, about 60 percent of the population is made up of long-time ethnic Kyrgyz or Russian urban residents; the other 40 percent are recent ethnic Kyrgyz arrivals. Young urban Kyrgyz and Russians share similar views about recent Kyrgyz migrants to the capital; migrants are considered uncivilized, rude, poorly dressed and likely to have body odour and poor Russian-language skills.⁷¹ These stereotypes likely developed because urban and rural youth have minimal knowledge about, or engagement with, each other.

Other studies have found that location and language are the two strongest determinants of identity in Kyrgyzstan. In their studies of Bishkek and Osh, both Schroeder and Liu highlight three factors that play a far greater role in group alignment than ethnicity: urban or rural origin, neighbourhood, and fluency in Kyrgyz, Russian or Uzbek.

Young men are usually exposed to more varied cultural influences and access more public spaces than their sisters. From Internet cafes to sports clubs, Kyrgyzstan's independence has provided men with more options to "celebrate masculinities".⁷² Parents are more protective of unmarried daughters, who face the risk of being abused in public places or even being kidnapped and forced into marriage.⁷³

Urban youth are more likely to join civil society organizations than youth in the hinterlands.

70 Stefan B. Kirmse (2010), "In the Marketplace for Styles and Identities: Globalization and Youth Culture in Southern Kyrgyzstan", *Central Asian Survey*, 29:4, 389-403; Kathleen Kuehnast (1998), "From Pioneers to Entrepreneurs: Young Women, Consumerism, and the 'World picture' in Kyrgyzstan", *Central Asian Survey*, 17(4), 639-654.

71 Philipp Schroeder (2010), "'Urbanizing' Bishkek: Interrelations of Boundaries, Migration, Group size and Opportunity Structure", *Central Asian Survey*, 29(4), 453-467.

72 Kirmse (2010).

73 For more details, see section VIII. on gender.

Urban associations and idea-driven activists in Bishkek and Osh are tremendous resources for promoting pluralism. In the capital, young activists support parliamentary initiatives on a range of causes, including women's rights, environmental degradation, police reform and urban infrastructure. In Osh, young activists promote multilingual mass media and reconciliation efforts. Many activists work with modest financial assistance and in-kind support from the international community.

Bishkek is also one of the few places in Central Asia with an active lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, which advocates for LGBT rights in government policy. The community is predominantly made of young activists. The Kyrgyz government has been receptive to some of the recommendations on protecting LGBT rights, but gathering places for the LGBT community are limited to special nightclubs, NGOs and private homes.⁷⁴

Studies of urban youth demonstrate that to instill the notion of pluralism, it is important to destigmatize public expressions of different identities. Many people in Kyrgyzstan hardened their attitudes toward people with different identities over the past decade, as the country witnessed population movements that created perceived and real struggles over resources.

74 Cai Wilkinson and Anna Kirey (2010), "What's in a Name? The Personal and Political Meanings of 'LGBT' for Non-heterosexual and Transgender Youth in Kyrgyzstan", *Central Asian Survey*, 29(4), 485-499.

75 Farideh Heyat (2004), "Re-Islamisation in Kyrgyzstan: Gender, New overtly and the Moral Dimension", *Central Asian Survey*, 23(3-4).

76 Sebastien Peyrouse (2007), "Christians as the Main Religious Minority" in Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca (eds) *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

77 Dmitry Kabak and Almaz Esengeldiev (2011), *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the Kyrgyz Republic: Overview of the Legislation and Practice*. Bishkek: Open Viewpoint Public Foundation.

78 Ibid.

V. RELIGION

During President Akayev's administration, Kyrgyzstan welcomed foreign religious organizations, including Christian and Islamic missionaries, allowing them to operate in the country.⁷⁵ Already working in the region in the late 1980s, foreign missionaries considered the country's Christian and Muslim populations to be "easy targets", ready to join a religious community as Soviet ideology crumbled.⁷⁶ Christian missionaries from the United States, Europe and South Korea found their most receptive audiences in the north, even among non-Slavs and non-European ethnic groups. Islamic influences, primarily from Turkey and Arab states, took hold more in the south and included education, financing for constructing mosques and student exchange programs.

As a result of liberal policies toward religious groups in the 1990s, today Kyrgyzstan hosts a range of religious organizations. Officially recognized Muslim organizations include the *mufitiat* or Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAM, *Sunni Hanafiyah*), as well as the *Tabligii Jamaat* movement, Shiite mosques and Islamic charity funds. Christian denominations include Russian Orthodox, Old Believers, Old Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Protestants (Baptists, Pentecostal movements, Lutherans, Reformed Church, Seventh-Day Adventists, Bible Christians, Presbyterians and Charismatics) and Jehovah's Witnesses.⁷⁷ There is a Buddhist society, *Chamsen*, and a Jewish religious community registered in Bishkek, as well as 34 other religious movements, including Scientology, Messianic Judaism "Beit Joshua" and the Lutheran Church Concordia.⁷⁸ Finally, Kyrgyzstan has adherents of Tengriism, a pre-Islamic belief in Tengri, god of the sky.

Following Supreme Court decisions, the State Commission on Religious Affairs has banned groups designated as terrorists, extremists or sects. The list of extremist organizations is dominated by movements with a regional or international political agenda. For example, to maintain good relations with Turkey and China, Kyrgyzstan has banned organizations promoting the creation of East Turkistan. Similarly,

Kurdish groups are banned, including the East Turkistan Islamic Party, the Organization of East Turkistan Liberation (*Sharki Azat Turkistan*), the Islamic Party of Turkistan (also known as the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan) and *Hizb-ut-Takhrir*. Terrorist organizations on the list include Al Qaeda, the Taliban, the People's Congress of Kurdistan and Jihad Group. The list of banned sects includes The Church of Moon San Man association, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Sri Chinmoy Church, Dolmar Channong, Falun Gong, Sri Aurobindo Ghose, the White Brotherhood and Satanists.⁷⁹

Bishkek and Chui oblast have the largest number of registered Christian and Muslim organizations, 127 and 156, respectively. Osh oblast has the largest number of registered Muslim organizations and houses of worship, with 669, followed by Jalalabad at 464. Unregistered religious organizations also exist, but remained uncounted.

Today up to 88 percent, or 5 million, of the population of Kyrgyzstan identifies as Sunni Muslim, while 11 percent identify as Christian. Compared to the 1990s, when only 55 percent of ethnic Kyrgyz and 87 percent of ethnic Uzbeks identified as Muslim, by the end of the first decade of the 2000s, 97 percent of ethnic Kyrgyz and 99 percent of ethnic Uzbeks identify as Muslim.⁸⁰ A much smaller percentage, however, actually practice Islam on a daily basis. For many, Islam is a selective set of traditions, rediscovered and reinterpreted after seventy years of Soviet rule,

practiced mainly during key life cycle events, such as childbirth, celebrations, weddings and funerals. At times, Islamic traditions are practiced in parallel with those from the Zoroastrian era, while some pre-Soviet practices, such as bride kidnapping and polygyny, are mistakenly identified as Islamic.

The significance of religion as an identity marker differs by ethnicity, age and region. Religion is “very important” for the vast majority of ethnic Uzbeks (80 percent), compared with 54 percent of ethnic Kyrgyz and 38.5 percent of ethnic Russians. Religion is more significant for people aged 26 to 35; of which 58 percent consider religion to be “very important”. The majority of residents of Batken (82 percent) and Jalalabad (68 percent) also consider religion to be “very important”, while the majority of people in the rest of Kyrgyzstan see religion as “somewhat important”.⁸¹ According to the Pew Research Center, 68 percent of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan say they can freely practice their religion, and over 90 percent believe that others are free to practice their faith as well.⁸²

Islam was revived in Kyrgyzstan against the backdrop of the failing Soviet Union. Religion can help rebuild inter-personal and community trust, and local clergy can perform the role of civil servants in community events such as marriage when they are not available. Outlawed groups such as *Hizb-ut-Takhrir* succeeded in recruiting new followers, thanks to their ability to mobilize resources to solve local problems ignored by the government.⁸³ Islamic charities help vulnerable populations when the state cannot. Scholars also attribute the revival of Islam in Central Asia to the need of the population to reclaim their “national cultural patrimony” in the post-colonial period.⁸⁴ According to this view, the return to Islam during the Gorbachev and post-Soviet eras represented an assertion of national roots, juxtaposing a Kyrgyz identity against a Russian/Soviet identity.

Religious belonging and ethnicity coincide for some people in Kyrgyzstan. In the south, in particular, religion is closely related to ethnic identity and mosques provide services in the language of their members. However, others view religion and ethnicity

79 Ibid.

80 Eric McGlinchey (2009), “Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, 56(3), 16-28.

81 SIAR (2013).

82 Pew Research Center, “The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics, and Society”, April 30, 2013, <<http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-religion-and-politics/>>, accessed on May 10, 2015.

83 McGlinchey (2009).

84 Adeeb Khalid (2003), “A Secular Islam: Nation, State, and Religion in Uzbekistan,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 35(4), 120.

as two separate components of identity.⁸⁵ In public discussions, religion and ethnicity are routinely referred to as coinciding, but that description is misleading when applied to some residents in northern Kyrgyzstan, who have been more open to external Christian missionary influences.⁸⁶

Regulations on religious groups became stiffer under Bakiyev and remain unchanged under the current leadership. These were justified by the alleged need to suppress radical forms of Islam, and by the state's close collaboration with the *mufitiat* and the Russian Orthodox Church, the two main religious authorities in the country. In 2009, Bakiyev passed a law restricting the freedom of religious groups. Religious groups now needed at least 200 members to receive legal registration, replacing the previous threshold of 10. Both SAM and the Russian Orthodox Church were concerned over the uncontrolled expansion of foreign Islamic and Christian groups in the country and supported the restrictions.

In late 2012, the Kyrgyz parliament amended Bakiyev's 2009 law, further restricting religious freedoms. The law now prohibits students from traveling abroad for religious education without state permission; prohibits

activities by foreign religious organizations without a state license; and imposes stronger censorship on religious literature. The law passed quietly, without broad discussion in parliament, and the president quickly signed it.⁸⁷ Increased restrictions on the activities of foreign missionary groups caused local authorities and Muslim clergy to deny Protestant, Baha'i, Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishnas the right to bury their followers according to religious rites.⁸⁸ Members of Jehovah's Witnesses face regular persecution in southern Kyrgyzstan.⁸⁹

Kyrgyzstan's *mufitiat* supports the government's vision of Islam and often finds a similar degree of respect from the state. It peacefully co-exists with the formal state and routinely coordinates with the government regarding the distribution of *hajj* exit visas and public prayers.⁹⁰ Bakiyev tried to increase political control over SAM by designing special uniforms for religious leaders. The administration claimed that the new uniform would combine "native" ethnic Kyrgyz and Islamic designs, namely traditional Kyrgyz embroidery and a tag depicting the Black Stone in Mecca. These plans to create ethnicized SAM never materialized.

Kyrgyzstan's security structures routinely label Islamic extremists as abstract "third forces" and use them as scapegoats for outbreaks of instability, ranging from small explosions to the ethnic violence in Osh.⁹¹ They regularly arrest alleged members of Islamic extremist groups. Of greatest concern is *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, a movement that, according to various estimates, has recruited up to 20,000 members in Kyrgyzstan and many more across the region.⁹²

Government fears of the potential spread of extremism are unfounded. Surveys indicate that only seven percent of Kyrgyzstan's population approves of *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* ideology.⁹³ Recent research revealed that 32 percent of people in Kyrgyzstan are concerned about the spread of Islamic extremism, while 20 percent are concerned about both Islamic and Christian extremism. The vast majority considers extremist religious activities, such as suicide bombings in defense of Islam, to be unjustified.⁹⁴

85 Peyrouse (2007).

86 Kabak and Esengeliev (2011).

87 Stuart Kahn, "Freedom House: Freedom of Worship is Limited in Kyrgyzstan", *Voice of Freedom*, December 15, 2012.

88 Felix Corley, "Kyrgyzstan: New Religious Law Changes Being Done 'Democratically'", *Forum 18*, December 19, 2012.

89 Felix Corley, "Kyrgyzstan: Eight Reids, Two Official Warnings in Three Months", *Forum 18*, April 8, 2012.

90 McGlinchey (2009).

91 Bruce Pannier. "Wary Locals Question Allegations Of Islamist Role In Kyrgyzstan's Ethnic Violence", *Eurasianet.org*, July 24, 2010.'

92 "Some 20,000 Hizb ut-Tahrir members active in Kyrgyzstan", *Fergananeews*, May 14, 2013; Joanna Paraszczuk, "More Than 330 Kyrgyz Said To Be Fighting Alongside ISIS in Syria, Iraq", *RFE/RL*, April 21, 2015.

93 Kathleen Collins (2007), "Ideas, Networks, and Islamist Movements: Evidence from Central Asia and the Caucasus", *World Politics* 60, October, 64-96.

94 Pew Research Center, "Concerns About Religious Extremism in Boston Bombings Suspects' Homelands", April 23, 2013.

Kyrgyz political leaders from Akayev to Atambayev have incorporated some symbolic features of Islam into public life. However, most political elites prefer to keep their religious identity separate from their public life. Public holidays are assigned for a range of religious holidays including the Islamic holiday *Eid*, the Zoroastrian new year *Nooruz*, and Orthodox Christmas (January 6). In urban areas, Soviet-propagated holidays, such as New Year's Eve, Defender of the Fatherland Day and International Women's Day, continue to be popular, while Western celebrations, such as Valentine's Day, are now generating considerable commercial activity.

VI. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Macro-Economic Picture

Kyrgyzstan is among the poorest countries in the former Soviet Union. Its economy, once dominated by agriculture, has become increasingly dependent on gold exports and trade. In May 1993, Kyrgyzstan became the first Central Asian country to leave the ruble zone and issue its own national currency.⁹⁵ Early membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1998 helped the country become a regional transit hub for Chinese goods and develop shuttle trade and bazaars. However, the 2005 and 2010 regime changes slowed economic growth considerably and delayed the launch of new mineral excavation sites by the government. Kyrgyzstan's

hydropower sector offers another potential resource for future economic development.

Economic liberalization programs following independence generated results in the late 1990s. Housing and public enterprises were privatized fairly quickly, with up to 60 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) coming from the private sector by the end of the 2000s. Approximately 500 collective and state farms were divided into more than 60,000 farms (each averaging 2,500 hectares) owned and operated predominantly by individual farmers, as well as by private and public enterprises.⁹⁶ However, corruption, patronage and lack of entrepreneurial experience quickly led to an increased gap between the rich and the poor. Akayev's poor macroeconomic management resulted in huge budget deficits, reaching a record 17 percent of GDP in 1996, and a reliance on international handouts.⁹⁷ Macroeconomic management improved in the 2000s and Kyrgyzstan saw stronger growth. According to the latest United Nations Human Development Index, Kyrgyzstan ranked 125th out of 187 in the world, with a Gini index of 33.4 in 2013.⁹⁸

Since the 2010 regime change, Kyrgyzstan has made attempts to improve market-based competition. The country began to implement a number of large-scale infrastructure projects, suggesting that external credits and loans are not all allocated towards consumption. Then First Vice Prime Minister Joomart Otorbayev pledged to ease regulations and rein-in the shadow economy.⁹⁹ According to Otorbayev, Kyrgyzstan's real GDP is three times higher than official figures because of the shadow economy, and a large chunk of the shadow economy is controlled by influential political officials evading taxes. Should the government succeed in decreasing the size of the shadow economy, Kyrgyzstan's state budget could increase twofold.¹⁰⁰ The World Bank's "Doing Business 2015" report indicates that Kyrgyzstan ranks 102nd among 189 economies on ease of doing business.

Kyrgyzstan's economy rebounded from the 2010 political upheaval. In 2013, GDP was \$7.2 billion, a 10.5 percent increase from the previous year. GDP per capita grew to \$3,212, up from \$2,920 in 2012.¹⁰¹

95 Richard Pomfret (2006), *The Central Asian Economies Since Independence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 74.

96 Ibid, 76.

97 Ibid.

98 United Nations Human Development Index, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi-table>; Gini Index, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/income-gini-coefficient>, last accessed on May 10, 2015.

99 Joomart Otorbayev served a Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan from March 2013 to May 2015.

100 "Вице-премьер Кыргызстана рассказал о программе его правительства «100 дней»", *Golos Ameriki*, April 20, 2012.

101 The World Bank, "World Development Indicators 2015", <<http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx>>, accessed on May 10, 2015.

This economic growth was accompanied by modest inflation (6.6 percent). The official unemployment rate in 2013 was eight percent, but the real level is likely higher.¹⁰²

In late 2011, Kyrgyzstan's external debt reached \$6 billion, roughly 80 percent of GDP, more than double compared to 2010.¹⁰³ Although the debt has continued to grow since the 1990s, the debt-to-GDP ratio has fallen, thanks to economic growth since 2005. In contrast to the 1990s, the government's fiscal and debt policies are generally oriented toward maintaining macroeconomic stability. The International Monetary Fund estimates that at the current debt payment rate, the level of external debt does not pose a threat to macroeconomic stability in the foreseeable future.¹⁰⁴ Foreign investment in 2013 rose slightly, reaching \$757 million.¹⁰⁵ In 2013, Kyrgyzstan's total foreign currency reserves increased to \$2.1 billion compared with \$1.9 billion in 2012. In 2014 and as of early 2015, the National Bank had sold about \$300 million to stabilize the exchange rates, thereby raising concerns about the fast-declining reserves.¹⁰⁶

According to official government data, private companies contribute roughly 40 percent of the economy and employ 15 percent of the population. The World Bank estimates that the share of the private sector reaches 75 percent of the economy. Entrepreneurs in Bishkek confirm that since the ouster of Bakiyev, doing business in Kyrgyzstan has

become easier because they do not have pay informal taxes to the president's son, Maksim Bakiyev.¹⁰⁷ Yet, following the 2010 regime change, market competition continues to be affected by the political situation and politicized interests.

The gold mining industry has been particularly fraught; investments are fragile and difficult to attract due to the unpredictable political landscape. Kyrgyzstan's gold reserves are confirmed to be around 1,000 tons, the third-largest in the former Soviet Union after reserves in Russia and Uzbekistan. Gold exports make up 40 percent of Kyrgyzstan's exports and 10 percent of GDP.¹⁰⁸ Kyrgyzstan is a minority holder in the Kumtor gold mine, which generates 12 percent of the country's GDP.¹⁰⁹ Centerra Gold, the Canadian company operating the Kumtor mine in eastern Kyrgyzstan, secured a favourable deal with Kyrgyzstan during the Akayev years that was renegotiated without much change for Kyrgyzstan under Bakiyev in 2009. Both presidents likely reaped personal benefits from these deals. Centerra Gold became an opportunity for opposition forces to gather protest crowds demanding the ouster Atambayev in 2012 and 2013. In February 2013, the parliament scrapped the 2009 agreement, sending the government back to the negotiating table with Centerra Gold. In September, Atambayev's government was able to increase Kyrgyzstan's interest in Kumtor from 32.7 to 50 percent, while Centerra would receive \$100 million.¹¹⁰

In the meantime, the opposition accused the Atambayev government of corruption and incompetence for not crafting a more lucrative deal. *Ata-Jurt* leader Tashiev staged a rally in Bishkek in October 2012 demanding the nationalization of Kumtor. Tashiev and several supporters climbed the fence of the parliament building before being arrested for attempting to overthrow the government. MPs Tashiev, Talant Mamytov and Sadyr Japarov subsequently received two years of jail time for the incident. Calls for the nationalization of the mining sector became an easy way for the populist political opposition to mobilize the impoverished masses, with just a small stipend and a bus ticket to the capital city.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 International Monetary Fund, "Kyrgyz Republic—Debt Sustainability Analysis Under the Debt Sustainability Framework for Low Income Countries", June 2, 2011.

105 Ibid.

106 The World Bank (2015).

107 Interviews with members of the Rotary Club, Bishkek, October 2012.

108 Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse (2012), *Globalizing Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 200.

109 "Gold in the Hills", *The Economist*, March 16, 2013.

110 "Centerra, Kyrgyz Government Sign Pact for Kumtor mine", *Reuters*, September 10, 2013.

In June 2013, another protest was allegedly organized by the residents of Jeti-Oguz, the district surrounding the mine, but experts widely agree that it was strategically organized by political opposition forces.¹¹¹ The protests, comprised of several hundred men, halted production at the mine, but did not impact the entire operation. In secretly taped videos released in September, protest organizers were allegedly seen blackmailing Kumtor's management with plans to poison the Barcoon River, which runs close to the mine, and blame it on Centerra Gold. According to the Kyrgyz National Security Committee, the protest organizers had the support of Tashiev and Japarov.¹¹² The same technique of paying and busing protesters was likely used to start the protests.

In both incidents, the opposition seized on populist demands to nationalize Kumtor and used them to generate a vague external enemy intent on stealing wealth that belonged to the people. Governance issues at the local and national levels were exploited by opposition activists to create economic and political mayhem. The central government, including the presidential administration, was unable to preempt sabotage organized at the local level because of poor coordination with local governments. This was partly the result of the inability of local governments to meet the needs of residents and perform basic administrative duties. The distrust of central and local government among villagers living near mining

areas made them easy targets for nationalist rhetoric. Finally, the government's inability to clearly and persuasively articulate its policies and plans led to stagnation in the mining sector and information gaps that the opposition filled. Other proposed mining projects in Naryn, Talas and Batken were delayed due to these governance problems. The scheduled 2013 openings of *Taldybulak Levoberezhny* (2,000 tons of gold) and Jerooy (1,500 tons of gold) mines were threatened by mass protests as well.

Kyrgyzstan's hydropower, another flagship sector of economy, accounts for up to 15 percent of exports.¹¹³ Current electricity output ranges between 12 and 14 terawatts-hour per year (TWh/year), barely meeting the demands of the local market. With better management and new power plants, Kyrgyzstan could generate up to 140 TWh/year and export surplus electricity to Afghanistan, Pakistan and China.¹¹⁴ The two main energy construction projects include the 1,900 megawatt (MW) Kambarata-1 and 360 MW Kambarata-2 on the Naryn River. Under pressure from the international community, in 1997, Kyrgyzstan began to reform its electric power sector. Despite reforms, the share of electric power in GDP has fallen since 2001. During the Bakiyev regime, poor management of the sector led to high losses (over 40 percent) and corruption. Thanks to Atambayev's good relations with Russian president Vladimir Putin, Russia promised to build both hydropower plants in 2013. As of May 2015, the plants had not been built. If constructed, however, production costs for both stations will exceed revenues unless the energy sector is reformed and electricity tariffs are raised in Kyrgyzstan. The Kambarata hydropower stations would also help Kyrgyzstan better control water release to downstream neighbours. This is likely to escalate tensions with neighbouring Uzbekistan, which depends on Kyrgyzstan's water supply during the summer.

The Kyrgyz government's Sustainable Development Strategy, which outlines economic development goals for the period 2013 to 2017, acknowledges the lack of an efficient regulative framework for private companies. The strategy aims at improving the legislative base to ensure fair competition and simplify the business start-up process.¹¹⁵ Unless

111 Johan Engvall (2013), "The Political Sources of Kyrgyzstan's Recent Unrest", *Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst*, June 26, 2013; John C.K. Daly, "Kyrgyzstan's Kumtor Mine Becomes Political Football", *Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst*, June 12.

112 "У Кумтора вымогают \$3 миллиона" Kumtor is Being Extorted for \$3 Million, *Vecherny Bishkek*, August 28, 2013.

113 Pomfret (2006), 80.

114 K. Izmailov, R. Karatayev, and U. Mateev (2007), *Реформа электроэнергетики Кыргызстана: Оценка ситуации, направления и условия успешного развития* [Electric power reform in Kyrgyzstan: Assessment of Situation, Directions and Conditions for Successful Development], Bishkek: Soros Foundation and IPAR.

115 "Национальной стратегии устойчивого развития Кыргызской Республики на период 2013-2017 годы", available at http://www.president.kg/ru/novosti/1466_tekst_natsionalnoy_strategii_ustoychivogo_razvitiya_kyrgyzzskoy_respubliki_na_period_2013-2017_godyi/.

poor governance is addressed at both the national and local levels, implementation of the strategy will be problematic.

Groups Most Susceptible to Poverty

Kyrgyzstan's population was estimated at 5.72 million in 2013, with average annual growth of one percent.¹¹⁶ Roughly 36 percent of the population is urban and 2.3 million are of working age.¹¹⁷ The overall poverty level in Kyrgyzstan in 2014 was estimated at 37 percent.¹¹⁸ In recent years, the percentage of the population living below \$2 per day has decreased slightly to 21.1 percent.¹¹⁹ Poverty is twice as high in rural areas than in urban areas. Batken and Naryn, two remote regions with declining infrastructure, are the poorest in the country. Employment in the rural sector does not mean a path to economic stability, but constitutes about 40 percent of "employed poor" in Kyrgyzstan.¹²⁰ Poor and rural residents tend to have large families (three or more children), and the largest number of dependents.

Although extreme poverty is more common in low populated areas like Batken and Naryn, one in three poor Kyrgyzstanis lives in the Osh region, the second-most populated area of the country after Bishkek.

Poverty is unevenly spread across ethnic lines. According to World Bank data, while ethnic Russians have the lowest levels of poverty, ethnic Uzbeks have the highest.¹²¹ Some predicting factors for poverty

among ethnic minorities are region (the north is more affluent than the south), urban/rural status, size of household and level of education. Ethnic Russians predominantly live in the urban north and have smaller families and greater access to education. Ethnic Uzbeks tend to live in the rural south and have large families and less schooling.

In urban areas, the poor tend to live in detached houses (69.4 percent), not apartment complexes (22.7 percent). Property ownership remains high across all segments of the population (over 90 percent), but the poor have access to much smaller parcels of land. Roughly two-thirds of the non-poor have access to utilities such as running water, sewage and central gas, but only 30 percent of the poor do, mostly thanks to the legacy of Soviet infrastructure. Most of the urban poor who lack access to utilities live in Soviet-era apartment buildings and are recent migrants.

The poverty level in Kyrgyzstan has significantly declined since the 1990s. For instance, twenty one percent of the poor suffered from malnutrition in the 1990s compared with four percent in the first decade of the 2000s.¹²² According to the World Food Program, today, about one million people in the country are food insecure, with an additional 750,000 at risk.¹²³ Poverty fell largely due to economic growth across a range of sectors, from construction to tourism. This growth did not extend to agriculture, making rural areas even less appealing to live in. Migrant remittances have contributed to greater economic consumption in the country and helped reduce poverty, but they have not been used for long-term planning or investment, in part due to the lack of state-guaranteed investments or saving accounts.

Households headed by a male aged 25 to 39 are more likely to be poor than those with older household heads.¹²⁴ Young rural men are more susceptible to poverty because they face the double burden of providing for their children and taking care of elder generations. According to the World Bank, education is one of the best predictors of higher income across the country. However, due to the pressure to support their families, men overall, and rural men in particular,

116 The World Bank (2015).

117 *CIA Fact Book*, February 2015 data, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>, last accessed May 10, 2015.

118 The World Bank (2015).

119 *Ibid.*

120 The World Bank, "Kyrgyzstan – Regional Welfare Disparities", April 12, 2013.

121 *Ibid.*, 15.

122 *Ibid.*, 2.

123 Kyrgyzstan – Overview, <http://www.wfp.org/countries/kyrgyzstan/overview>, accessed on September 3, 2013.

124 The World Bank (2007).

Table 3. Age of the Population by Gender, 2013.¹²⁶

	Under 16		16 – 57		Over 63		Total	
Men	941,366	34%	1,741,126	62%	116,306	4%	2,798,798	49%
Women	903,652	32%	1,698,589	59%	262,094	9%	2,864,335	51%
Total	1,845,018	32%	3,439,715	61%	378,400	7%	5,663,133	100%

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic

are less likely to pursue a university education and tend to join the workforce at an earlier age. Men comprise only 19 percent of university students in the Osh region, in contrast to 60 percent in Chui oblast and Bishkek.¹²⁵

More women are unemployed than men, and those who are employed earn an average of 30 percent less than men.¹²⁷ Only half of working-age women are employed (compared to 73 percent of men). The gender gap is particularly wide in Batken and Naryn, reflecting the high poverty and lack of jobs in these regions. The gender gap is partly caused by a lack of childcare facilities, as well as the need to care for elder family members. Nationwide, women tend to leave the labour force during their reproductive years (25 to 34) and again later in life to help bring up their grandchildren (55 to 64).

In 2009, 51 percent of the employed population (43 percent of men and 61 percent of women) worked in the formal sector. The rest worked either without formal employment contracts or in the informal economy. While women are more likely

to be employed in the public sector, very few hold positions of power. Women make up only one-fifth of all entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan.

The average age for marriage is 26.8 years for men and 23 for women.¹²⁸ Average life expectancy for men is 65.7 years and 73.7 years for women. The average number of children per woman is 3.38 in rural areas and 2.66 in urban areas. The average number of children per woman has decreased in rural areas since the 1990s, but has increased in urban areas mostly due to internal migration.¹²⁹

The government provides social safety nets to vulnerable groups, including monthly benefits to the poor, the disabled and the elderly. Around 12 percent of the population receives some type of support from the state.¹³⁰ However, given the high poverty level in the country, existing safety nets are insufficient. Vulnerable groups heavily rely on poverty reduction programs by external donors, as well as on remittances from labour migrants.

Uneven, slow economic development poses great challenges to pluralism in Kyrgyzstan. Modernization and free markets offer benefits to only a small portion of the population, while the majority either survives on remittances or lives in extreme poverty. Economic divides and development disparities between urban and rural areas fuel competition over land and water resources and access to job markets. The mining sector demonstrates how the economically deprived become easy targets for political entrepreneurs who recruit protesters to challenge government decisions.

125 The World Bank, *Kyrgyz Republic Gender Disparities in Endowments and Access to Economic Opportunities*, June 26, (2012 b).

126 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, <http://www.stat.kg/stat.files/din.files/census/5010002.pdf>.

127 The World Bank (2012 b), 8.

128 National Statistical Committee <http://www.stat.kg/stat.files/din.files/census/5010016.pdf>.

129 Ibid.

130 The World Bank (2012 a).

Socio-economic Impact of Labour Migration

Labour migration has had a tremendous impact on Kyrgyzstan's economic and social development. According to the World Bank, roughly 621,000 Kyrgyzstani citizens (11 percent of the total population) reside abroad.¹³¹ However, the head of the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Relations, Kanybek Imanaliyev, puts the number higher. He estimates that over one million Kyrgyzstani citizens, or one fifth of the country's total population, currently reside in Russia and Kazakhstan.¹³² In 2013 remittances equaled 31.5 percent of GDP. Roughly 90 percent of Kyrgyz migrants work in Russia, providing 92 percent of all remittances.¹³³ The vast majority spend over a year working in Russia, sending money home to support their families. Remittances range from several hundred to several thousand dollars a year per worker. One in three migrants returns home disappointed with labour prospects abroad, and over 60 percent consider returning to Kyrgyzstan after a long stay abroad.¹³⁴

131 The World Bank, *The Migration and Remittances Factbook* 2011. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1199807908806/KyrgyzRepublic.pdf>

132 Presentation by Kanybek Imanaliyev at Turkish-American Alliance, Washington, DC, March 13, 2013. Also confirmed by other reports, including Evgeny Vinokurov (2013), "The Art of Survival: Kyrgyz Labor Migration, Human Capital, and Social Networks", *Central Asia Economic Paper*, No. 7, Central Asia Program, Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University, April.

133 World Bank (2015).

134 Schmidt and Sagynbekova (2008).

135 Dilip Ratha (2012), "Outlook for Migration and Remittances", World Bank presentation. <http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/tenthcoord2012/V.%20Dilip%20Ratha%20-%20Remittances%20and%20their%20costs.pdf>.

136 Migration Policy Institute memo. http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/remittances/All_Profiles.pdf.

137 Ratha (2012).

138 Casey Michel, "Drop in Migrant Remittances A Problem for Central Asian Economies", *The Diplomat*, December 23, 2014.

139 Interview with expert at International Organization for Migration, Bishkek, February 2009.

140 Migration Policy Institute, *Remittances Profile: Kyrgyz Republic*. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/remittances/KyrgyzR.pdf>

Remittances played a stabilizing role in the economy of Kyrgyzstan, and in Central Asia in general, during the global financial crisis in 2008 and 2009. Initial concerns that the crisis would force Central Asian migrants to return home were incorrect. On the contrary, the initial shock of the sharp decline in remittances in late 2008 propelled more Kyrgyz to travel abroad. Fearing that the crisis would hit the domestic market even harder, many Kyrgyz took on low-paying foreign jobs rather than risk unemployment at home. High oil prices in 2008 contributed to Russia's economic stability and helped steady the volume of remittances in 2009.¹³⁵ Remittances dropped to \$1 billion in 2009, compared with \$1.2 billion in 2008, a record-high year. They picked up again, reaching \$1.16 billion in 2010 and \$1.7 billion in 2012.¹³⁶

According to United Nations predictions, the level of remittances was to remain stable – or slightly increase by 2014.¹³⁷ However, due to economic decline in Russia in 2014 and 2015, the volume is expected to drop as well.¹³⁸

Instead of looking for jobs in Russia's largest and most affluent cities, Moscow and Saint Petersburg, migrants from Central Asia increasingly chose to travel to Eastern Russian cities of Nizhny Novgorod, Yuzhny Sakhalin and Yekaterinburg.¹³⁹ Central Asian labour migrants in Russia tend to concentrate in public transit, construction, retail (bazaars and large markets) and street sweeping jobs that are not attractive to Russian citizens. Migrants, therefore compete for jobs mostly among themselves rather than with Russian citizens.

Remittances make up a significant source of financial flows to Kyrgyzstan compared to other financial exchanges. In 2011, \$1.2 billion in remittances made up 22 percent of the country's GDP, 524 percent of foreign direct investment, 315 percent of official development assistance, 69 percent of merchandise exports, and 102 percent of commercial services exports.¹⁴⁰

Migrant remittances also have social implications. Remittances enable family members of migrants to remain in their villages and sustain social relations

and acquire or advance in social status.¹⁴¹ Social relations are sustained as remittances fund important life-cycle rituals such as weddings and funerals.

Labour migration, however, also has social costs for those remaining in Kyrgyzstan. With working age parents abroad, children are raised by grandparents. Sometimes, one parent stays at home while another spends long periods of time abroad. More alarming is the growing number of children abandoned abroad by single mothers or married women working in Russia.¹⁴² Since 2011, 24 newborns have been repatriated to Kyrgyzstan, while over 50 are currently located in Russian orphanages. Many more children abandoned by Kyrgyz mothers are likely never registered with Russian authorities.

Labour migration is not an option for everyone in Kyrgyzstan. People with funds to finance a trip abroad, a high school or college education, and access to major airports are more likely to seek work in Russia or Kazakhstan than others.¹⁴³ Those with a good knowledge of Russian are likely to feel safer and have more opportunities for employment across the former Soviet region, where Russian is still a main medium of inter-ethnic communication. Impoverished, Kyrgyz-speaking families living in remote areas are less likely to have an earner abroad.

141 Eliza Isabaeva (2011), "Leaving to Enable Others to Remain: Remittances and New Moral Economies of Migration in Southern Kyrgyzstan", *Central Asian Survey*, 30:3-4.

142 Aida Kasymalieva, "Broshennyh detei stanovitsya vse bol'she", *Azattyk.kg*, February 19, 2013.

143 Aziz Atamanov and Marrit van den Berg (2012), "International Labour Migration and Local Rural Activities in the Kyrgyz Republic: Determinants and Trade-offs", *Central Asian Survey*, 31:2, 119-136.

144 Aida Aaly Alymbetova, Keneshbek Almakuchukov, Emil Nasritdinov, Ruslan Rakhimov and Bermet Zhu-makadyr kyzy (2013), "Debating Migration in Kyrgyzstan", *Voices from Central Asia Series*, No. 9, Central Asia Program, Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University, February.

145 Ibid.

146 Ibid.

147 World Bank (2007).

148 "Antropolog E. Nasritdinov: 10 mifov o novostoikah v Bishkeke", *Tazabek.kg*, April 22, 2013.

Internal Migration

Internal migration and urbanization have also alleviated poverty in Kyrgyzstan. People move within the country seeking jobs, better educational opportunities and agricultural land. Many ethnic Kyrgyz have moved from rural areas to Osh or Bishkek, with migration to Bishkek part of a significant south to north migration.¹⁴⁴ Bishkek and Osh also serve as transit points for migrants who move to other parts of the country or on to Russia and Kazakhstan. According to various estimates, about 32 percent of the migrant population does not register in their new place of residence because they reside in Bishkek's slums or *novostroiki* (translated as "newly built").¹⁴⁵

Outmigration is particularly high in mountainous areas that were heavily dependent on Soviet-era subsidies providing compensation during poor harvests, "entertainment and social life" and healthcare.¹⁴⁶ With the introduction of land privatization and a market economy, many rural residents found it difficult to adapt from being collective farm workers to individual entrepreneurs. They also could not keep up with the economic cycles in urban areas, which tend to be considerably faster than agricultural work. Environmental degradation of pastoral lands also drove many people away from mountainous areas.

By the mid-2000s, more than half of Kyrgyzstan's urban population resided in Bishkek.¹⁴⁷ The capital city has disproportionately benefited from economic growth, a phenomenon the World Bank calls "unipolar development". The first wave of migration to the outskirts of Bishkek began in the late 1980s. Since then, there have been several major inflows, particularly associated with the 2005 and 2010 regime changes. Bishkek's growing slums lack the amenities the capital city offers to other residents, such as roads, running water, electricity and sewers. Migrants also lack the proper residence registration (*propiska*) that provide access to public goods such as education and healthcare. Over the past decade, the number of residents in *novostroiki* grew from 173,000 to 300,000, most of whom voluntarily segregate according to regional origin.¹⁴⁸

Unlike popular perceptions, however, not all residents in novostroiki acquired land illegally through the *samozakhat* (seizing of land) process. Some residents were promised land plots by political leaders seeking to prevail over their competitors. Additionally, according to early research, *novostroiki* residents may be contributing to stability in Bishkek by boosting the city's economic vitality. Up to 17 percent of residents already have, or are in the process of earning, a university degree.¹⁴⁹ Most novostroiki residents work in the main Bishkek bazaars of Dordoi, Osh and Orto-Sai. Some internal migrants work in Bishkek's construction sector and can be regarded as an emerging urban middle class.

The urban population in Osh has transformed over the past century as well. The population of Osh increased tenfold, from roughly 30,000 in 1926 to over a quarter of a million today. The population grew particularly rapidly in the post-World War II period, when Osh rapidly industrialized. Many ethnic Kyrgyz arrived and moved into apartment complexes in Uzbek-majority areas. Ethnically mixed communities populated Osh's central areas, which had the typical attributes of a Soviet city; a Lenin statue, central square, department store and restaurants. While ethnic belonging was reinforced by Soviet leadership, the Central Asian population were also modernized under Soviet rules.¹⁵⁰ By the early 21st century, Osh was split almost equally between ethnic Uzbeks (48.3 percent) and Kyrgyz (43 percent). Russians make up 2.7 percent of the population.¹⁵¹ Roughly half of all Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan live in Osh.

149 Presentation by Emil Nasritdinov, "Myth and Realities of Bishkek Novostroikas", Uppsala University, December 19, 2012.

150 Liu (2012), 103.

151 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2009.

152 "Азамат Акеев: Расходы на образование составляют 5% от ВВП страны" ("Azamat Akeev: Education Expenditures Make Up 5% of the Country's GDP"), *Vecherny Bishkek*, June 27, 2012.

153 Duishon Shamatov (2012), "The Impact of Standardized Testing on University Entrance Issues in Kyrgyzstan", *European Education*, 44(1), 71-92.

154 The World Bank(2012 a).

155 The World Bank (2012 b).

Education

When Kyrgyzstan became independent, it lost a large part of its education budget. Kyrgyzstan currently spends roughly 5 percent of GDP on education and less than 0.2 percent on research and development; considerably lower than in the Soviet period.¹⁵² The constitution guarantees free education up to Grade 9 (high school goes up to Grade 11). Although there are some opportunities for free higher education, tertiary education is increasingly tuition-based. Natural science and mathematics education has become particularly problematic at all levels because of outdated textbooks and a shortage of qualified teachers. In many schools, teachers are expected to teach classes outside their main area of expertise. There is still a significant gap in the quality of education offered at Russian-language and Kyrgyz-language institutions, a legacy of the Soviet regime.¹⁵³

Although the quality of education has fallen significantly since independence, literacy rates remain close to universal in Kyrgyzstan. School enrollment levels for both girls and boys remain high at close to 90 percent nationwide.¹⁵⁴ The rate of enrollment in vocational schools grew by 71 percent over the past decade, but the quality of such training is often poor and graduates find it difficult to find a job.¹⁵⁵ More women are pursuing higher education, with women's enrolment in universities rising by 34 percent over the past decade, compared with 12 percent among men.

However, enrollment data can be misleading, as the quality of teaching in schools in rural areas is inadequate. The number of poorly educated has risen among rural youth, due to falling standards and increasing absences due to the employment of children to support families. Table 4 demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of students across the country do not meet state standards of mathematics and reading and comprehension. Bishkek is the only place where over half of all students meet the standards.

Table 4. School Children Performing Below Basic Levels of Attainment in Kyrgyzstan (%)¹⁵⁶

	Grade 4		Grade 8	
	Mathematics	Reading and comprehension	Mathematics	Reading and comprehension
Batken Oblast	67	78	81	85
Chui Oblast	64	66	71	60
Issyk-Kul Oblast	50	61	66	59
Jalalabad Oblast	60	74	76	79
Naryn Oblast	58	72	75	69
Osh Oblast	62	84	79	84
Talas Oblast	62	77	73	70
Bishkek City	39	48	53	40
Osh City	63	79	79	75
Nationwide	56	69	71	67

Source: The Center for Education Assessment and Teaching Methods

The new market economy created opportunities for the emergence of private schools and universities that offer better-trained faculty and up-to-date textbooks. Tens of new private universities, colleges, and schools opened in Bishkek and other major urban areas. This proliferation of education institutions is

both a response to the demand for private schools among the wealthy population, as well as successful marketing campaigns touting universities as ways to connect with the world beyond Kyrgyzstan's borders.¹⁵⁷ In post-communist countries, education is linked to authority and progress at the individual and societal levels. Additionally, "the idea of education", particularly university education, is closely associated in Kyrgyzstan with modernization and the departure from a tumultuous past into a hopeful future.¹⁵⁸

156 The definition of a student performing below the basic level of attainment is: "The student has some fragments of knowledge, often not connected between different topics. The student does partially possess some procedural and practical skills, though does not demonstrate an understanding of basic understanding of studied topics and makes mistakes even in simple, standard procedures when deciding problems and fulfilling tasks. The student often cannot decide simple tasks in real life by using the acquired knowledge and skills from school. In this way, the student does not have sufficient knowledge or skills for further successful education or for a successful life in society." The Center for Education Assessment and Teaching Methods, "Otchet ob osnovnykh resul'tatakh issledovaniya "Natsional'noe otsenivanie obrazovatel'nykh dostizhenii uchashchikhsya" v 2009 godu. Bishkek, 4.

157 Alan DeYoung (2010), *Lost in Transition: Redefining Students and Universities in the Contemporary Kyrgyz Republic*. Charlotte: Information Age Publisher.

158 Sarah S. Amsler (2009), "Promising Futures? Education as a Symbolic Resource of Hope in Kyrgyzstan", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61:7, 1189-1206.

160 Madeleine Reeves (2005a), "Of Credits, *Kontrakty* and Critical Thinking: Encountering 'Market Reforms' in Kyrgyzstani Higher Education", *European Educational Research Journal*, 4(1).

However, because a formal education does not universally lead to a better economic or political future (although it does correlate with a higher income for some), tuition-seeking universities capitalize on the hopes of students for advancement. In virtually all higher education institutions, both students and faculty are engaged in a shadow economy of buying and selling test answers, grades and even diplomas.¹⁵⁹ Public universities that offer free education are unable to compete with private institutions that heavily rely on private "contract" students who are willing to pay for their education.¹⁶⁰

While there are a few good universities that offer high-quality training, most private institutions are unwilling to provide training in the natural sciences and engineering and focus on the humanities,

business administration and the social sciences. This has resulted in a glut of graduates with similar degrees that do not respond to market needs. Furthermore, declining academic standards do not sufficiently prepare graduates for the challenges of the job market. University education, therefore, may be a prestigious accomplishment among young people in Kyrgyzstan, but it does not guarantee employment, let alone professional development. The current education system is therefore incapable of fostering pluralism in the labour market.

VII. POLITICAL CHANGE AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Political development in independent Kyrgyzstan has been cyclical, swinging between relative openness and authoritarianism. Two violent regime changes over the course of five years persuaded major political actors to establish a system that would prevent the consolidation of power in the hands of one person. Informal arrangements had not worked. Following Akayev's ouster, rival opposition leaders made an informal pact to install Bakiyev as head of state.¹⁶¹ At that time, Bakiyev was seen as a "consensus figure" who could maintain a balance among various factions without grabbing too much power himself. His job was to fulfill the expectations of the competing players who had orchestrated Akayev's removal. Bakiyev, however, quickly marginalized his supporters and promoted a small group of people loyal to him into top positions.¹⁶²

When Bakiyev was ousted, the leaders responsible recalled the lessons of 2005. Instead of relying on a single individual to manage conflicting interests and the state, they understood that changing the overall political system was required to ensure fair representation of all players. That is, whereas Bakiyev had been a consensus choice among rival

political players in 2005, the victors in 2010 actually redistributed power by adopting a new constitution and creating a two-year transitional presidency.¹⁶³ The consensus was the result of a rational choice among interim government members based on new rules of power sharing, rather than on an ideological accord. Politicians sought to preserve their individual powers and interests by gaining seats in the parliament and appointing the government.

The 2010 constitution was designed to ensure that formal rules superseded informal patrimonial practices in politics and business. It also sought to reduce or eliminate the possibility of another violent regime change. The constitutional provisions ensure that no single leader or political force is able to centralize power to such a degree that they could refuse to hand over power if they lost the next election.¹⁶⁴

The new constitution makes it more challenging for one political leader or party to emerge as an authoritarian force. All parties recognize that winning through elections is their best option, even if winning still involves voter manipulation and other undemocratic tactics. Three constitutional provisions are especially important. First, parliament is now stronger than the presidency; parliament cannot be dissolved unless two-thirds of the MPs agree to resign. Second, no one party can receive more than 60 percent of all seats in parliament, no matter how many votes it receives; protecting the parliament from the emergence of a powerful pro-presidential party and ensuring that the majority party or coalition faces a strong opposition faction. The constitution also specifies that opposition members chair the parliamentary committees on the budget and law enforcement. The parliamentary minority can also nominate its own candidates for ministerial positions. Finally, the president can only serve one six-year term.

Kyrgyzstan's 2010 constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens regardless of ethnicity, religion or gender. The constitutional provision on human rights, drafted by Kyrgyzstan's leading human rights activists, guarantees the rights of all Kyrgyz citizens, regardless of "sex, race, language, disability, ethnicity,

161 Interviews with leaders of *Ata-Meken*, SDPK and smaller opposition parties who sought Akayev's ouster, 2005-2009.

162 Ibid.

163 Ibid.

164 Interview, Omurbek Tekebayev, Washington, DC, December 2008.

religion, age, political or other opinion, education, origin, property or other status, or other factors". Furthermore, the Electoral Code includes 30 percent quotas for women, ethnic minorities and young people in the parliament. The statute on quotas for women was adopted largely in response to the sharp decline in the political participation of women during Bakiyev's regime. The parliament elected in 2007 did not include a single female MP. All political parties met the quotas when compiling their party lists ahead of the 2010 parliamentary elections, usually by recruiting a person who satisfied more than one required category (for example, a young female, Russian candidate). However, after the elections, the share of women in parliament dropped to 18 percent because some women gave up their seats or were appointed to government positions and replaced by male colleagues.¹⁶⁵

Parliamentary Experiment and Implications for Pluralism

Following the 2010 regime change, Kyrgyzstan held a constitutional referendum on June 27 and parliamentary elections on October 10. The referendum took place in the relatively stable environment barely two weeks after the violence in Osh, despite fears that renewed violence might interrupt the process. For many voters, the referendum represented a way to reduce instability by approving the new constitution. With a 70 percent turnout, approximately 90 percent of voters supported the new constitution and the creation of a parliamentary system to replace the existing strong presidency. The OSCE praised the vote, which was perhaps the most transparent and orderly referendum ever held in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ The list of MPs can be found at <http://www.kenesh.kg/RU/Folders/235-Deputaty.aspx> (last accessed August 23, 2013).

¹⁶⁶ Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Kyrgyz Republic: Constitutional Referendum, 27 June 2010, OSCE/ODIHR Limited Referendum Observation Mission Report*, Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 27 July 2010.

¹⁶⁷ "TsiK Kyrgyzstan oglasi rezultaty parlamentskih vyborov" [Kyrgyzstan's CEC has announced the results of parliamentary elections], *Kginform.kg*, November 1, 2010.

Kyrgyzstan faced more uncertainty as the October 2010 legislative elections approached. Twenty-nine political parties registered to participate, although only a few candidates were familiar to the general public. Tensions were especially high among parties that aspired to form a parliamentary majority and those unlikely to meet the robust thresholds for representation (5 percent of the national vote, and 0.5 percent in each of the seven regions addition to the cities of Bishkek and Osh). Before the vote, Interim President Otunbayeva warned that she would cancel the balloting should political parties resort to violence.

A myriad of new parties were formed shortly before election day. *Ata-Jurt* and *Respublika* were formed by Kamchybek Tashiyev and Omurbek Babanov respectively, shortly after the ouster of Bakiyev. They managed to win support thanks to the popularity of their leaders and intense campaigning. *Ata-Jurt's* ethno-nationalist appeals in the aftermath of the June violence gained it the backing of a majority of ethnic Kyrgyz living in the south. For the first time, candidates participated in public televised debates. Campaigns tended to promote individual political leaders rather than ideas.

Contrary to skepticism, the October 2010 parliamentary elections, the first based on the new constitution, were conducted in a peaceful fashion. Twenty-nine parties fielded candidates, and five passed the five percent threshold to win seats: *Ata-Jurt* (8.47 percent, for 28 seats), SDPK (7.83 percent, for 26 seats), *Ar-Namys* (7.57 percent, for 25 seats), *Respublika* (6.93 percent, for 23 seats), and *Ata-Meken* (5.49 percent, for 18 seats). Turnout for the parliamentary elections was about 57 percent.¹⁶⁷ The fact that opposition parties (*Ata-Jurt*, *Ar-Namys* and *Respublika*) won the largest share of votes suggests that the interim government did not intervene in the electoral process or pressure the Central Elections Commission (CEC) to ensure victory for its constituent parties. Despite some shortcomings, the OSCE endorsed the election process, emphasizing that the political competition had taken place in a free environment and that all participating political parties had equal access to the media. Many

Timeline: Major Political Events, 1990- 2011.

Period	Event
June 1990	Ethnic violence in Osh, with an unofficial death toll of 1,000.
October 1990	Kyrgyz SSR's Supreme Soviet elects Askar Akayev as First Secretary.
August 31, 1991	Kyrgyzstan declares independence from Soviet Union.
December 1995	Presidential elections: Akayev reelected with 72% of votes, though rival Absamat Masaliyev gains strong support in southern Kyrgyzstan.
October 2000	Presidential elections: Akayev runs for a de facto third term, wins with 76% of votes; Omurbek Tekebayev wins 14%, Almazbek Atambayev wins 6%.
March 17, 2002	Unrest in Aksy village in support of opposition MP Azimbek Beknazarov, five people shot dead by police and special forces.
March 24, 2005	Opposition groups convene crowds in central Bishkek following fraudulent parliamentary elections. Akayev flees to Russia. Former Prime Minister Kurmanbek Bakiyev from Jalalabad becomes interim president.
December 2007	Bakiyev changes constitution, makes his Ak-Jol party the major political force in the country.
April 7, 2010	Bakiyev's regime toppled after violent protests in Bishkek. Over 90 people killed by Bakiyev's forces. Roza Otunbayeva appointed interim president.
June 10-14, 2010	Ethnic violence erupts in Osh and Jalalabad, leading to 470 deaths and dozens of rapes, pogroms and cases of arson.
June 27, 2010	The interim government holds a constitutional referendum.
October 10, 2010	Parliamentary elections take place, deemed as free and competitive by international observers.
November 11, 2011	Presidential elections: Central Asia's first peaceful transfer of power based on competitive elections. Almazbek Atambayev wins with 63% of support. His main challengers were Kamchubek Tashiev and Adakhan Madumarov.

international observers called the elections the most free and fair in Central Asia's history.¹⁶⁸

Several political parties that did not pass the five percent threshold, including *Butun Kyrgyzstan*, refused to recognize the official results. *Butun Kyrgyzstan* leader Adakhan Madumarov announced that he would not concede and demanded that his party be awarded seats in parliament. *Butun Kyrgyzstan* initially appeared to have passed the threshold, but once all the ballots were counted, the qualifying minimum rose by a few thousand votes.

¹⁶⁸ Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Election Observation Mission Report*, Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, December 20, 2012.

Madumarov mounted rallies in Osh and Bishkek in the weeks following the elections. Partly because of this dispute, it took the CEC several weeks to announce the final results.

Members of the new parliament elected in October 2010 learnt to engage in substantive debates on important issues, including the adoption of a state budget, managing ethnic tensions in southern Kyrgyzstan and investigating corruption charges. However, in the years since that election, legislation is often drafted and passed into law with limited expert consultations. Instead, in some cases, new laws contradict portions of other bills or even limit constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. There are several MPs who regularly speak out in defense of

democratic principles, but the parliament has shown no reluctance adopting statutes that restrict freedom of speech or appointing judges likely to protect the interests of incumbent parties.

The establishment of quotas for women and minorities has not yet translated into pluralism in the parliament. Several issues are particularly important to highlight regarding political quotas and pluralism. First, existing quotas are not filled, and the numbers of both non-Kyrgyz MPs and women MPs have continued to fall since the parliament was elected. Second, the number of female or ethnic minority representatives in any given party does not necessarily lead to greater activism on inter-ethnic or gender issues for that party. On the contrary, some female MPs readily vote for legislation that restricts the rights of women and minorities. Finally, although quotas were established, the parliament lacks specialized committees to address issues of pluralism. Existing committees on Social Politics, Human Rights, Constitutional Legislation, and Policy rarely deal with issues related to minority rights or women. Even MPs oriented towards ethnic, cultural and gender pluralism are unable to gain enough traction to set off a discussion at the committee level, let alone a full session of parliament. As a result, nationalist factions and ultra-conservative MPs have successfully promoted policies of ethnic and gender exclusion.

One positive result of the shift to a stronger parliament has been the decrease in political violence in the country. Since the current parliament represents nearly all major political forces in the country, political competition has moved from the streets to the halls of parliament. During Bakiyev's regime, the number of contract assassinations, violent protests, beatings and killings of journalists, as well as arbitrary arrests of opposition leaders, reached new heights. This was an outcome of the concentration of power in the hands of

a small clique at the top of the political ladder, while other political factions lost access to government positions. The April 7, 2010 violence, when Bakiyev ordered soldiers to shoot to kill protesters in central Bishkek, leading to over 90 deaths and hundreds of injuries, was the bloodiest political confrontation to date in Kyrgyzstan.

Transfer of Presidential Power

In the 2011 presidential elections, Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev defeated 15 other candidates, winning 63 percent of the vote with a 60 percent turnout.¹⁶⁹ Although the exact outcome of the election was largely unpredictable, Atambayev had emerged as the clear frontrunner several months before the vote. His chief opponents, Adakhan Madumarov and Kamchybek Tashiyev, captured 14.7 percent and 14.3 percent of the vote respectively. Atambayev was also the only candidate to secure at least 10 percent of the support in all seven of the country's oblasts. Both Tashiyev and Maduarov, widely popular in southern Kyrgyzstan, hoped to reach a runoff. The prospect of a second round pitting Atambayev against a single opponent based in the south threatened to stoke regional rivalries.¹⁷⁰

The presidential campaign was conducted in a freer environment than any previous election in the country. For the first time, all competing candidates had the opportunity to participate in televised debates, during which citizens, especially those using the Internet, could submit questions. The debates covered pressing economic and political issues, and most candidates called for stronger rule of law, urged greater national unity in the face of north-south and ethnic divisions, and distanced themselves from corruption. Like the 2010 parliamentary elections, Kyrgyzstan's 2011 presidential election marked a major regional milestone; for the first time, state power was transferred through competitive elections.

Initially, 86 candidates had registered to run in the election, but 50 dropped out before the official campaign period began. Most were either unable to collect the necessary signatures, submit the

169 Almas Ysman, "В Кыргызстане подвели итоги выборов", *Azattyk.kg*, October 31, 2011.

170 Erica Marat, "Upcoming Presidential Election Highlights Kyrgyzstan's North-South Divide," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 19 September 2011.

registration fee (\$2,200 or 100,000 Kyrgyz som) to the CEC, or pass the Kyrgyz language proficiency exam. A few candidates, including Omurbek Tekebayev of *Ata-Meken* and Nariman Tuleyev of *Ata-Jurt*, simply decided not to run.

Over 300 OSCE observers and 1,000 observers from the non-governmental Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society monitored the election. According to the OSCE,¹⁷¹ the candidate registration process was inclusive, and the campaign was open and respected fundamental freedoms. However, hundreds of citizens were not able to cast their votes because of incomplete voter lists, and some cases of attempted vote buying by Madumarov's supporters were reported. The OSCE concluded that the CEC's work was "adequate, but sometimes lacked transparency". Most observers agreed that the election's flaws were not sufficient to affect the overall outcome.¹⁷²

All parties represented in the parliament have suffered internal splits since the election. Both *Ata-Jurt* and *Ar-Namys* voted to replace their party leaders in 2012, moves that were largely seen as indicators of intra-party divisions. Furthermore, several *Ata-Meken* and *Respublika* MPs have resigned from their respective parties.

Local Government

In 2012, highly competitive elections for local councils were held in most parts of the country. Since the elections were so competitive, political parties welcomed monitoring as a way to prevent any fraud

by their competitors. Through these elections, local political parties received an opportunity to increase their chances in the next parliamentary elections. For the first time the responsibility over the formation of local governments was given to political parties that won representation. This marked a growing independence of local governments, on one hand, but also resulted in the appointment of politicized officials with inadequate backgrounds in public administration, on the other. Both large, nationwide parties and local political forces competed for seats, with larger parties facing a tough challenge from parties representing local political elites.

Local governments generally tend to have greater ethnic and gender diversity compared to the national government. The Osh city council, however, does not reflect the diversity of the local population. While Uzbeks comprise roughly half the city's population, Uzbek MPs make up just 20 percent of the council (nine out of forty five). There are only seven female MPs on the council.¹⁷³ Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov's party, *Uluttar Birimdigy*, won 47 percent of the vote, securing 21 out of 45 seats on the city council.

Bishkek's city elections in November 2012 were particularly competitive. Sixteen parties registered, including five represented in the parliament. Most began to prepare months before the vote. Since the parliamentary parties had a greater chance of succeeding, smaller parties and individual candidates tried to get onto their rosters. SDPK led the voting, winning 21 of 45 seats (47 percent), while *Respublika* earned 11 seats. Parties that did not win any seats alleged widespread fraud on the election day. *Respublika*, in particular, was accused of fraud after online videos of its members busing voters to various precincts across the city emerged.¹⁷⁴

Political Parties and Pluralism

According to the Kyrgyz Ministry of Justice, there are 181 political parties registered in Kyrgyzstan. Five are represented in the parliament, and several smaller parties are represented in local assemblies. Kyrgyzstan's proportional representation system has encouraged

171 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), *Kyrgyzstan's Presidential Election Was Peaceful, but Shortcomings Underscore Need to Improve Integrity of Process*, News Release, 31 October 2011. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/84571>

172 Ibid.

173 "В состав Ошского горкенеша вошли всего 7 женщин-депутатов" [Only Seven Female MPs are part of the Osh City Council], *Kyrtag.kg*, April 5, 2012.

174 Zarema Sultanbekova, "ЦИК изучает видео 'Карусель от партии Республика'" [CEC is Investigating 'Respublika party's carousel' video], *Kloop.kg*, 27 November 2012.

several smaller parties to band together in umbrella political groups. Most parties are the product of one political leader, but *Zamandash* (meaning “contemporary”), which represents the interests of labour migrants, is a rare exception and does not have one identifiable leader. The party won six out of forty five seats in the Bishkek City Council elections in November 2012.

To date, the new constitution appears to have met its goal of laying the foundation for a more stable political environment. The vast majority of the population agrees that democracy is necessary and requires a viable opposition.¹⁷⁵ Compared to 2011, more people believe that expressing their own political opinions is not dangerous. However, the level of satisfaction with the way democracy is developing differs across regions. People in the south tend to be less satisfied than people living in the rural areas in the north, while about 45 percent of southerners and Bishkek residents are satisfied with current politics. The urban population is more satisfied with democracy than their rural counterparts. Unemployment, corruption and poor economic development are among the most frequently mentioned political issues.

Most Kyrgyzstanis have access to radio and television channels that report on major political developments in the country and the region. These result in a visible and audible assortment of political views across various social groups. Yet, this plurality is hardly translated into political participation outside of voting booths. Only a small share of the population has membership in political parties, while the majority mostly knows individual political leaders, not their party platforms.

175 International Republican Institute, *Kyrgyzstan National Opinion Poll*, February 2012. <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2012%20April%2011%20Survey%20of%20Kyrgyzstan%20Public%20Opinion%2C%20February%204-27%2C%202012.pdf>

176 OHCHR ROCA (2011).

177 Ibid.

178 Interview, representative of an international donor organization, Bishkek, June 12, 2013.

179 SIAR (2013).

180 Coalition for Democracy and Human Rights, *Sotsial'noe samochuvstvie naseleniya: otchet po rezul'tatam telefonnogo oprosa grazhdan Kyrgyzstana* [Social attitudes of the population: A report of a telephone survey of Kyrgyzstan's citizens], Bishkek, February 2013.

Polls conducted in 2012 revealed regional differences regarding perceptions of the fairness of the 2011 presidential election. In northern Kyrgyzstan, roughly 90 percent of those polled regarded the election as free and fair. In contrast, in the south, only 40 percent thought the voting was “somewhat free and fair” and 33 percent thought the election was “unfree and unfair”. Across the country, the vast majority (70 percent of the population) does not believe that their interests are represented in parliament. This skepticism is slightly higher in major urban areas, with residents of Osh city at 74 percent and Bishkek at 80 percent.¹⁷⁶ Only two percent of Osh residents believe that the national parliament truly represents them. Over one third of the residents of Jalalabad believe their interests are represented in the parliament, perhaps attributing representation to the presence of *Ata-Jurt*, since the party leaders are from their region.

Quantitative studies conducted after the June 2010 violence, demonstrate that during elections, ethnic Uzbeks are almost as politically active as the rest of the population. While ethnic Uzbeks report little political involvement during in-person interviews, studies show that roughly 80 percent have voted in elections.¹⁷⁷ However, data indicates that while ethnic Uzbeks may perform rituals of political participation such as voting, they do not perceive themselves as part of the political process.¹⁷⁸ SIAR data show that half the ethnic Uzbek population does not know if their interests are represented in parliament; indicating more uncertainty about the political process than any other ethnic group. Only 8.6 percent of ethnic Uzbeks believe they are adequately represented (compared with 19 percent nationwide).¹⁷⁹ Smaller ethnic minority groups are even more skeptical about their interests being represented in parliament, with just 6.6 percent of Russians and 7.1 percent of Turks believing they are adequately represented.

Public opinion polls conducted in February 2013 indicate that the urban population, especially in Bishkek, tends to be more skeptical about their own economic prospects than the rural population.¹⁸⁰ Only 29 percent of respondents in Bishkek consider Kyrgyzstan's economic situation to be stable,

compared with 54 percent in Osh. Satisfaction with the economy overlaps with perceptions of stability in Kyrgyzstan. About half the residents of Osh and Batken oblasts are satisfied with the economy, and about half consider the political situation to be stable as well. In Bishkek, as well as in Chui, Talas, Naryn and Jalalabad oblasts, over 60 percent of the population considers Kyrgyzstan to be politically unstable. The percentage of people fearing instability is lower in Osh (44 percent) and Batken (51 percent). Nationwide, 39 percent of the population considers the political situation to be stable, with younger respondents more optimistic than older respondents. The understanding of democracy varies among young people; some associate democracy with political chaos, others with freedom of choice.¹⁸¹ When asked about their fears in February 2012, respondents stated the possibility of civil war (44 percent), followed by instability in the country (36 percent) and unemployment (35 percent). In Osh, ethnic Uzbeks were more than twice as likely to name unemployment (40 percent) as their most pressing problem compared to ethnic Kyrgyz (19 percent).¹⁸² Less than a quarter of the population fears an economic crisis or violent demonstrations in the country. However, 18 percent fear a repetition of the 2010 events, namely regime change and ethnic violence.¹⁸³

181 Saferworld, "Nobody Has Ever Asked About Young People's Opinions: Young People's Perspectives on Identity, Exclusion and the Prospects for a Peaceful Future in Central Asia", March 2012. <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/037%20CAsia%20web.pdf>.

182 SIAR (2013).

183 International Republican Institute (2012).

184 Gulnara Ibraeva, Anara Moldosheva, and Anara Niyazova (2011), "Kyrgyz Case Study", *Background Paper, Gender Development and Equality*, World Development Report 2012; Kathleen Kuehnast (1998), "From Pioneers to Entrepreneurs: Young Women, Consumerism, and the 'World Picture' in Kyrgyzstan", *Central Asian Survey*, 17:4, 639-654.

185 Ibraeva (2011).

186 Ibid, 27.

187 Ibid, 14.

188 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, "Zhenschiny i muzhchiny Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki" [Women and men of the Kyrgyz Republic], Bishkek, 2012, <http://unitekyrgyzstan.kloop.kg/files/2013/09/stat.jpeg.pdf>, 26.

Overall, the majority of respondents in all regions believed that their economic condition will improve in the near future. Across Kyrgyzstan, roughly 20 percent of the population considers their economic situation to be poor, while the rest are satisfied.

VIII. GENDER

The collapse of the Soviet Union slashed the network of state subsidies that allowed women to maintain a balance between family and work. The Soviet ideal of a working mother able to balance child-rearing and her career became unattainable. Public-sector employees saw their salaries depreciate, kindergartens lost state financing and maternity leave payments dropped below the basic standard of living.¹⁸⁴ As a result, the number of women in the workforce almost halved from 81.6 percent in the Soviet era to 42.3 percent in independent Kyrgyzstan.¹⁸⁵

The combination of economic changes and the resurgence of traditional practices forced many women into early marriage and childbearing, and the additional burden of unpaid housework. Particularly in rural areas, women's role in society was reduced to childbearing. Motherhood became synonymous with patriotism and commitment to cultural traditions.¹⁸⁶

Women face different challenges in rural and urban areas in Kyrgyzstan. Maternal mortality rates increased in rural areas, but decreased in urban areas.¹⁸⁷ While women across the country have access to medical facilities for childbirth, healthcare facilities are significantly better in major urban areas than in rural areas. Girls in rural areas tend to leave school earlier and in higher numbers than their urban counterparts.¹⁸⁸ Fewer girls finish school compared to boys, particularly in Talas and Naryn oblasts. In Osh oblast, only 90 percent of students, both girls and boys, finish school. While this may seem high, it is the lowest rate nationwide. However, women make up the majority of university students across the country, except for in Bishkek. This suggests that men are more likely to join the workforce immediately after finishing school instead of continuing their education.

Faced with growing traditionalism, women between the ages of 16 and 25 are becoming increasingly mobile. Migration to Bishkek, Russia and Kazakhstan offers them an escape.¹⁸⁹ For women from rural areas, in particular, migration offers opportunities for emancipation and access to independent income, which the Soviet regime used to facilitate. On the other end of the spectrum, however, women in rural areas who are left to raise families while men migrate for jobs, are expected to take on traditionally male duties, such as harvesting crops and operating heavy machinery.

Market liberalization and the privatization of land and property put women in a vulnerable position. By law, in rural areas everyone is entitled to land. However, women often lose their share of land when they marry and leave their parents' house.¹⁹⁰ Land and other family property are usually inherited by sons. The rise of informal marriages and polygyny, supported by local Islamic clergy, put women at risk of losing access to alimony and property following divorce.¹⁹¹ This is

a considerable loss, given that 31 percent of children are born outside of a legal marriage in Kyrgyzstan. Of them, 40 percent are to single mothers, the others are registered to two parents, presumably lacking an official marriage registration.¹⁹²

The experience of women from ethnic minority groups may differ during times of political instability. In the early 1990s, amid rising nationalism in Kyrgyzstan, Russian women who had previously enjoyed active public lives preferred isolation.¹⁹³ Lack of knowledge of or interest in learning the Kyrgyz language made it challenging for ethnic Russian women to adapt when speaking their native language in the workplace was not only no longer mandatory, but often looked down upon by ethnic Kyrgyz colleagues. Reports suggest that in the aftermath of the June 2010 violence, ethnic Uzbek women became also more isolated from public life.

Kidnapping for Marriage

Kidnapping women for marriage (*ala kachuu*) is the most disturbing example of how practices from the pre-Soviet period have been reinterpreted as genuine Kyrgyz traditions against the backdrop of a weak state. In fact, there is no academic consensus that *ala kachuu* (translated as “take-and-run”) is a tradition of the Kyrgyz.¹⁹⁴ Studies show that the practice was a rare occurrence before the 20th century and regularly resulted in punishment. While the practice continued in Soviet Kyrgyzstan in a much-altered fashion, it has become common since independence. Today, up to 60 percent of women are forced into marriage after they have been kidnapped. The practice ranges from violent abduction of women followed by a subsequent rape to a staged “consensual” ritual. The vast majority of women kidnapped for marriage have never met their potential husband.¹⁹⁵

In 2012, two young women kidnapped into marriage committed suicide. Outraged NGOs demanded that the parliament criminalize bride kidnapping, arguing that stealing cattle was treated as a more serious offense.¹⁹⁶ *Ata-Meken* MP Ainuru Altybayeva worked with civil activists to criminalize bride kidnapping in a rare example of NGO-parliament collaboration.

189 Susan Thieme, “Living in Transition: How Kyrgyz Women Juggle Their Different Roles in a Multi-local Setting”, *Gender Technology and Development* 2008, 12: 325.

190 Ibraeva (2011), 33.

191 Venera Djumataeva, “In Kyrgyzstan, Polygamy’s Rise Takes Its Toll”, *Azattyk*, March 8, 2010.

192 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2012).

193 Nataliya Kasmarskaya (1996), “Russian Women in Kyrgyzstan: Coping with New Realities”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 19(1/2), 125-132.

194 Russell Kleinbach, Mehriyi Ablezova and Medina Aitieva (2005), “Kidnapping for marriage (*ala kachuu*) in a Kyrgyz village”, *Central Asian Survey*, 24:2, 191-202; Cynthia Werner (2009), “Bride Abduction in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Marking a Shift Towards Patriarchy through Local Discourses of Shame and Tradition”, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15(2), 314-331.

195 Russ Kleinbach and Lilly Salimjanova (2007), “*Kyz ala kachuu* and *Adat*: Nonconsensual Bride Kidnapping and Tradition in Kyrgyzstan”, *Central Asian Survey*, 26:2, 217-233.

196 See for example: “Munara Beknazarova: Ala kachuu pust’ stanet legendoi” [Munara Beknazarova: Let Bride Kidnapping Become a Legend], *Vecherny Bishkek*, August 9, 2012; Ekaterina Ivaschenko, “Украл - изнасиловал - женился. Джигит!” [Stolen, Raped, Married. Hero!], *Ferghana*, May 15, 2012.

Although criminalization of bride kidnapping has not led to nationwide prosecution, media reports suggest that more cases are prosecuted.

Some NGOs oppose classifying bride kidnapping as distinct from human kidnapping because they fear that separating women into a distinct category could result in bride kidnapping being considered a less serious crime than human trafficking. However, over the past two decades, few cases of bride kidnapping have been prosecuted in accordance with existing legislation.

Women and Politics

Although women make up 90 percent of the leadership in the NGO sector, they remain a minority in top government posts.¹⁹⁷ Across the country, only 20 percent of women occupy managerial positions in the private sector, and women are best represented in the private sector in Osh city (34 percent), Chui oblast (33 percent) and Bishkek (41 percent). In Batken, the most impoverished region of Kyrgyzstan, women fill only 12 percent of managerial positions. Women make up roughly one-third of local government officials. The low salaries for public positions is one reason women prefer to remain in the NGO sector. Women who join parliament and the government are often either financially supported by their family or are poorer than their male counterparts.

Gender-related issues are often addressed from a deeply patriarchal point of view; that is, blaming the victim instead of finding a solution to empower

vulnerable groups. In the 1990s, and again during the Bakiyev regime, the parliament discussed the possibility of legalizing polygamy as a way to deal with poverty and prostitution among women.¹⁹⁸ MP Tursunbai Bakir uluu from *Ar-Namys* regularly speaks in favour of regulating how girls and women may dress in public.

That female representation in parliament does not translate to better protection of women's rights was amply demonstrated by Social Democratic MP Yrgal Kydyralieva, who secured her seat through a gender quota and introduced legislation to ban women under the age of 22 from traveling abroad for work without parental consent. She presented her initiative as an attempt to protect Kyrgyz women from prostitution and abuse abroad following the widely publicized case of a woman who was severely beaten in Moscow by Kyrgyzstani men. The online video depicting the brutal assault by "patriots" seeking to punish the woman for "prostituting" with men from Tajikistan quickly went viral.¹⁹⁹ The parliament passed Kydyralieva's decree barring the age specification and with a non-binding principle.²⁰⁰ In practice, government authorities cannot prevent young women from traveling abroad without parental consent. However, the law creates a legal justification for selective enforcement of travel restrictions at a family level.

As mass protests became more frequent in Kyrgyzstan, women often participated in rallies in Bishkek and across the country. As images of women shouting at law-enforcement officials and inciting others to disobey authorities became common, women protestors earned the nickname "*Otryad bab osobogo naznacheniya*" or special-assignment female units, "OBON", a play on the letters in the word OMON, the special forces police.²⁰¹ OBON has a distinctly negative connotation in Kyrgyzstan, referring to rural uneducated women ready to raise havoc in the capital city for a little pay. These women are stereotyped as being drunk and hysterical. They mistakenly identify themselves as descendants of Kurmanjan Datka, a Kyrgyz stateswoman who first resisted only to later convince her people to join the Russian Empire in

197 Swanee Hunt (2007), "Let Women Rule", *Foreign Affairs*, 86(3), 109-120.

198 "Kyrgyz Lawmakers Reject Decriminalizing Polygamy", *Azattyk*, March 23, 2007.

199 Eleonora Beishenbek Kyzy and Claire Bigg, "Kyrgyz Migrant Women Brutally Assaulted In 'Patriotic' Videos", *Azattyk*, May 31, 2013.

200 Tolgonay Osmongazieva, "Из постановления ЖК исчез скандальный возрастной ценз на выезд кыргызстанок", *Vecherny Bishkek*, June 13, 2013.

201 "Rent-a-mob Protests in Central Asia", *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, January 6, 2012.

the 19th century.²⁰² A contemporary feminist NGO leader, however, argues that regardless of whether women are paid to join rallies or not, OBON should not be a derogatory term because it signifies female participation in public life.²⁰³ In promoting gender rights, Bishkek feminist groups have used some of the tactics similar to those labeled as OBON; staging protests in front of parliament, shouting messages and persuading police to support their agenda. According to this view, the nickname signifies society's discomfort with women playing an active political role.

IX. CHALLENGES TO PLURALISM

In 2010, the regime change in Bishkek was followed by a series of violent incidents fueled by ethnic, economic and political disparities. This instability underscored the new government's lack of control over large parts of the country and local police forces.²⁰⁴ Most of the police in Osh, for example, were loyal to Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov, not the central government.²⁰⁵ As a result of ineffective leadership by the interim government, political disagreements quickly escalated into large-scale interethnic conflict.²⁰⁶

When Bakiyev's regime collapsed, local authorities and residents in the south refused to recognize the legitimacy of the interim government. Indeed, after fleeing Bishkek on April 7, Bakiyev found refuge in his hometown, the southern city of Jalalabad. He made a few attempts to mobilize crowds in Osh and Jalalabad to hold onto his power, but failed. Members of the interim government appealed to Kadyrzhan Batyrov, a prominent ethnic Uzbek entrepreneur, founder of the University of People's Friendship in Jalalabad and former MP. In the aftermath of the April regime change he helped the new government reduce Bakiyev's influence in the south.²⁰⁷ Bakiyev and Batyrov had conflicting interests, but these differences were related to business and political representation, not ethnicity. However, the tangled relationship between the interim government and the entrepreneur quickly assumed ethnic overtones with Batyrov publically requesting better representation for Uzbeks.²⁰⁸

Events took a more ominous turn when violence erupted between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks. On May 19, 2010, roughly 1,500 people marched toward the University of People's Friendship in Jalalabad, demanding that the interim government terminate its support for Batyrov. The crowd was reportedly dominated by ethnic Kyrgyz who still supported Bakiyev and accused Batyrov of participating in burning down the deposed president's home in Teyit village.²⁰⁹ Hundreds of local Uzbeks mobilized to resist the group. About 5,000 people gathered in front of the university. Two ethnic Kyrgyz were shot and killed, and over 60 people were injured as a result of the clashes.²¹⁰

202 In 2013, President Atambayev shamed OBON women for blocking the Bishkek-Osh highway, saying that they cannot compare themselves to Kurmanjan Datka. "Алмазбек Атамбаев раскритиковал матерей-героинь, перекрывавших дорогу Бишкек-Ош" [Almazbek Atambayev Criticized Mother Heroes who blocked Bishkek-Osh Highway], *Knews*, June 12, 2013.

203 Interview, feminist NGO leader, Bishkek, October 2012.

204 Scott Radnitz (2010), "Competing Narratives and Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan", *PONARS Policy Memo No. 105*; Freedom House, Memorial Human Rights Center and Norwegian Helsinki Committee, *A Chronicle of Violence: The Events in the South of Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 (Osh Region)*, February 2012. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/special-reports/chronicle-violence-events-south-kyrgyzstan-june-2010-osh-region>.

205 "Kyrgyzstan: A Nazi and a Drug Lord in Charge of Police in Osh?", *Fergananews.com*, January 17 2012.

206 Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC), *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 (Osh)*: KIC, May 2011), 44, http://www.k-ic.org/images/stories/kic_report_english_final.pdf, ii.

207 Anna Matveeva (2010), "Kyrgyzstan in Crisis: Permanent Revolution and the Curse of Nationalism", *Crises State Research Centre Working Papers No. 79*, September.

208 International Crisis Group, *The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan*, August 23, 2010.

209 David Trilling (2010), "Ethnic Violence in Kyrgyzstan Presents New Test for Provisional Government", *Eurasianet.org*, May 19.

210 Iliya Lukashov and Dina Tokbaeva, "Spectre of Ethnic Violence in Kyrgyzstan", Institute for War and Peace Reporting, *IWRP.net*, May 19, 2010.

Batyrov enjoyed strong political influence and is among the wealthiest entrepreneurs in Jalalabad. In an interview with a local online news agency, Batyrov said that the “Uzbek diaspora” is no longer willing to be a mere observer and is ready to become part of the political process in the country.²¹¹ Some of critics dismiss Batyrov’s calls for the mobilization of Uzbeks as simply efforts to protect his business interests in Jalalabad and expand his political power. However, others interpreted these statements as an Uzbek call for territorial autonomy from Kyrgyzstan.²¹²

In May and June 2010, rumours about the mobilization of ethnic groups played a critical role in whipping up crowds. Government officials spread some of the rumors as well. In May, Batyrov’s statement that it was time for Uzbeks to demand political representation were interpreted by political elites as a warning that Uzbeks were preparing to seek revenge for the atrocities of 1990.²¹³ Three months after the violence in Osh, in a video address released after fleeing Kyrgyzstan, Batyrov denied rumors that he had tried to detach Uzbek-majority parts of the country and create an autonomous entity.²¹⁴ Batyrov confessed that Otunbayeva and other members of the interim government had requested his help in preventing Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan from supporting Bakiyev after he had escaped to Jalalabad. He highlighted various social problems and blamed specific “political adventurers” for instigating the violence and escaping justice. Members of the interim government denied that they had collaborated with Batyrov.

211 “Кадыржан Батыров: Мы надеемся, что кыргызское правительство учтет наши интересы” www.ca-news.org, May 19, 2010.

212 Melvin (2011), дыржан

213 Ibid. атыров

214 Kadyrjan Baatyr’s Youtube address on September 11, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArbBU2noK0g>.

215 Human Rights Watch, *Where is the Justice? Interethnic Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan and its Aftermath*, August 16, 2010; International Crisis Group, *The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan*, August 23, 2010.

216 Human Rights Watch (2010).

217 Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC) (2011), ii.

218 Laruelle (2012).

219 Megoran (2012).

220 Laruelle (2012).

On June 10, a scuffle among young patrons at a local bar in Osh escalated into one of the bloodiest outbreaks of ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan’s recent history. The strife between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks continued for about four days, resulting in over 470 deaths and forcing some 400,000 Uzbeks to flee their homes. Most Uzbek communities and businesses in the Osh area were looted and burnt down. Observers reported acts of torture, extortion and illegal arrests during subsequent police raids of Uzbek communities.²¹⁵ As the violence spread across Osh on the morning of June 11, the Kyrgyz military was not well organized, often responding to rumors spread by provocateurs.²¹⁶

The police were ordered to shoot to kill on June 13, but had already been using firearms against civilians. The violence was halted on the fourth day. Otunbayeva was forced to call up reservists to sustain a 24-hour curfew in the city. Moscow rejected Bishkek’s pleas to deploy troops from the Collective Security Treaty Organization to help quell the violence, asserting that the growing interethnic conflict was Kyrgyzstan’s internal problem.

Most victims were ethnic Uzbeks, but ethnic Kyrgyz also suffered significant losses.²¹⁷ The Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC) noted that murder, rape, torture and other abuses during and after the outbreak of violence were underreported. Many looted weapons remained unaccounted for, and are now in circulation and could be used in future clashes.

The reaction of the Kyrgyz media to the violence was aggressive, ranging from accusations that ethnic Uzbeks sought to break away from Kyrgyzstan to blatant calls for more ethnic violence.²¹⁸ The reaction of the Uzbek diaspora and the media in Uzbekistan was similarly relentless, blaming Kyrgyz nationalism for instigating and covering up the violence.²¹⁹ Russian-language media in Kyrgyzstan was not nearly as aggressive, but refrained from sympathizing with ethnic Uzbeks or repeating the Uzbek interpretation of the violence.²²⁰ The Western media tended to portray ethnic Kyrgyz as villains and Uzbeks as victims, failing to consider the complex non-ethnic factors that provoked the strife.

The KIC and other reports blame political fanaticism for the violence.²²¹ The KIC found no evidence of organized crime or “third forces” participating in the violence. Instead, it argued that the violence was likely sparked by local economic, political and social factors. Military and government officials were largely unable to stop the bloodshed and prevent the illegal seizure of state weaponry by perpetrators who attacked Uzbek communities. The KIC noted that some officials were suspected of complicity in crimes against humanity. Most officials named in the report occupy positions in the government or are MPs.

The Kyrgyz government did not block international and local investigations, but did question some aspects of the KIC’s approach. Mira Karybayeva, head of the interim president’s Department of Ethnic and Religious Policy and Interaction, argued that although the KIC had recognized the weakness of state power and the general fragility of the ethnic situation in Kyrgyzstan, the conflict was still evaluated “as though Kyrgyzstan was a strong country, with functioning government institutions, full control over the entire state territory, strong armed forces that were adequately equipped and with a solid understanding of human rights.”²²² She said it was obvious that none of these elements were in place when the conflict erupted.

A number of MPs tried to discredit Kimmo Kiljunen, the Finnish MP who headed the commission, because the report blamed them for failing to prevent casualties in Osh. Officials in Bishkek also declared that they opposed the investigation because they

feared the resulting report would spark new ethnic clashes. In late May 2011, 95 MPs voted to declare Kiljunen *persona non grata*.²²³ The inability of the political class to tolerate free discussion on this sensitive issue makes it unlikely that the general public will be given opportunities to understand and reach a consensus on the facts of the violence. A month later, the parliament banned the “emergence of monoethnic” communities in ethnically mixed areas, as well as in places that experienced interethnic conflict in the past. The measure sought to control the freedom of movement of ethnic minorities inside the country and to limit their right to preserve their ethnic identity and cultural heritage by choosing to live alongside other members of their group. However, it was never enforced.

There are undeniable parallels between the outbreaks of violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 1990 and June 2010. Lingering tensions over access to resources and political representation prompted violent actions at times when the central authorities were particularly weak and unable to control the territory. In 1990, violence broke out after Kyrgyz were allocated land and property in sections of Osh predominantly populated by ethnic Uzbeks. The Uzbeks were already upset about their declining representation in local government.²²⁴ The perceived disparity in resource distribution, combined with growing nationalist movements in both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, provoked ethnic-based riots, pogroms and rapes in June 1990. Unofficial estimates put the death toll at 1,000.²²⁵ Soviet troops were dispatched shortly after the violence began, quelling the conflict. Although an official investigation never took place, 46 alleged perpetrators of violence, mostly ethnic Kyrgyz, were found guilty and received prison sentences of up to 18 years.

Following the June 2010 violence, there was a large exodus of ethnic Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan, mostly to Russia. According to official data, 13,132 Uzbeks left in 2010 and 8,751 left in 2011, compared with the 3,145 who left in 2009.²²⁶ The official estimate is probably low, based on the rates of Uzbek migration during Bakiyev’s reign, when the highest annual outmigration of Uzbeks (6,778 people) was registered in 2007.

221 KIC (2011); Melvin (2011).

222 Ravshanbek Sabirov, Mira Karybaeva, Erikinbek Mamyrov and Dmitry Kabak, “Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission Report: A Response from the Kyrgyz Government”, *Discussion* at the National Democratic Institute, Washington, D.C., 24 May 2011.

223 “Киммо Кильюнен объявлен персоной нон грата в Кыргызстане”, *Vesti.kg*, May 26, 2011.

224 Tishkov (1995).

225 Ibid.

226 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic. <http://www.stat.kg/stat.files/din.files/census/5010015.pdf>.

Uneven Justice Following Ethnic Violence

The aftermath of the four-day violence in June 2010 revealed the worst flaws in Kyrgyzstan's judicial system and underlying problems within law enforcement. The judicial system faced the task of identifying and prosecuting the perpetrators of the violence. About 300 cases were initiated in 2010, but only a small number reached the courts. The vast majority stalled because defendants, witnesses and lawyers encountered intimidation, and local judges refrained from taking potentially explosive cases to avoid further instability.²²⁷ The country's law enforcement agencies predominantly arrested ethnic Uzbeks, despite the fact that Uzbeks accounted for 75 percent of the casualties and suffered 90 percent of the property losses.²²⁸ In the year after the violence, police forces regularly extorted bribes from ethnic Uzbeks in Osh by intimidating and arbitrarily arresting them. The bribes required to win release from detention ranged from \$2,000 to \$20,000, depending on the

legitimacy and seriousness of the charges.²²⁹ Most law enforcement officials and judges in southern Kyrgyzstan are ethnic Kyrgyz, raising the likelihood of anti-Uzbek bias in the judicial system. Despite government-led legal reforms and donor-funded legal reform projects, the judicial system remains flawed in Kyrgyzstan.

Thirty-nine people received the highest penalty, life sentences, in 2011, more than double the fifteen who were convicted in 2010. Nearly all were convicted of contributing to violence during the Osh events.²³⁰ Among ethnic Uzbeks sentenced to life is prominent human rights activist Azimjon Askarov, who was convicted in September 2010 of complicity in the murder of an ethnic Kyrgyz policeman and of inciting ethnic hatred. Askarov has reportedly been tortured at the detention facility at least twice.²³¹ In December 2011, the Supreme Court denied his appeal and upheld his life sentence.

In the meantime, instances of relatives of ethnic Kyrgyz victims beating lawyers who defend ethnic Uzbeks and intimidating judges, have become increasingly common, including in the Supreme Court, which is reviewing cases that were appealed after trials in regional courts.²³²

Since 2010, Kyrgyzstan has launched an ambitious program of judicial and law enforcement reforms. The government invited NGOs and various experts to participate in the process. The process has been politicized and marred by corruption. Two NGO leaders who participated in the reform process, Dinara Oshurakhunova and Nurbek Toktakunov, criticized parliament for ignoring the recommendations offered by civil society groups. Instead of selecting new judges in an impartial manner, lawmakers informally opted for judges considered likely to represent their interests.²³³ Civil society activists argued that the previous regime had repeatedly made this mistake and left the judicial system vulnerable to political manipulation. Some judges elected to the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court by a special committee composed of MPs and NGO representatives have dubious professional backgrounds and were alleged to have

227 Some material in this and other sections is drawn from Erica Marat, *Security Sector Reform in Central Asia*, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, March 2012, 21. <http://www.dcaf.ch/Publications/Security-Sector-Reform-in-Central-Asia>.

228 Erica Marat, "Kyrgyzstan: One Year Passes after the Osh Violence," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 10, 2011; Amnesty International, *Still Waiting for Justice: One Year On from the Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan*, London: Amnesty International, June 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR58/001/2011/en>; Human Rights Watch, *Distorted Justice: Kyrgyzstan's Flawed Investigations and Trials on the 2010 Violence*, New York: Human Rights Watch, June 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/06/08/distorted-justice-0>.

229 Interviews with residents of Cheremushki, Furqat and Osh, September 2011.

230 Kulym Shamy, "Роль органов власти в период событий июня 2010 года», September 2012. <http://www.osce.org/ru/odihr/94202>.

231 According to human rights activist Tolekan Ismailova, "Толекан Исмаилова: Гражданское общество Кыргызстана не намерено сдаваться", *Golos Ameriki*, September 22, 2011.

232 Interviews with Head of NGO Coalition for Democracy and Human Rights Dinara Oshurahunova, Bishkek, May 30, 2013 and Freedom House expert, Almaz Esengaliev, June 5, 2013; Human Rights Watch, "Kyrgyzstan: Violence Mars Supreme Court Hearing", April 5, 2013.

233 Akipress, "Правозащитник Н.Токтакунов озвучил три основные причины, которые могут грозить провалом судебной реформы", April 10, 2013.

collaborated with political forces. Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan has still not brought justice to the victims of ethnic violence in 2010.

During her tenure as interim president, Otunbayeva took a number of steps aimed at increasing the impartiality of the police and courts, including raising wages and rotating officers and judges between northern and southern Kyrgyzstan. She also sought to appoint 445 new judges with the help of the parliament and independent observers, and created a special council of civic groups to observe the process. However, the first few rounds of judicial appointments took place in a highly politicized environment, and lawmakers responsible for choosing new judges chose to ignore the recommendations of civil society groups.

There are a few positive cases of justice being served, thanks to the efforts of non-government activists. For example, the NGO Precedent has been able to win a number of cases, successfully abiding by professional legal practice and elaborating the case to the judge, including the overturning of a parliamentary decree to block the *Ferghana.ru* news website. Activists from Precedent and other NGOs routinely provide informal yet authoritative interpretations of the law that lead to the courts siding with civil society.²³⁴ The lawyers' skillful elaboration of the case against the parliamentary vote to shut down the website allowed them to succeed, despite existing problems within the judiciary system, including corruption, politicization and low professionalism.

234 Interview with two lawyers, Bishkek, June 14, 2013.

235 David Lewis, "Reassessing the Role of OSCE Police Assistance Programming in Central Asia", Open Society Foundation, April 2011.

236 See for example, Alexander Kupatadze (2012), *Organized Crime, Political Transitions and State Formation in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Johan Engvall (2011), *Flirting with State Failure: Power and Politics in Kyrgyzstan since Independence*, Stockholm & Washington, DC: Central Asia – Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, July.

237 "Роль органов власти в период событий июня 2010 года в Кыргызстане" [The Role of Authorities during the Period of Events in June 2010 in Kyrgyzstan], Klym Shamy, Bishkek, 2012. http://vof.kg/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Doklad-rol-organov-vlasti_Rylym-shamy.pdf.

238 Erica Marat (forthcoming 2015), "Reforming Police in Postcommunist Countries: International Efforts, Domestic Heroes", *Comparative Politics*.

Law Enforcement Reform

Compared to other post-Soviet countries, Kyrgyzstan adopted the idea of law enforcement reform relatively early, with the help of the international community. In 2002, President Akayev called for external assistance to reform the police following the killing of five protesters in Aksy village. However, a decade of efforts supported by donors to transform the Interior Ministry has yielded modest results.²³⁵ Political elites who came to power as a result of the two regime changes have also been trying to change the Interior Ministry by retraining personnel and amending the legal code. However, they are reluctant to introduce major changes because many of them still have lucrative informal ties with Interior Ministry personnel. Politicians in Kyrgyzstan have also turned to law enforcement structures to cover up some of their own illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, or to protect members of organized criminal groups from arrest.²³⁶

The June 2010 bloodshed demonstrated that the country's police forces are not trained to deal with inter-ethnic violence. Along with the armed forces, the police became part of the conflict, rather than a solution. They acted unprofessionally and reportedly provoked the Uzbek minority and protected the Kyrgyz majority. Police personnel either overstepped their mandate or chose not to follow the commands of political officials. At times, they chose to submit to local political leaders, rather than leaders within the interim government.²³⁷ Kyrgyzstan's NGO leaders argue that the police and army began shooting at civilians, predominantly ethnic Uzbeks, without waiting for the political leadership's command during the 2010 violence.

From 2011 to 2013, the pace of reform accelerated when local NGOs joined efforts to design and oversee law enforcement reform. The OSCE played a critical role in mediating this collaboration between NGOs, MPs and the Interior Ministry, empowering civil society voices in a debate previously dominated by ministry officials.²³⁸ The police-public debate became the main force driving meaningful change in

Kyrgyzstan after years of stalled police reform efforts. In 2011, a working group made up of NGOs and MPs took responsibility for reform away from the political leadership and the Interior Ministry.

Aside from OSCE support for police reform, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement of the United States Department of State provided \$13.1 million to support law enforcement and legal reform programs in Kyrgyzstan.²³⁹ In total, between 1992 and 2010, the United States provided aid packages that totaled \$1.22 billion.²⁴⁰ This includes \$90 million in humanitarian assistance following the regime change and ethnic violence in 2010.

Nationalism and Kyrgyzstan's South

The failure to prosecute the perpetrators of ethnic violence and ensure the fair representation of ethnic minorities, as well as calls for forcing Kyrgyz language fluency across the population, have been ascribed to the rise of Kyrgyz ethnic nationalism.²⁴¹ Yet those who blame all of Kyrgyzstan's post-2010 problems on nationalism fail to see the deeper underlying issues that foster an environment in which nationalist rants become a way to deal with fears of state collapse, territorial disintegration and treason by ethnic minority groups.²⁴² The nationalist agenda is to restore Kyrgyzstan, based on the idea of

an ancient homeland of the glorious Kyrgyz nation, where everyone speaks the same language, Kyrgyz traditions are respected and a rich cultural legacy is passed on to future generations. That these ideals are unattainable, given that Kyrgyzstan is a multiethnic society surrounded by larger states, only increases the sense of urgency to realize this goal.

At the same time, as Megoran argues, nationalism is part of the broader democratic process that allows various voices to be heard above the din of fierce political competition. Nationalism is often used as a political tool to unite the population and drum up political support, especially by politicians from southern Kyrgyzstan. Several MPs have used ethnic nationalism to rally support among their constituents.²⁴³ However, they have made few public statements calling for discrimination against ethnic minorities in the south. Those ideas are primarily voiced in closed conversations. Instead, public officials have resorted to the politics of symbolism and subversive activities. This includes erecting new Kyrgyz-centric monuments, demoting the status of the Russian language and shutting-down Uzbek-language media.

There are two levels of top-down nationalism; national and local. At the national level, nationalism is expressed in specific policy items such as the introduction of "Manasology" (*masovedenie*) as a required course in all schools, elevating the status of the Kyrgyz language, celebrating Kyrgyz cultural heritage and calling for ethnic Kyrgyz to be considered a privileged group. Knowledge of the Manas epic, the political legacy of Kurmanjan Datka and the literary success of Chingiz Aitmatov have been politicized to the extent that they suppress pluralism within discussions on what constitutes Kyrgyz heritage. At the local level, nationalism may manifest in workplace discrimination and the marginalization of minorities from public spaces through police violence and informal taxation. The mayor of Osh has implemented more nationalistic politics than the national governments. Myrzakhmatov enjoyed a high degree of sovereignty in distributing national post-conflict reconstruction funds and staging

239 Data for 2006-2011, "State/INL Kyrgyzstan Program", <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/fs/178372.htm>, December 6, 2011. Kyrgyzstan was the largest recipient of Bureau of International Narcotics and Law (INL) Enforcement aid in Central Asia, receiving \$13.1 million, compared to \$1.7 million granted to Uzbekistan and \$3 million to Turkmenistan. Tajikistan was the only country where INL spent more over the same time period; \$46.3 million.

240 Jim Nichol, "Kyrgyzstan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests", *Congressional Research Service*, January 19, 2012.

241 Megoran (2012).

242 Ibid.

243 For example, "Skandal iz-za testirovaniya na uzbekskom yazyke", *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, May 5, 2012; David Trilling, "Kyrgyzstan: How to Rouse Ethnic Tensions", *Eurasianet*, April 18, 2012; and "Kamchybe Tashiev: 'Esli russkie, uzbeki ili turki skazhut, chto oni na ravne s kirgizami ili vyshe ih, - gosudarstvo razvalitsya'", *Ferghana.ru*, September 16, 2010.

municipal celebrations, all with strong ethno-centric undertones. Furthermore, his directives during post-conflict reconstruction were primarily aimed at assisting ethnic Kyrgyz. Ethnic Uzbeks had to rely on the help of external donors.

Osh, Uzbeks and Uzbekistan

Two dominant perceptions of Osh coexisted between the outbreaks of violence in 1990 and 2010. Members of both Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities interpreted the June 2010 violence as a victory for the Kyrgyz against Uzbek-dominated Osh. One MP said, “Yes, the Osh violence has damaged Kyrgyzstan’s international reputation, but in the long-term we’ve benefited”, meaning that the ethnic Kyrgyz majority would no longer need to fear an Uzbek-dominated Osh and threats from the south in general.²⁴⁴

A common fear among Kyrgyz politicians is that ethnic Uzbeks, particularly influential entrepreneurs, are more loyal to the Uzbek state than to Bishkek. “Following the April 2010 revolution, some Uzbeks did not know who their president was; they considered (Uzbekistan’s president) Karimov to be their leader”, said one Kyrgyz official.²⁴⁵ Fear that the Kyrgyz national state is not accepted by Uzbek communities reinforces the perception that ethnic Uzbeks are waiting for the opportunity to secede and join Uzbekistan. These fears are then compounded by the perceived need to quell any such intentions before Uzbekistan is ready to open its borders to Kyrgyzstan’s Uzbeks. Ethnic Uzbeks, despite their long historical ties to and presence in Jalalabad and Osh, are often referred to as diaspora Uzbeks in

Bishkek. According to this interpretation, the 2010 Osh events were unfortunate because of the human cost, but they saved the integrity of the country at a time of great uncertainty.²⁴⁶

Ethnic Uzbeks are indeed more culturally connected with the population in the Ferghana Valley than with the leadership in Bishkek. As Liu writes, “The ‘nation-state’ concept is a poor fit for Osh Uzbeks, who look to Uzbekistan for their ethnic identification and to Kyrgyzstan for their citizenship”.²⁴⁷ Some stereotypes about ethnic Kyrgyz among Uzbeks centre around nomadic backwardness and “lack of culture.”²⁴⁸ Neither Uzbek nor Kyrgyz authorities, however, treat ethnic Uzbeks living in Osh as equals of the majority population. Other Kyrgyz observers posit that Kyrgyzstan’s ethnic Uzbeks are much more emancipated than Uzbeks in Uzbekistan because they own property. In the meantime, Karimov is determined to keep Uzbekistan’s borders closed to ethnic Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan.

The fear that Tashkent could meddle in Kyrgyzstan’s domestic affairs looms large, given the country’s size, military capability and uncertainty about Karimov’s regime transformation. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan share contested borders and enclaves. During and after the June 2010 violence, many feared that Karimov would send troops into Kyrgyzstan’s territory. However, Karimov joined Kyrgyzstan’s interim government in blaming abstract “third forces” for the outbreak of violence, and many in Kyrgyzstan openly praised his restraint.²⁴⁹ Beyond Osh, Kyrgyz security analysts also fear Uzbekistan might invade should Bishkek stop supplying the country with water during the summer months, a fear Karimov readily fanned by shrewdly noting that “water wars” are a possibility in the region.²⁵⁰

Migration

The perception that Kyrgyzstan’s territorial integrity is under threat is also driven by the fear of “creeping migration” at the border areas. Kyrgyz politicians and experts view this as a pressing security problem that could lead to inter-ethnic violence. The phenomenon

244 Interview, Washington, DC, March 2013.

245 Interview, Washington, DC, March 2013.

246 Interview, Kyrgyz MP, March 2013.

247 Liu (2012), 10.

248 Ibid.

249 “Об обстоятельствах и хронологии трагических событий мая-июня 2010 года в городах Ош, Джалал-Абад, отдельных районах Ошской и Джалал-Абадской областей”, *Ferghana.ru*, June 7, 2012.

250 “Uzbekistan Leader Sounds Warning over Central Asia Water Disputes”, *Reuters*, September 7, 2012.

mainly applies to ethnic Tajiks who move to Batken and Soghd regions, buying or renting property from ethnic Kyrgyz who move to other parts of Kyrgyzstan or to Russia. The population on the Tajikistan side of the border, as well as within the Tajik enclave, is several times denser than on Kyrgyzstan's side. Creeping migration was more of a problem in the 1980s and 1990s, when borders were poorly defined and the population was growing rapidly, but in the 2000s, it has become increasingly politicized.

Kyrgyz authorities and academic experts view creeping migration as a sign of state weakness.²⁵¹ The rising numbers of other ethnic groups in southern Kyrgyzstan increase challenges to the state and its territorial integrity.²⁵² The urge for border demarcation arises from the perception that Kyrgyzstan's survival as a state depends on clearly defined territory that will protect the country from external challenges. The state cites creeping migration as a rationale for border institutionalization to define the allocation of material resources to local populations.

During the Bakiyev era, several assertive steps were taken to prevent creeping migration along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. These included bans on the sale of land, granting special status to villages close to disputed border areas and allocating special subsidies to the local population.²⁵³ Some of these initiatives were abandoned by Bakiyev's successors.

251 Reeves (2005a); Madeleine Reeves (2005b), "Locating Danger: Konfliktologiya and the Search for Fixity in the Ferghana Valley Borderlands", *Central Asian Survey*, 24(1) March, 67-81.

252 Reeves (2005a).

253 Ibid.

254 Reeves (2005a, 2005b).

255 Reeves (2005a); Madeleine Reeves (2014), *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

256 Megoran (2012).

257 R. Abazbek-utulu, "Трансграничные миграционные процессы на юге Кыргызстана и их возможное влияние на межэтнические отношения", *Demoscop Weekly*, October 2011. <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2011/0481/analit03.php>

258 Reeves (2005a); Melvin (2011); Megoran (2012).

259 Megoran (2012); Reeves (2005a).

The practice of demarcating and institutionalizing previously vague borders in ethnically mixed areas has political and social consequences.²⁵⁴ According to Reeves, the "materialization of borders" actually creates tension among local populations, breeds illegal activity and increases the propensity for confrontation over resources. The practice is particularly contentious because, "Territory and ethnicity are both symbolically linked and discursively over-determined".²⁵⁵ While border materialization is particularly driven by Uzbek authorities, it breeds grievances among peoples on both sides of the border.²⁵⁶

Borders are also demarcated informally, for example, with Tajiks planting trees on disputed lands and Kyrgyz authorities removing them.²⁵⁷ Brawls between young people divided along ethnic identities are not uncommon. As Reeves argues, in addition to a standard set of official national symbols, such as Manas and the national flag, the politicization of ethnicity in rural areas is expressed in investments in infrastructure, including the construction of new water pipes (sometimes with the help of international NGOs), roads or landscaping. Elsewhere in the country, the mass media, workplace recruitment strategies and school curricula promulgate "kyrgyzness" across both recognized and disputed territory.

The root causes of tension in rural areas are, however, the shortage of resources, the government's continuous politicization of ethnicity, and ethnically defined territory that generates and reproduces resentment in everyday life.²⁵⁸ The struggle for water resources and land leads to tensions between residents who find themselves on different sides of state borders.

Other scholars argue that it is the unregulated nature of creeping migration that creates tensions with the local population. Thus, the greater certainty brought by border delimitation is key for inter-ethnic and inter-state stability.

Borders demarcated separate areas populated by ethnic Tajiks and ethnic Kyrgyz. The process of delimiting disputed borders came to the fore in the 2000s, following Uzbekistan's aggressive policy of border mining and restricting border crossings.²⁵⁹

Four majority-Uzbek enclaves are located within Kyrgyzstan's territory (the largest are Shakhimardan and Sokh), while a Kyrgyz enclave (Barak) is located in Uzbekistan. Although Sokh is Uzbekistan's territory, it is mostly populated by ethnic Tajiks.²⁶⁰ According to polls, more people in Kyrgyzstan consider Uzbekistan to be a threat to Kyrgyzstan (39 percent), than think of it as a partner (18 percent). To date, only 237 kilometres of the 674 kilometre border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has been delimited, mostly in mountainous areas. Of the 384 kilometre Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, 103 kilometres remain disputed.²⁶¹ Enclaves in the Fergana Valley are largely the outcome of the Soviet logic of state-formation and some borders were only intended as provisional arrangements. Since these arrangements lacked formal ratification at the republican level, the post-1991 border delimitation process was highly contested.²⁶²

Tensions Beyond Osh

Tensions among ethnic groups exist beyond the Kyrgyz-Uzbek axis. Like violence in Osh and Jalalabad, however, outbreaks of violence tend to follow an everyday spat between young people or be caused by a real or rumored case of attacks against members of the ethnic majority by members of an ethnic minority.²⁶³

In February 2006, in the northern village of Iskra, the situation escalated after two Kyrgyz teenagers were severely beaten, allegedly by a group of Dungan teens. Between 250 and 300 ethnic Kyrgyz from

neighbouring villages gathered in front of the Iskra administration building to demand the eviction of several Dungan families as punishment. Protestors threw stones at the houses where the Dungan suspects lived. When four Dungans from Tokmok town drove their cars into the crowd and opened fire on ethnic Kyrgyz protestors, the crowd set fire to the houses and livestock belonging to Dungans. Although there were no human casualties, seven houses, one vehicle and 250 kilograms of hay owned by Dungans were destroyed in the violent clashes. A special unit of the security forces was deployed to break up the mob.

The scope and intensity of the conflict between Kyrgyz and Dungans in Iskra was unprecedented. There are roughly 37,000 Dungans living in Kyrgyzstan. They form the majority of Iskra's population, representing over 689 households out of 2,353. Iskra is one of the few villages in northern Kyrgyzstan where ethnic Kyrgyz are a minority.

Dungans are ethnic Chinese from northwestern China who practice Hanafi Sunni Islam, like the majority of Kyrgyz Muslims. Dungans speak Mandarin, but their dialect has used Cyrillic script since the 1920s and is significantly influenced by Turkic and Slavic languages. Many Dungans also speak Russian and Kyrgyz. Despite intensive russification during Soviet times, the Dungans preserved a strong religious identity and lived in distinct communities and collective farms, mostly in rural areas.²⁶⁴ Many Dungans are now involved in the agricultural sector and food retail in bazaars in Chui oblast. They are known as hard-working farmers who grow high quality rice, fruits and vegetables. Dungan agricultural products are popular in many local food markets. Most Dungans still value intra-ethnic marriages. The local Kyrgyz have adopted some aspects of Dungan culture, especially Dungan cuisine and farming skills.

Like the Dungans, Meshketian Turks rarely mix with other ethnic groups, and many are entrepreneurs. In April 2010, just a few days after the ouster of Bakiyev, violence between ethnic Kyrgyz and Meshketian Turks led to the death of three people, partly because the central authorities were slow to

260 Farangis Najibullah "Uzbekskii anklav Sokh, naseleennyi tadjikami", *Azattyq.org*, June 14, 2010.

261 "М. Джумабеков: Пограничное положение Баткенской области порождает немало проблем и последствий в социально-экономическом развитии региона", *Akipress.kg*, January 23, 2009.

262 Reeves (2005a), 1285-1286.

263 "Дунгане против киргизов. В Чуйской области произошли локальные столкновения на межэтнической почве", *Ferghananews.ru*, February 7, 2006.

264 "Общественное объединение Дунган КР", Проект: «Кыргызстан – многонациональная страна», June 29, 2011. http://www.university.kg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2337:2011-06-29-09-44-58&catid=868:2011-06-14-05-28-18&Itemid=337&lang=kg.

react. A group of villagers, reportedly ethnic Kyrgyz, attacked a Meshketian Turkish community in the northern village of Mayevka, killing five Turks and injuring twenty eight people (including one ethnic Russian). Hundreds of ethnic Kyrgyz demanded that the authorities allocate them land plots owned by Meshketian Turkish. The crowd blamed Meshketian Turks for seizing land from the Kyrgyz for agriculture.²⁶⁵ Several houses occupied by Turks were burned down. The police were nowhere to be seen. The Meshketian Turks had no choice but to flee the village. Hours passed before any security forces arrived in Mayevka. When they eventually arrived, they detained 120 people. Seven were eventually indicted for instigating violence.

Today, it is believed that roughly 20,000 Meshketian Turks live in northern Kyrgyzstan.²⁶⁶ Stalin deported between 80,000 and 100,000 Meskhetian Turks and other Caucasus ethnic groups from Georgia to Central Asia in 1944.²⁶⁷ Ethnic tensions in Uzbekistan in 1989 led to the death of hundreds of Meskhetian Turks. The diaspora has preserved its cultural traditions, language and religion.

Similar to the June 2010 violence, in these two cases, the Kyrgyz authorities blamed the violence on “third forces” interested in destabilizing domestic security. Depending on which government source is referenced, these “third forces” ranged from drug lords to state officials to members of the former government. Observers and the media, however, pointed at the underlying economic and

social tensions in the two villages. The newspaper *Vechernyi Bishkek* commented that the fight between Kyrgyz and Dungan teenagers was a tipping point following several years of mounting tensions. The newspaper also blamed the village administration for taking the side of ethnic Kyrgyz and participating in violence against Dungans.²⁶⁸ Other media cited the lack of educational facilities, high unemployment, alcoholism and drug addiction in Kyrgyz villages as potential causes. Many rural teens are unable to receive a basic education or vocational training and find jobs and often become involved in racketeering and stealing. Ethnic divisions only exacerbate the aggression between young people.

More recently, in 2014 and 2015, Kyrgyzstan has seen the rise of an extreme nationalist movement, *Kalys*, and a nationalist militia group, *Kyrk Choro* (forty knights), that seek to defend the Kyrgyz ethnic group through violent means. *Kalys* is notorious for its hate speech against LGBT communities, anti-Western views and championing of “Islamic society” identity for Kyrgyzstan. Its members are not typical Islamist radicals but rather tend to be Kyrgyz traditionalist nationalists.²⁶⁹ These groups are still marginal and are not a threat to nation-level democratic direction or values. However, to date, the government has failed to counter such movements systematically, and instead has opposed and criticized them sporadically.

X. EFFORTS AT RECONCILIATION

Following the June 2010 violence, the Kyrgyz government received vast international humanitarian assistance, primarily from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund – Immediate Response Facility (PBF-IRF) and from the United States Agency for International Development’s Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID OTI). IRF provided \$3 million to quickly respond to reconciliation needs: youth empowerment, women’s networks and water users’ associations. In June 2012, the fund allocated a further \$7 million for “implementation of peace building activities prior to the Presidential elections” in October 2011.²⁷⁰ The second portion of PBF funding was

265 “Кыргызстан: Участники погромов в Маевке наказаны условно”, *Fergana.ru*, December 13, 2010.

266 Joldosh Osmonov, “Mayevka Unreset Threatens Inter-Ethnic Stability in Kyrgyzstan”, *Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst*, April 28, 2010.

267 Temo Bardzimashvili, “Kyrgyzstan: Meskhetian Turks Cling to Traditions to Cope with Uncertainty”, *Eurasianet.org*, April 20, 2012.

268 “Interethnic Clash Causes Kyrgyzstan’s ‘Common House’ to Tremble”, *Eurasianet.org*, February 15, 2006.

269 “Organizator o sorvavshih kontsert ‘Kazakov’: ‘Oni krichali u nas islamskaya strana’” [Organizer of the disrupted Kazaky concert: “They shouted ‘We are an Islamic country’”], *Kloop.kg*, October 18, 2014.

270 Marla Zalpach and Gulnara Ibraeva, “Immediate Response Facility (IRF1) Final Evaluation – Kyrgyzstan”, *UN Peacebuilding Fund – Immediate Response Facility*, June 2012.

allocated to infrastructure, administration of justice and strengthening media capacity to promote peace efforts. Finally, in July 2010, international donors pledged \$1.1 billion in emergency response funding to the country for the duration of 30 months, with \$600 million earmarked for the remaining of 2010.²⁷¹

OTI provided \$21 million to fund 415 projects that supported the interim government and peace building efforts in southern Kyrgyzstan.²⁷² As a significant portion of its projects are concentrated in southern Kyrgyzstan, OTI funds filled the gap when USAID changed its project focus from its regular programs to addressing repercussions of violence in the country. OTI identified agents of change who would foster inclusiveness and diversity; sought to provide better services in rural areas, improved safety in urban spaces through simple steps like fixing traffic lights, and supported the efforts of local NGOs to reform the Interior Ministry. By creating an environment of equal access to resources and infrastructure, these efforts are conducive to promoting ethnic and cultural pluralism in everyday life.

With international aid flowing, the national government under President Atambayev did little to actively engage in peace building. It resorted to the old cliché of blaming abstract “third forces” for instigating violence and ignored the flawed trials and unequal representation of minorities in

the public sector, two of the most pressing issues in 2013.²⁷³ Bishkek persistently avoided discussing the reconciliation process in the south. The national government’s reluctance to openly discuss the problems plaguing the south created the illusion that there was stability in post-violence areas.

The president is wary of raising post-2010 reconciliation because it could potentially fuel the nationalist opposition.²⁷⁴ Were the Atambayev administration to press charges against ethnic Kyrgyz perpetrators, the opposition party *Ata-Jurt* could seize the opportunity to present the problem as a north-south cleavage and challenge the government’s legitimacy.²⁷⁵ To a great extent, Kyrgyzstan may not be able to ensure justice after the 2010 violence because it lacks the institutions required for transitional justice and prosecuting crimes of past regimes.

Since the government maintains its silence about fundamental tensions, there is a sense that future escalation of ethnic tensions is inevitable. Without national leadership actively seeking reconciliation, any hint of political instability or everyday violence may acquire ethnic overtones.²⁷⁶ The government’s silence about the state of affairs in southern Kyrgyzstan only increases fear among Uzbeks living in the region.²⁷⁷ This fear is especially strong among people who connect the June 2010 violence to the June 1990 violence.

With the government avoiding open discussion of inter-ethnic reconciliation, and the nationalistic opposition readily promoting values that discriminate against ethnic minorities, it is difficult for the international community to broach the question of reconciliation. Should donor organizations working in Kyrgyzstan openly call for inter-ethnic peace? Or should they address the root causes of inter-ethnic strife and ignore nationalist outbursts among political leaders?

There is a conceptual divide between various approaches to post-violence reconciliation among the international community. Some international agencies, for instance, promote direct engagement among members of both ethnic groups, regardless of existing

271 “High-Level Donors Meeting for the Kyrgyz Republic Pledges US\$ 1.1 Billion in Emergency Response”, <http://www.un-foodsecurity.org/node/670>, accessed on August 23, 2013.

272 For more information see, http://centralasia.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/u4/oti-kr_program_update_2011_10_27_october_final.pdf.

273 Alamazbek Atambayev, “Vместе мы можем!” [Together we can!], Vecherny Bishkek, June 7, 2013.

274 Interview, member of presidential administration, Bishkek, June 13, 2013.

275 Interviews, two representatives of human rights NGOs, Bishkek, June 14, 2013.

276 Interview, representative of United Nations donor organization, Osh, June 9, 2013.

277 Interview, member of human rights NGO, Osh, June 7, 2013.

political inequalities. Given that the local government in Osh is reluctant to address the sense of insecurity and pervasive ethnic stereotyping, both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are “waiting for another conflict to happen”.²⁷⁸ To remedy this, both sides need to come together and to try to understand each other and reach a “shared vision” of both the past and the future.

In contrast, some international NGOs look for ways to engage both ethnic groups in solving everyday issues that might otherwise escalate tensions. These range from ensuring people are able to pay electricity bills and secure water supplies, and the mass media coverage of problems in ethnically intermixed areas. The goal is to address root causes of inter-ethnic tension, such as perceived and real inequalities in resource distribution, that might lead to violence. Proponents of this approach are careful to avoid the ethnicization of shared community problems.²⁷⁹ As one expert put it: “Some donor organizations confuse human rights activism and peace building”. In other words, by addressing the post-June 2010 problems in southern Kyrgyzstan through an ethnic lens, the international community is promoting human rights, not building peace.

These differences in methodological approach also exist among local government and NGO activists. An ethnic Uzbek NGO leader in Osh said that after the violence most of her colleagues in the non-governmental sector divided along ethnic lines, forgetting about their shared human rights agenda. Furthermore, while the mayor of Osh’s sporadic

attempts at reconciliation are based on staging events to showcase “ethnic unity”, such as televised inter-ethnic marriages, local activists are more focused on solving issues at the community level, not the ethnic level. “One of our main goals is to make broadcasts in the Uzbek language normal again”, says a journalist from bilingual *Yntymak* radio.²⁸⁰

According to local activist organizations in Osh that have been able to work with various communities on shared issues, an approach that addresses root causes and potential triggers of ethnic tensions is more effective in the long term, than reconciliation activities that engage individuals based on their ethnic background. Joint activities that prioritize community issues can help routinize the notion that ethnic diversity is an indispensable, valuable part of everyday life.

Local Views on Reconciliation

The narrative about what is needed for reconciliation among Kyrgyz and international human rights activists, in both Osh and Bishkek, has shifted since 2010. Experts note that both ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz share a sense of victimization, albeit on different levels. Ethnic Uzbeks complain that following the violence and lack of post-conflict justice, they are increasingly alienated from public life. Their growing isolation, has led them to turn inward and return to traditional practices. “After the 2010 violence, Uzbek girls were banned by parents from attending schools for safety reasons; however, it has now become a norm to give only nine years of education to a girl”, according to a representative of NGO specializing in development in Osh.²⁸¹

Ethnic Kyrgyz, in the meantime, consider it unfair that Uzbeks dominate the private sector and own most of the real estate in urban and suburban areas of Osh. While poverty is widespread across the entire population, ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks each feel that their community is worse off than others.²⁸² “The nationalists are successful because of the lack of modernization in mountainous areas”, a representative of an international organization says.²⁸³ In Osh, the problem is exacerbated by the

278 Interview, representative of United Nations donor organization, Osh, June 9, 2013.

279 Interviews, representatives of three international donor organizations, Osh, June 7-11, 2013.

280 Interview, Osh, June 11, 2013.

281 Interview, Osh, June 11, 2013.

282 According to the SIAR survey, one-third of ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks cite financial problems as the most pressing problems in their daily lives, but unemployment is more pervasive among ethnic Uzbeks (54 percent compared to 35 percent among ethnic Kyrgyz in Osh and 17.6 percent nationwide).

283 Interview, Bishkek, June 12, 2013.

number of ethnic Kyrgyz from mountainous areas who have migrated to the city, where there is already a housing shortage, further increasing competition for resources. According to unofficial data, the population of Osh is now half a million, twice the official population count.²⁸⁴

The physical and cultural divides between the two ethnic groups have deepened since 2010. Both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks self-segregate in separate neighbourhoods of Osh and in workplaces. While territorial divisions existed prior to 2010, they have become especially rigid.²⁸⁵ Reconciliation therefore remains elusive. As one expert puts it: “Integration happens at a workplace, when people solve issues together. But people are not working together”.²⁸⁶ Osh-based human-rights activists agree that reconciling members of multiethnic communities is an easier task than engaging individuals from monoethnic communities. Stereotypes about other ethnic groups are likely to be more extreme in monoethnic compound communities.²⁸⁷

In 2012, there were attempts to create radio stations that broadcast in Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek. At least one station, Yntymak, began to broadcast news in Uzbek largely due to donor-backed efforts to expand media coverage in Uzbek language. Other attempts to initiate Uzbek-language broadcasts were less successful.²⁸⁸ Jalalabad’s TV Channel 7 tried to use donor funds to broadcast news in Uzbek, only to encounter resistance from the local population. Faced with condemnation, the channel only broadcast cultural shows in Uzbek language during off-peak hours.

284 Interviews, representatives of an international donor organization and a local NGO, Osh, June 7, 2013.

285 Multiple interviews with journalists, NGO activists and international community representatives, Osh, June 7-11, 2013.

286 Interview, representative of a United Nations agency, Bishkek, June 12, 2013.

287 Interview, representative of a human rights NGO, Osh, June 11, 2013.

288 “Kyrgyzstan: Language and Media Still Sensitive Subject in Southern Regions”, *Eurasianet.org*, October 18, 2012.

289 OHCHR ROCA (2012).

290 Interview, human rights activist, Bishkek, May 28, 2013.

291 Ibid.

Despite growing cultural divides, qualitative research shows a formidable consensus among ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek groups. Both criticize leaders of the interim and incumbent governments for failing to prevent the violence and not effectively dealing with its aftermath. Most residents in southern oblasts agree that a “fair investigation” of events and justice has not occurred.²⁸⁹ Over half the population is dissatisfied with the work of law enforcement and the judicial sector.

The lack of concrete action by central authorities has created a situation where the fault lines are not as much between members of ethnic groups, as between communities and law-enforcement agencies and local government. An Osh-based human rights NGO blames central authorities for not punishing the perpetrators of the violence and argues that this blind spot enables law-enforcement agents in southern Kyrgyzstan to continue to abuse ethnic Uzbeks with impunity. Members of the Uzbek community, particularly entrepreneurs, are regularly bullied by criminal syndicates operating in Osh. As one NGO leader said, “At times it is hard to separate law enforcement from the criminals in Osh”.²⁹⁰ Uzbeks are such frequent targets of murder, torture and criminal raids that such events are hardly noted by the media and government.²⁹¹

Champions of Pluralism within Government and their Opponents

There are several top-ranking officials who push for a more inclusive form of nationalism, but those propagating ethnocentric ideas largely overshadow them. The Concept of Development of National Unity and Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Kyrgyz Republic is one of the few government policies to promote pluralism after the June 2010 violence. The Concept is the result of a three-year effort to reconcile competing visions of inter-ethnic relations presented by NGOs, ethnocentric nationalists and the government. It presents a broad consensus between polarized understandings of the post-June 2010 situation in Kyrgyzstan. It took months for the administration’s representatives to persuade nationalists in parliament

and government to leave out Soviet-inherited terminology and statures routinely used in state documents and political discourse.²⁹² Notably, the Concept does not define the Kyrgyz as a “state-making group” or a “titular” ethnicity; two definitions the nationalists fiercely demanded initially. Instead, it seeks a balance between democratic principles and civic rights, on one hand, and the enforcement of the Kyrgyz language across the nation, on the other.

While the Concept is a bold step towards pluralism, representatives of the President’s Administration office have identified three challenges toward its implementation. First, local governments need training and funding to organize events to foster peace.²⁹³ Second, the government’s language policy needs to be transformed to improve Kyrgyz language pedagogy, particularly at the pre-school level. Mira Karybayeva, who served as head of the interim president’s Department of Ethnic and Religious Policy and Interaction, together with head of the State Commission on National Language, Egemberdy Ermatov, and the head of the newly created State Agency on Local Governance and Inter-ethnic Relations, Naken Kasiyev, agree that the best way for the government to increase knowledge of the Kyrgyz language is to change the way in which the language is taught.²⁹⁴ Kyrgyzstan’s current education system currently provides instruction in only one language at each school (usually Kyrgyz, Russian or Uzbek). This approach should be replaced with a multilingual teaching environment that includes Kyrgyz, Russian, a minority language and/or one of the six official languages of the United Nations. Finally, efforts to promote civic-based patriotism need to balance

inclusive ideals of citizenship and the nationalistic urge to impose the hegemony of Kyrgyz culture. There should be a balanced approach to ethnic minorities who culturally identify with Uzbekistan, Russia or other national backgrounds or cultures.

NGOs in Bishkek and Osh see a different set of challenges. Some NGO leaders in Bishkek argue that the Concept unnecessarily delineates ethnic majority and minority groups and reinforces divisions at the local level.²⁹⁵ Any programs for multiethnic peace will be conducted from the perspective of these categories and therefore conflict with the very goals set out by the Concept. NGOs in Osh argue that the Concept has been created by a national government that is detached from reality in the south and that it is likely to be oriented towards preserving the regime’s authority in Bishkek’s competitive political landscape.

Finally, international donor organizations view the Concept as a significant step forward in framing multi-ethnic peace, but criticize the Kyrgyz government’s “lack of ownership” in its implementation.²⁹⁶ According to this view, it is uncertain which government agency or official is actually responsible for the policy implementation and its outcomes. The source of funding to implement the policy and who will oversee the process are also unclear.

Since the Concept represents a broad consensus, it is also open to interpretation. A former Presidential Advisor on Inter-Ethnic Relations who now occupies a regional leadership position, for example, is convinced that the country does not need new resources for teaching the Kyrgyz language because it is simply every citizen’s duty to learn the state language. According to his view, Kyrgyz cultural heritage must be celebrated more often to ensure that all ethnic minorities respect the majority group’s identity. Similarly exclusionary ideas that deny minority rights are widespread in the parliament. They are driven by the Eurocentric belief promoted in the Soviet era that any ethnic group seeks self-determination in its own nation-state and that until it reaches it, it will reject any civic-based ideals.

292 Interview, representative of President Atambayev’s administration, Bishkek, May 27, 2013.

293 Kasiyev also cited this set of challenges in an interview, Bishkek, May 31, 2013.

294 Interviews, Bishkek, May 27-June 7, 2013.

295 Interview, head of NGO Coalition for Democracy and Human Rights Dinara Oshurahunova, Bishkek, May 30, 2013.

296 Multiple interviews with representatives of human rights NGOs and international donor organizations, Osh and Bishkek, May 28-June 11, 2013.

Despite these challenges and the government's reluctance to directly address issues of post-conflict ethnic reconciliation, the presidential administration has achieved significant progress in neutralizing nationalist political rhetoric of linguistic and cultural exclusion. The administration and NGO community continue to look for ways to promote greater pluralism, while dealing with the challenges of democratization in a diverse society.

XI. OPPORTUNITIES FOR AND OBSTACLES TO PLURALISM

Based on an analysis of the social, cultural, economic and political diversity of Kyrgyzstan, this paper concludes that while there are significant challenges in Kyrgyzstan, the prospects for pluralism are considerable in Kyrgyzstan. The most encouraging factors include the presence of champions of pluralism within the ranks of both government and civil society, and growing economic freedoms and dynamism of the political process.

This paper has demonstrated that Kyrgyzstan's social tensions are the product of both the Soviet practice of nation building based on ethnic self-determination and the country's growing economic and political freedoms over the past decade. Tensions span ethnic, regional and urban-rural cleavages that, in turn, reflect how economic resources are generated and distributed across the country's territory and population. The manifestation of tensions is also the product of the country's generally liberal political environment in which most residents are able to express their concerns. Kyrgyzstan's political and economic freedoms offer significant opportunities for pluralism. Pressing issues that divide society, including north/south political identity, internal and external migration and the radicalization of rural youth, are also part of the broader discussion.

However, because of the endemic institutional weakness of central and local government agencies, and the intermittent rule of law, competing voices and interests have not created a civil dialogue in which each and every voice is respected. Instead,

debates and conflicting political agendas coexist in various contexts – the parliament, mass media, territorial communities and the NGO sector – without overlapping or evolving into a broader discussion. In this cacophony of competing voices, the national government avoids the issues of ethnic tensions and regional divides, while local governments have scarce understanding of civic nationalism and identity. Compounding this is the political opposition's use of ethnic pride and the status of the Kyrgyz language as political instruments to challenge the president and generate support from ethnic Kyrgyz.

This section analyzes opportunities and constraints to fostering pluralism in Kyrgyzstan at the state and society levels.

Opportunities

Fragile but Sustainable Political Stability

The first three years under the new constitution were both encouraging and disappointing. Contrary to predictions, the parliament was not dissolved after being elected, and MPs have learned to conduct civil debates on the chamber floor. Except for a few notable cases, there have been fewer protests by protesters hired by opposition leaders against the political establishment. On the other hand, the parliament has demonstrated limited ability to draft legislation that fosters economic growth and creates new economic opportunities. Legislation is often drafted and passed into law with limited expert or technical consultations to address specific issues. Essentially, it will take another round of parliamentary and presidential elections to see whether Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary democracy has truly taken root. Should the upcoming elections in October 2015 be held in a free and fair manner there will be more hope for the consolidation of democratic practices in Kyrgyzstan.

Good Laws are in Place

Kyrgyzstan's legal base is widely recognized as conducive to democracy and pluralism. The constitutional provision on human rights, drafted by

Kyrgyzstan's leading human rights activists, guarantees the rights of all Kyrgyz citizens, irrespective of "sex, race, language, disability, ethnicity, religion, age, political or other opinion, education, origin, property or other status, or other factors". The Electoral Code requires that 30 percent of parliament consists of representatives of ethnic minorities, women and young people. The Concept of Development of National Unity and Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Kyrgyz Republic was developed largely based on constitutional provisions that privilege civic rights over ethnic belonging, but still ensures that ethnicity is an accepted part of civic identity.

Pluralism Champions within Civil Society

Kyrgyzstan has a vibrant civil society ready and willing to collaborate with the government on issues related to pluralism. A number of NGO activists have made the choice to directly work with and support government efforts rather than pursue advocacy against the government. NGO representatives realize that the government is open to collaboration with civic activists. Youth NGOs in Bishkek and Osh, supported both by international or local donors, are particularly committed to fostering ethnic and political pluralism.

Pluralism Champions within Government

Since 2010, champions of pluralism within the government have made significant attempts to ensure that civic rights are extended to the entire population. They have sought ways to tame nationalist views represented in parliament and to bring the vision and values of progressive civil society into the mainstream. Two new agencies created by the President's Office in the aftermath of the June 2010 violence are particularly noteworthy: the Department of Ethnic and Religious Policy and Interaction and the State Agency on Local Governance and Inter-ethnic Relations. Both are headed by dedicated public servants ready to implement change at the national level. Furthermore, President Atambayev's administration is supporting the promotion of the Kyrgyz language as a primary means of communication across the society, rather than as a political tool to coerce ethnic minority groups.

Mass media are Free and Diverse

Kyrgyzstan has a relatively free media landscape. Mass media broadcast a wide variety of voices and views from political leaders and civil society. The online universe remains especially free, and several news sites publish criticism of the president, parliament and government. Websites blocked during Bakiyev era and by the current parliament have been ordered unblocked either by the executive branch or the courts. The authorities rarely interfere with online fora and social networking sites. More public officials are joining social networks, to interact with citizens freely.

Political Dynamism is on the Rise

Despite the institutional weakness of the government, the degree of political dynamism in Kyrgyzstan is higher compared to other post-Soviet countries. Political parties are becoming more prominent in Kyrgyzstan's political landscape, and competition among them is intensifying. Some parties strive to represent the interests of specific interest groups such as migrants and entrepreneurs, as opposed to narrow political cliques. At the local level in particular, political parties can have a strong impact by engaging minorities, women and youth in solving community issues. Political parties could potentially promote pluralism at the local and national levels.

Ethnic Minorities as a Niche Market and Electorate

Whether nationalist forces approve or not, ethnic minority groups continue to represent an important electoral force, as well as a formidable market force. This is particularly the case in the cities of Bishkek, Osh and Jalalabad, where the population is ethnically mixed. In southern Kyrgyzstan, in particular, local mass media that refuse to broadcast in the Uzbek language will inevitably lose vast market opportunities. Likewise, political parties resorting to ethnic nationalism to generate support during elections may win votes in rural areas, but will lose support in more ethnically diverse urban areas.

The Foundations of a Civic Identity

Research demonstrates that it is common for ethnic minorities to identify with their national citizenship and share a strong loyalty to Kyrgyzstan as a state. Bishkek residents are likely to have a strong civic identity as well. Non-ethnic identity markers are particularly prominent in situations that do not involve group interactions. Given that the foundations of civic identity are already in place among some groups, efforts to promote civic identity are likely to find broad support as well. With the right approach by the national and local governments, civic ideals can gradually be ingrained in the political and social fabric of Kyrgyzstan. Calls for unity, pluralism and diversity may become the norm in the future elections.

Obstacles

Weak State Capacity

Although the legislative base, policies and intentions of the President's Administration are generally conducive to inter-ethnic reconciliation, the institutional base for policy implementation is largely lacking in Kyrgyzstan. Due to frequent changes within the ruling coalition, government cadres have been rotating as well. With each change, policy continuity breaks down, as each new public official brings their own vision into the government. The capacity of institutions across all three branches of power remains weak, with corruption and nepotism plaguing many agencies. Given the weakness of central authorities, local government leaders who impose a sense of stability and security through coercive, top-down methods enjoy local popularity. Confidence in public institutions is low. In fact, most politicians rely on their own informal or private security organizations than law enforcement agencies. Public figures across the political spectrum, including government employees, MPs, journalists and NGO activists, fear mob attacks organized by political forces seeking to bully those who criticize them. Nationalism is habitually used as an instrument to generate local support in fierce political competitions.

Unreformed Judicial Sector

The country's judicial sector is perhaps the least reformed branch of government in Kyrgyzstan. Following the June 2010 violence, justice remains elusive and citizens cannot rely on the impartiality of courts. Kyrgyzstan's courts remain irrelevant to broader efforts of democratization and protecting the freedoms of citizens as provided in the constitution. The national government has done little to promote justice and ensure the rule of law beyond Bishkek. The prolonged process of forming the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, whose main function is to interpret the constitution, allowed various political forces to come up with legislative initiatives that contradict the law and limit the rights of the most vulnerable members of society, including ethnic minorities, women and children.

Stereotypes Among Mono-ethnic Communities

Having ethnic groups concentrated in one geographical area generates distrust towards the state and representatives of another ethnic group, especially if economic resources are scarce or perceived to be scarce. Ethnic tensions are likely to emerge during times of general political instability in the country. Mono-ethnic communities represent a formidable electoral force for candidates willing to use nationalist rhetoric to generate support. Stereotypes, frustration and political fanaticism generated in mono-ethnic communities can spill over to multi-ethnic regions during political crises.

Politicized Identity Among the Majority Group

Deep-seated Soviet notions of nationhood continue to frame discussions about individual and group identities in Kyrgyzstan. Top-down, nationalistic ideas are promoted by political elites who continue to operate with Soviet ideals that put ethnicity at the center of individual and group identity. Such views define the Kyrgyz ethnic group as the titular nationality whose well-being is key to the country's survival. These political views find support among

ethnic Kyrgyz, particularly in rural, mono-ethnic areas where economic resources are scarce.

Politicization of Language

The issue of the Kyrgyz language is deeply politicized by political factions competing for voters among the ethnic-majority population and challenges any discussion of minority rights. The data indicates that while over 70 percent of the population agrees that ethnic minority groups should be allowed to preserve their own cultural heritage and that measures must be implemented to end discrimination against minorities, only half the population thinks that minority groups should be allowed to either study in or access mass media in their own languages. Nationalist forces are quick to use these views to boost their popularity among the ethnic majority group.

Minorities are Under-represented

Since 1991, the number of ethnic minorities represented in parliament, top government positions and local administrations has consistently fallen. In the parliament elected in 2010, minorities made up less than 10 percent of all MPs, while ethnic Uzbeks are represented by only two MPs out of a total of 120. Although the share of female MPs has risen over the past two decades, they, like ethnic minorities, still fall short of meeting the constitutional quota of 30 percent. Since minorities continue to be under-represented, issues related to minority rights are rarely discussed in the parliament or the government. Instead, nationalist and sexist language is frequently used and often finds broad support.

Parliamentary Quotas have not Translated into Pluralism

The established quotas for women and minorities have not yet translated into pluralism in parliament. Existing quotas are not filled, and the numbers of both non-Kyrgyz and female MPs have fallen since the parliament was elected. Additionally, the presence of female or ethnic minority representatives in a

party does not necessarily lead to greater progress on inter-ethnic or gender issues. On the contrary, some female MPs readily vote for legislation that restricts the rights of women and minorities. Finally, the parliament lacks specialized committees to address issues of pluralism.

Lack of Media for Minority Groups

Many ethnic minorities are able to understand at least basic Russian and Kyrgyz. However, information sources in either of these languages are scarce in remote parts of Kyrgyzstan and are often one-sided, reflecting pro-Kremlin views. Uzbek-language media outlets that were shut down in the wake of the 2010 ethnic violence have still not re-opened. Ethnic Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan almost entirely watch television channels broadcast from Uzbekistan. This reinforces their sense of alienation and the segregation from public life in southern parts of the country, and at the national level. Other ethnic groups, such as Tajiks, Dungans, and Chinese living in Kyrgyzstan experience similar problems of accessing media in their native languages.

Modernization has not Affected all Groups

The uneven distribution of economic resources and land between urban and rural areas, north and south, even among different age groups can fuel tensions along ethnic and political lines. Ethnically diverse cities, such as Bishkek and Osh, have seen much stronger economic growth than mono-ethnic rural areas, where poverty is endemic. Kyrgyzstan's youth make up half of the country's population and have limited job opportunities. Their chances of success are largely predetermined by their place of residence (urban/rural), whether they have access to tertiary education and the size of their household. Once the fault lines are ethnicized, however, a long-term approach is needed. While reconciliation efforts guided by the goal of reconciling ethnic groups might prove effective in the short-term, a long-term approach requires addressing uneven modernization, which provides the fodder for conflict.

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Egemberdy Ermatov, State Commission on National Language.

Emilbek Kaptagaev, ex-Presidential Advisor on Inter-Ethnic Relations.

Mira Karybayeva, Head of the Department of Ethnic and Religious Policy and Interaction.

Naken Kasiyev, State Agency on Local Governance and Inter-ethnic Relations.

Kadyr Toktogulov, Press Secretary, President’s Administration.

Members of Parliament

Dastan Bekeshev, MP, Ar-Namys.

Ravshan Jeenbekov, MP, independent.

Representatives of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Bishkek

Atyrkul Alisheva, Director, Institute for Regional Studies (Bishkek).

Dmitry Kabak, Director, Open Viewpoint Foundation (Bishkek).

Dinara Oshurahunova, Director, NGO Coalition for Democracy and Human Rights (Bishkek).

Ainoura Sagynbaeva, Director, SIAR Research and Consulting (Bishkek).

Nurbek Toktakunov, Director, Precedent (Bishkek).

Natalia Utesheva, Program Coordinator, Youth Human Rights Group (Bishkek).

Osh

Sardar Bagishbekov, Director,
Voice of Freedom (Bishkek).

Ikbola Bakhranova, Osh Branch Manager of
Development and Cooperation in Central Asia (Osh).

Sadykjan Makhmudov, Solomon's Ray of Light (Osh).

Sahira Nazarova, NGO Advocacy Center (Osh).

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Experts

Asel Abdyramanova, Osh State University (Osh).

David Guillette, University of Central Asia (Bishkek).

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Sabyr Abdumamuniv, Anchor, Yntymak Radio (Osh).

Sanjar Eraliev, Reporter, Azattyk Radio (Osh).

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Representatives of International/ Regional Organizations:

Ross Brown, Political and Security Officer,
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Chris Burnett, Office of the High Commissioner
for Human Rights (Osh).

Pavlo Byalyk, Office of the United Nations
High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Yuka Hasegawa, United Nations High
Commission for Refugees (Osh).

Richard Haselwood, Country Representative,
Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID).

Tatyana Jiteneva, National Programme Officer,
United Nations Women.

George Katcharava, Institution Building Officer,
OSCE (Bishkek).

Lucien Lefcourt, International Resources Group
(OTI Implementing partner in Osh).

Jomart Ormonbekov, Program Officer, UN Regional
Center for Preventative Diplomacy for Central Asia.

Oleh Protsyk, the Office of the United Nations
High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Anders Troedsson, Deputy Head of Centre,
OSCE (Bishkek).

Alexander Zelichenko, Expert, Eurasian Harm
Reduction Network.

Representatives of International NGOs

Almaz Esengaldiev, Freedom House (Bishkek).

Altaf Hasham, Aga Khan Development Network
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Nana Lambert, Search for Common Ground (Osh).

Residents of Osh

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violence and informal meetings with residents
(families and businesses).

June 2013: Informal conversations with residents of
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the outskirts of Osh city, believed to be related to the
Roma community.

Other

Rotary Club members, Bishkek, October 2012.

Leaders of Ata-Meken, SDPK and smaller opposition
parties who sought Askar Akayev's ouster, 2005-2009.