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Drug Trafficking, State Capacity, and the Post-Soviet Condition in the Kyrgyz Republic

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Drug Trafficking, State Capacity, and the Post-Soviet Condition in the Kyrgyz Republic

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Geography

by

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University of Arkansas
Bachelor of Arts in International Relations, and Middle East Studies, 2017

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council

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Abstract

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent states of Central Asia faced numerous challenges. These included cultivating new national identities and state capacity, managing new borders, and addressing issues of conflict and political violence. Converging with these challenges – a booming trade in opium and heroin originating in neighboring Afghanistan. Central Asia quickly became a key route for opiates originating in Afghanistan and transiting to Russia and Europe. The Kyrgyz Republic lies at the southeastern corner of this region, along one of the world's busiest drug trafficking routes.

This thesis examines state and societal responses to narcotics trafficking in the Kyrgyz Republic with a specific emphasis on the role of ethnicity, religion, kinship, and patronage networks. In doing so, it seeks to discern the role played by narcotics trafficking in the broader political-geographic space of the Republic, paying specific attention to state capacity. Likewise, it is interested in how these processes both shape and are shaped by political-geographic space. It relies on publicly available data provided by the Kyrgyz Government as well as the UNODC. More importantly, it derives context from a series of interviews and observations obtained during fieldwork in the Kyrgyz Republic during the summer of 2018. These interviews – conducted with officials from academia, non-governmental organizations, international governmental organizations, diplomatic missions, and the Kyrgyz government, provide critical context to broader research efforts and previous work conducted on this subject.

This thesis ultimately supports some recent scholarship conducted on narcotics trafficking in the Republic, while also challenging the premises of older discourse on the drug trade in the region. In doing so it hopes to reinvigorate scholarship and policy debates on the Eurasian narcotics trade and broader illicit geographies.

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Seven weeks on the ground in Kyrgyzstan is a seemingly short period of time given the two-year breadth of this project. There are countless others who have assisted me over the past two years - namely members of my cohort, department faculty and staff, and numerous friends across multiple states. Without their support and camaraderie this thesis would not have been possible. In this regard, I owe special thanks to Nani Verzon and Hilary Zedlitz - friendships from which I have greatly benefited personally, professionally, and intellectually. I owe even greater thanks to my family; your love and encouragement are invaluable and infinitely appreciated. Thank you for supporting me in everything I do.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, George, who always loved learning.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Central Asia has long been a fixture for trafficking of Afghan opiates, which account for over 90% of the global heroin supply.¹ Opiates flowing along the “northern route,” transit the Central Asian Republics or Transcaucasia before entering Russia and Eastern Europe. While only accounting for five percent of global seizures in 2015, Russian authorities have claimed that up to twenty percent of heroin seized in Russia is trafficked along this route.²

This research is concerned with the effects of trafficking on the political geography of Central Asia. Namely, it seeks to discern the influence of factors including kinship, ethnicity, and religious affiliation as they pertain to narcotics trafficking and subsequent responses in the Kyrgyz Republic. More importantly, this research is concerned with the role of trafficking and responses as they pertain to political geography and state capacity in the Kyrgyz Republic, with a special emphasis on how these processes both manifest spatially and in turn shape space.

In terms of situating this work, this research examines a subject – transnational narcotics trafficking – often overlooked within political geography and Middle East Studies. It furthermore examines this subject in the context of themes and discourses common within regional studies of both Southwest and Central Asia. More importantly, this research contributes to a body of literature which has remained sporadic in its treatment of this issue, with periodic shifts in interest and disinterest dating to the 1990s. It likewise incorporates mixed methodology – cartographic representation and field interviews – which are also lacking in existing literatures.

¹ Tom Bowman, “Afghan Governor Wants Government To Control Poppy Crop,” NPR.org, accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2016/07/06/484894669/afghan-governor-wants-government-to-control-poppy-crop>.

² UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME, *World Drug Report 2017 (Set of 5 Booklets)*. (Vienna, Austria: UNITED NATIONS, 2017), <https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/index.html>.

In doing so, it hopes to reinvigorate scholarly discussions of the Eurasian drug trade within the discipline of political geography. Beyond academia, this research aims to serve as publicly accessible scholarship on the Eurasian drug trade. In doing so, it hopes to challenge commonplace misconceptions and serve as a resource for analysts and policymakers working on efforts related to US policy in Southwest and Central Asia.

Research Questions

This thesis explores the topic of narcotics trafficking and state capacity the Kyrgyz Republic through a series of research questions. They are as follows:

- How do religious, ethnic, or kinship affiliations affect state and societal responses to narcotics trafficking in the Kyrgyz Republic?
- How do narcotics trafficking and subsequent responses impact state capacity in the Kyrgyz Republic?
- How do both processes manifest spatially?

The first question draws upon many of the continuing challenges faced by the Kyrgyz Republic in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. These issues are but a handful of the challenges faced by the Republic, but also among the most pronounced. The second question assumes that the process of narcotics trafficking plays a key role in shaping state capacity in the Republic. While the notion of state capacity is somewhat of a connotative chimera - as will be discussed in Chapter II - assessing the effects of the narcotics trade on state capacity is crucial to understanding the political geography of Kyrgyzstan. Likewise, assessing state capacity is critical to understanding responses to the narcotics trade. Finally, as a piece of scholarship in geography it is vital to relate how these processes manifest spatially – namely, how do both processes shape the broader political-geographic space of Kyrgyzstan?

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

This thesis represents an attempt to answer these questions in the context of research conducted over a two-year period. As such, this thesis was drafted with a clear set of limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. Limitations include the limited scope of field interviews and access to data. In short, field interviews presented unique challenges, as did obtaining quantitative data. These challenges - further detailed in Chapter III - were addressed to the fullest extent possible considering exigent circumstances.

Regarding delimitations, the scope of this research is limited to the Kyrgyz Republic. While the intent of this research is to provide a framework for conducting further research in Southwest and Central Asia on the relationship between crime, political violence, and state capacity, this thesis limits its focus to a single country. This consideration was influenced by concerns of research feasibility, cost, ease of access, available resources and contacts, and researcher safety. Future research intends to address these questions over a broader geographic context, if possible.

This thesis operates under several assumptions - many of which were directly influenced by fieldwork. Foremost, this thesis assumes that the narratives collected during the course of fieldwork represent a specific, limited perspective in terms of the research questions being assessed - what Sally Cummings and Ole Nørgaard term a “critical case subset.”³ The breakdown of these perspectives based on metadata – interviewee, location, date, language, etc. - will be detailed in Chapter IV. As will be discussed in Chapter V, one of the major challenges

³ Sally N. Cummings and Ole Nørgaard, “Conceptualising State Capacity: Comparing Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan,” *Political Studies* 52, no. 4 (December 2004): 692, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2004.00503.x>.

presented at the conclusion of fieldwork was deciphering competing narratives presented by the perspectives of interviewees.

Fieldwork also proved useful in developing assumptions regarding the integrity of available quantitative data. Namely, as a result of fieldwork this thesis assumes that open-access data detailing annual drug seizures in Kyrgyzstan and the region at large represent a small fraction of what is being trafficked. For those familiar with the region, this seems inherently intuitive considering often-inconsistent reporting by countries, as well as significant levels of political corruption - especially tied to narcotics policing. These numbers are thus viewed as an approximation - as well as with a healthy dose of Disraelian skepticism.

The third assumption of this research pertains to the assumed role of ethnic identity and identity perceptions. As will be discussed in Chapter IV, prior to field research it was assumed that perceived ethnic identity would play a key role in influencing state responses to narcotics trafficking - as it does in the United States and many other countries. Interviews largely disputed this notion. Still, ethnic identity continues to play a critical role in the political geography of the Republic. This assumption will be explored in Chapters II, III, and V.

Finally, this research assumes that trafficking is fundamentally a spatial process in that it both shapes and is shaped by space. This assumption extends to responses to trafficking as well. More importantly, this research assumes that these spatial processes play a larger role in shaping the Kyrgyz Republic as a political-geographic space. This assumption will also be explored further in Chapters II, III, and V.

Terminology and Definitions

Before delving into relevant literature on the topic at-hand, it is imperative to clarify the nomenclature which will be employed within this thesis. This includes various terminology and acronyms utilized throughout the body of this work. The former is detailed in narrative form below, whereas the latter are attached as an appendix (See Appendix A).

Foremost, under the purview of this thesis ‘drugs,’ and ‘narcotics,’ are used to denote “narcotic drugs,” as defined by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Per the UNODC:

“In the context of international drug control, “narcotic drug” means any of the substances, natural or synthetic, in Schedules I and II of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, and that Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol Amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961.”⁴

In this case, narcotics denote both plant-based and synthetic drugs, including opium and opiates, coca and cocaine, amphetamines, hallucinogens, cannabinoids, and a variety of other stimulants and depressants subject to international control regimes.

This thesis details the state and societal responses to narcotics trafficking in the Kyrgyz Republic with the goal of assessing state capacity. This is primarily in the context of trafficking in opiates, i.e. raw and processed opium and heroin. As will be discussed in Chapter V, however, the nature of the narcotics trade in Kyrgyzstan is changing. Synthetic narcotics including amphetamines, club drugs, hallucinogens, and synthetic cannabinoids were repeatedly cited as growing in prominence. Experts interviewed broadly termed these drugs ‘NPS,’ or ‘new psychotropic substances.’ This is a catchall term generally applied to synthetic narcotics which

⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Terminology and Information on Drugs*, 2016, https://www.unodc.org/documents/scientific/Terminology_and_Information_on_Drugs-3rd_edition.pdf.

also appears in official UN reports. Beyond specific instances - which will be discussed - this thesis utilizes the term ‘NPS’ when referring to synthetic narcotics.⁵

Throughout this thesis the Kyrgyz Republic will be referenced in several different ways. While the official country name is the “Kyrgyz Republic,” it may simply be referred to as “Kyrgyzstan.” The latter is considered acceptable and retains widespread usage. Furthermore, the simple short form “the Republic,” may also be employed. In Russian-language sources, the Republic is sometimes designated “Kirghizia,” however this thesis will refrain from doing so unless directly quoting a Russian-language source. Likewise, older source material may use alternate spellings regarding the ethnonym and titular nationality for which the country was named - often employing ‘Kirghiz’ or ‘Kirgiz’ instead of ‘Kyrgyz.’ This thesis will employ the modern spelling and country designation unless an alternate spelling or designation appears in a direct quotation. Citizens of the Republic may alternatively be referred to as “Kyrgyz,” or “Kyrgyzstani,” depending on the context, however these terms are used interchangeably. When discussing “Kyrgyz,” as a titular nationality, it will be clear from context.

Considering this research was conducted in a Kyrgyzstan - formerly a republic of the Soviet Union - it uses the term ‘post-Soviet,’ extensively. In most contexts, this term is being used as a temporal designation to indicate a period following the end of the Soviet Union. There are several instances, however, where this term refers to spatial rather than temporal characteristics. This will be clear from the context. Furthermore, a portion of the literature review in Chapter II will detail the latter usage of the term.

⁵ Anonymous UN Official, Interview with Anonymous UN Official, interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, June 29, 2018; Alexander Zelichenko, Interview with Alexander Zelichenko, interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, July 4, 2018.

When referring to the Middle East, this thesis will use the geographic designation of Southwest Asia. If the context includes North Africa, then Southwest Asia/North Africa will be utilized. Regarding the geographic focus of this thesis - Central Asia - several terms exist within literature on the region which may be referenced. These terms include Central Asia, Eurasia, Central Eurasia, Inner Asia, and Inner Eurasia. This thesis will utilize the term “Central Asia,” when referring to the region – operating under the contemporary definition which indicates the five post-Soviet republics which occupy the stretch of territory between China and the Caspian Sea and between Russia and Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. While this concept of territory will be explored further in Chapter III, generally this definition is informed by the work of acclaimed Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid.⁶ It is likewise informed by drug seizure data sourced from the UNODC. The latter definition includes the countries of the region – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – alongside the countries of the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia – under the broader territorial umbrella of “Central Asia and Transcaucasia.”⁷

This thesis makes use of the term “nexus,” when referring to cooperation and/or collaboration between criminal organizations and other violent non-state actors such as insurgent or terrorist groups. There is considerable debate as to the extent and proper characterization of this phenomena. As such, this concept will further be explored in Chapter II. In general,

⁶ R.M. Alimov, *Tsentrlnaya Asiya - Obschnost Interesov* (Tashkent: Shark, 2005), <https://www.worldcat.org/title/tsentralnaia-aziia-obshchnost-interesov/oclc/171275037>; Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?*, Book, Whole (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994); Alexander von Humboldt, *Asie centrale: Recherches sur les Chaînes des Montagnes et la Climatologie Comparée.*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gide, 1843), <https://archive.org/details/asiacentralerec04humbgoog/page/n8>.

⁷ Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*; UNODC, “Annual Drug Seizures, Kg Equivalents. UNODC World Drug Report 2018.,” UNODC Statistics and Data, 2018, <https://dataunodc.un.org/drugs/seizures>.

however, use of this term is intended to indicate cooperation and/or collaboration between criminal organizations and violent non-state actors.

Finally, this thesis will employ several acronyms. There is a full table of these acronyms included in Appendix A. Several of the more commonly utilized examples are as follows:

- International Governmental Organizations may be referenced as IGOs
- The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan may be referenced as IMU
- Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Internal Affairs may be referenced as MoIA
- The National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic may be referenced as stat.kg
- Non-Governmental Organizations may be referenced as NGOs
- Southwest Asia and North Africa may be referred to as SWANA
- Synthetic Narcotics may be referenced as NPS, New Psychoactive Substances
- The United Nations may be referenced as UN
- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime may be referenced as UNODC

Chapter I Summary

This chapter provided a brief introduction of the research topic and its significance. It then discussed the questions which guided this research endeavor, likewise, discussing the limitations, delimitations, and assumptions under which this research was conducted. Finally, it provided a brief introduction to several unfamiliar terms and concepts central to this work. Moving forward, Chapter II provides a literature review examining three concepts: state and state capacity, narcotics trafficking, and the insurgent-criminal nexus. Chapter III includes a site survey of the region on which research is focused and wherein fieldwork was conducted, respectively examining Central Asia broadly and the Kyrgyz Republic specifically. Chapter IV details data collection methodology, rationale, procedure, and treatment. Research findings are

discussed at length in Chapter V. Finally, Chapter VI provides a conclusion of this thesis and suggests areas for further inquiry.

Chapter II: Drugs, Insurgents, and States

The following literature review seeks to clarify three main concepts as they relate to this research. Foremost, this literature review will examine relevant literature on the narcotics trade in Central Asia. It proceeds to examine literature on the “insurgent-criminal nexus.” Owing to the scant literature in geography on each subject, these sections incorporate information from across the broader spectrum of social sciences. Finally, it assesses concepts of state and state capacity through a review of selected literature from political geography, political science, sociology, and economics. In doing so it seeks to provide an operative framework for concepts of state and state capacity.

A Geography of Drug Trafficking

This thesis focuses on the geography of opiate trafficking in Central Asia. Within Geography, and under the broader purview of social sciences, this remains a niche topic. While considerable academic effort has been devoted to studying cultivation and consumption of narcotics, relatively little effort has been spent examining how drugs transit from producer to consumer. Also puzzling is the dearth of significant material in Geography despite the inherently spatial nature of drug transit. There are numerous plausible explanations for this including safety concerns, the covert nature of the activity and those orchestrating it, and the difficulty-of-access in regard to both research subjects and sites.⁸ These considerations in mind, this section will

⁸ Natalie Koch, “Introduction - Field Methods in ‘Closed Contexts’: Undertaking Research in Authoritarian States and Places: Introduction - Field Methods in ‘Closed Contexts,’” *Area* 45, no. 4 (December 2013): 390–95, <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12044>; Jonathan S. Taylor, Christopher Jasparro, and Kevin Mattson, “Geographers And Drugs: A Survey Of The Literature,” *Geographical Review* 103, no. 3 (July 2013): 415–30, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2013.00007.x>; Johnathan Walker and Jonathan Leib, “Revisiting the Topia Road: Walking in the Footsteps of West and Parsons,” *Geographical Review* 92, no. 4 (2002): 555–81.

provide a brief overview of relevant literature on the Central Asian narcotics trade encountered in geography and other social science fields during research.

“Geographers and Drugs: A Survey of the Literature,” provides the best starting point for surveying relevant literature in political geography on the Eurasian drug trade.⁹ Taylor et al. note that while geographers have made limited contributions - often in a “scattershot,” fashion – these contributions have proved valuable to assessing cultivation and production, trafficking and distribution, sale and consumption, and the broader geopolitics of illegal drugs.¹⁰ In terms of cultivation and production geographies, coca, cocaine, and opium remain broadly studied whereas cannabis and synthetics are often neglected.¹¹ As such, most literature on trafficking focuses on traffic originating in Latin America and terminating in North America or Western Europe; literature on trafficking of Afghan-derived opiates remains scant within the discipline.¹²

Political and critical geography provide more robust literatures on the illicit narcotics trade, particularly examining the relationship between the drug trade, conflict, and institutions. Geographers have also provided critical assessments of global counter-narcotics efforts, notably the U.S. “War on Drugs,” in terms of power structures and globalization.¹³ Geographies of consumption are largely tied to medical geography and ethnography, but in general consumption

⁹ Taylor, Jasparro, and Mattson, “Geographers And Drugs.”

¹⁰ Taylor, Jasparro, and Mattson, 415.

¹¹ Kendra McSweeney et al., “Why Do Narcos Invest in Rural Land?,” *Journal of Latin American Geography* 16, no. 2 (2017): 3–29, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lag.2017.0019>; Zoe Pearson and Nicholas J. Crane, “The Challenge of Feminist Political Geography to State-Centrism in Latin American Geography,” *Journal of Latin American Geography* 16, no. 1 (2017): 185–93, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lag.2017.0011>; Taylor, Jasparro, and Mattson, “Geographers And Drugs,” 416–20.

¹² Taylor, Jasparro, and Mattson, “Geographers And Drugs,” 420.

¹³ Taylor, Jasparro, and Mattson, 421–23.

remains understudied.¹⁴ Some areas, including consumption geographies of drug tourism, remain completely unexplored.¹⁵ Ultimately, geography offers a wellspring of methods, tools, approaches, and subdisciplines which can be employed to contribute to broader scholarship on illicit narcotics.¹⁶

Importantly, Taylor et al. grounds this research in three regards. Foremost they provide justification for this research by indicating a general lack of literature on the Eurasian drug trade within Geography proper. Granted, this is likely tied to the difficult nature of the research topic. According to the authors:

“Why is the geography of illegal drugs so lacking? The difficulty associated with researching illegal drugs is one obvious reason. Factor in the very real threat of personal danger when conducting fieldwork on criminal enterprises and it is clear that geographic work on illegal drugs is considerably more difficult to conduct than geographic work on other agricultural or industrial commodities. Beyond difficulty and personal risk, research on illegal drugs may well be stigmatized by social, political, and cultural currents, to the extent that research in this area is actively discouraged, for example, by Ph.D. committees supervising graduate students.”¹⁷

To be sure, these are both valid concerns and impediments to research. Challenges in this regard will be further explored in Chapters IV and V. Still, such difficulties do not preclude geographic inquiry; in fact, they all but necessitate further exploration. They likewise affirm the value of

¹⁴ Geoffrey DeVerteuil and Robert D. Wilton, “The Geographies of Intoxicants: From Production and Consumption to Regulation, Treatment and Prevention,” *Geography Compass* 3, no. 1 (2009): 478–94; Eugene McCann and Cristina Temenos, “Mobilizing Drug Consumption Rooms: Inter-Place Networks and Harm Reduction Drug Policy,” *Health & Place* 31 (2015): 216–23; Taylor, Jasparro, and Mattson, “Geographers And Drugs,” 424–25; Robert Wilton and Christopher M Moreno, “Critical Geographies of Drugs and Alcohol,” 2012.

¹⁵ Taylor, Jasparro, and Mattson, “Geographers And Drugs,” 427.

¹⁶ Taylor, Jasparro, and Mattson, 426–27.

¹⁷ Taylor, Jasparro, and Mattson, 427.

well-planned fieldwork despite the significant challenges and potential concerns. While these challenges may eventually impede further research, fieldwork nonetheless lends unique and unparalleled observations and context to geographies of narcotics.

As indicated in Taylor et al. there are some geographers conducting extensive research on the narcotics trade, one of whom is Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy. With specific regard to Central Asian opiate trafficking, *Opium* provides a foundational text - simultaneously one of the most comprehensive yet concise summaries of the history, geopolitics, and political economy of the global opium trade.¹⁸ Relying extensively on fieldwork conducted in Southeast and South Asia, Chouvy lends a unique and unmatched expertise to the discourse and traces the deep roots contemporary issues surrounding cultivation, trafficking, and consumption of opiates. With specific regards to Central and Southwest Asia, Chouvy details a history of trafficking dating to the Hellenic era to the present. While opium cultivation was historically confined to Southeast and South Asia – excluding Afghanistan – the strategic geopolitics of British and Russian imperial expansion in the region during the Great Game gradually forced cultivation and trafficking northward.¹⁹ The full consequences of this shift became pronounced following the Soviet-Afghan War and the broader collapse of the Soviet Union.²⁰

While statistics regarding narcotics trafficking in Central Asia are often exaggerated – as will be discussed in Chapter V – Chouvy notes the stark increases in narcotics traffic as reported by the UN and the region’s republics in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Initially, the UN believed

¹⁸ Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, *Opium: Uncovering the Politics of the Poppy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁹ Chouvy, 80–82.

²⁰ Chouvy, 82, 86–88.

that 65% of opiates cultivated in Afghanistan were passing through the region; this estimate was later revised to 15%. Nonetheless, between 1998 and 1999 Tajikistan and Uzbekistan respectively reported a 250% and 600% increase in illicit narcotics trafficking. The following year Kyrgyzstan's Interior Ministry reported a 1600% increase in overall seizures with an 800% increase in heroin specifically.²¹ While the Taliban had recently come to power in Afghanistan, their prohibition on opium cultivation would not be enacted until 2000/2001; this did not preclude their adversaries, the Northern Alliance, from continuing to fund their operations through drug cultivation and trafficking.²²

With regards to Central Asia, Chouvy's work illustrates the challenges faced by the newly independent states of the region in the 1990s – particularly with political violence and struggles to cultivate institutional capacity. Both challenges are intimately linked to the drug trade considering the propensity of Tajik and Uzbek militant groups to fund their activities through criminal enterprise, as well as the challenges faced by the new states of the region in policing their borders.²³ Chouvy's work also discusses the role of terrain, topography, and space in the narcotics trade, noting that cultivation and production of organically-based illicit narcotics is increasingly concentrated in terrain which provides the requisite balance between remoteness

²¹ Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, *Les Territoires de l'opium: Conflits et Trafics Du Triangle d'Or et Du Croissant d'Or (Birmanie, Laos, Thaïlande et Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan)* (Editions Olizane, 2002), 208–20; Chouvy, *Opium*, 87.

²² Douglas Farah, "Terrorist-Criminal Pipelines and Criminalized States: Emerging Alliances," *Prism* 2, no. 3 (2011): 15–32; Joel Hernández, "Terrorism, Drug Trafficking, and the Globalization of Supply," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 4 (2013); Martin Jelsma, "Learning Lessons from the Taliban Opium Ban," *The International Journal of Drug Policy* 16, no. 2 (2005): 98–103.

²³ Svante E. Cornell and Niklas L.P. Swanström, "The Eurasian Drug Trade: A Challenge to Regional Security," *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, no. 4 (July 2006): 10–28, <https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216530402>; Doug Foster, "Cleansing Violence in the Tajik Civil War: Framing from the Dark Side of Democracy," *National Identities* 17, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 353–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2015.1083967>; Jeni Mitchell, "Civilian Victimization during the Tajik Civil War: A Typology and Strategic Assessment," *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 357–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2015.1050286>.

and access.²⁴ Beyond the spatiality of cultivation and production, this discussion further intimates the inherently spatial nature of the trafficking process as well as the direct linkages between trafficking and state capacity, as will be explored later in this section.²⁵

Aside from *Opium*, Chouvy provides critical insight into typologies of space typically associated with geographies of illicit narcotics – namely the idea of “the narco-state.”²⁶ Like terrorism, the notion of a narco-state is widely employed albeit ill-defined. In many discussions of narcotics trafficking, the term “narco-state” is utilized to imply that a nation-state or de-facto state relies on revenues from cultivation, trafficking, or both as its primary source of state income, and by extension a primary fiscal source of state capacity. The term emerged in the 1980s following the ouster of Bolivian dictator Luis Garcia Meza – a coup allegedly financed by drug traffickers.²⁷ Since the inception of the term, the label has been applied in a range of contexts including Colombia, Mexico, and Afghanistan.²⁸ Less commonly considered are Guinea Bissau, Tajikistan, and areas of Myanmar. Kyrgyzstan has also been subject to this characterization.²⁹

²⁴ Chouvy, *Opium*, 88.

²⁵ Chouvy, 89; Jean Gottmann, “Space, Freedom, and Stability,” *International Political Science Review* 5, no. 2 (April 1984): 117–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/019251218400500203>; Mahnaz Z Ispahani, *Roads and Rivals: The Politics of Access in the Borderlands of Asia* (Tauris London, 1989).

²⁶ Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, “The Myth of the Narco-State,” *Space and Polity* 20, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 26–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2015.1052348>.

²⁷ Matt Weiner, *An Afghan 'narco-State'?: Dynamics, Assessment and Security Implications of the Afghan Opium Industry* (Australian National University, Research School of Social Sciences, 2004).

²⁸ Gretchen Peters, *Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling the Taliban and Al Qaeda* (Macmillan, 2009).

²⁹ Chouvy, “The Myth of the Narco-State”; Alexander Kupaadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?,” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 25, no. 6 (November 2014): 1178–85, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2014.01.012>; Davin O Regan and Peter Thompson, “Advancing Stability and

In his critique of the narco-state, Chouvy argues that the entire notion is simultaneously overused and ill defined – rendering it a faulty ideation of space. Furthermore, he argues the term should only be utilized in the context of states where the state itself is an active sponsor of the narcotics trade and where a majority of overall GDP is derived from this activity. This bimodal condition in mind, a true narco-state remains elusive. While many alleged cases have robust illicit economies with various degrees of state involvement and/or benefit, in Chouvy’s estimation there are currently no states which truly qualify as narco-states. In further challenging this trend, Chouvy explores critical discourse on the term.³⁰ This mirrors certain critical and feminist geographies which discuss the use of terminology as a manifestation of hegemony and scalar power differentials between the global north and the global south in discourses of state failure and fragility. The common thread between these discourses is the idea that terms like “failed state,” and “narco-state,” are often used to advance ulterior geopolitical motives – often tied to securitization and counterterrorism.³¹

Chouvy’s critique of the notion of the “narco-state,” raises several questions. Foremost – what is the proper way to characterize the proverbial narco-state considering its prevalence in literature on narcotics trafficking?³² In this regard, rather than refigure Chouvy’s critique, it is

Reconciliation in Guinea-Bissau: Lessons from Africa’s First Narco-State” (NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIV FORT MCNAIR DC AFRICA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, 2013).

³⁰ Chouvy, “The Myth of the Narco-State.”

³¹ Morten Bøås and Kathleen M Jennings, “‘Failed States’ and ‘State Failure’: Threats or Opportunities?,” *Globalizations* 4, no. 4 (2007): 475–85; Mary Manjikian, “Diagnosis, Intervention, and Cure: The Illness Narrative in the Discourse of the Failed State,” *Alternatives* 33, no. 3 (2008): 335–57.

³² Ashley Neese Bybee, “Narco State or Failed State? Narcotics and Politics in Guinea-Bissau,” 2011; Ashley-Louise Bybee, “The Narco-Curse in West Africa,” 2009; Joshua Kucera, “The Narcostate,” *Politico Magazine*, March 2014; Filippo De Danieli, “Beyond the Drug-Terror Nexus: Drug Trafficking and State-Crime Relations in Central Asia,” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 25, no. 6 (2014): 1235–1240; Paul Rexton Kan, *Drug Trafficking and International Security* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Dirk Kohnert, “Democratization via Elections in an African ‘narco-State’? The Case of Guinea-Bissau,” 2010; Kupertadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”;

perhaps best to acknowledge that while a “narco-state,” may not exist there are doubtless states which benefit from illicit activity. Unrecognized territorial entities – quasi-states – often fall within this category.³³ One example is Transnistria - the breakaway region between Moldova and Ukraine. Transnistria is perceived as reliant on smuggling – everything from chicken to weapons – as a primary economic activity.³⁴ While diplomats have argued that these reports are exaggerated, there are other examples in the South Caucasus and Central Asia of codified states where such activity is more pronounced – including Armenia, Georgia, and Tajikistan.³⁵ Beyond the purview of the former Soviet Union, a number of countries benefit as havens for activities such as illicit finance – including Panama, the Bahamas, and Malta. For their part, state elites themselves often engage in or directly benefit from illicit activity.

O Regan and Thompson, “Advancing Stability and Reconciliation in Guinea-Bissau”; Letizia Paoli et al., “TAJIKISTAN: THE RISE OF A NARCO-STATE,” *JOURNAL OF DRUG ISSUES*, 2007, 30; Thomas Schweich, “Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?,” *New York Times Magazine* 27 (2008); Weiner, *An Afghan 'narco-State'?: Dynamics, Assessment and Security Implications of the Afghan Opium Industry*.

³³ Pål Kolstø, “The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States,” *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 6 (November 2006): 723–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343306068102>.

³⁴ John Beyer, “Transnistria: In Search of a Settlement for Moldova’s Breakaway Region,” *St Antony’s International Review* 6, no. 1 (2010): 165–187; Kolstø, “The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States”; Steven Lee Myers, “Ukraine Battles Smugglers as Europe Keeps Close Eye,” *The New York Times*, May 28, 2006, sec. Europe, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/28/world/europe/28ukraine.html>; W. Alejandro Sanchez, “The ‘Frozen’ Southeast: How the Moldova-Transnistria Question Has Become a European Geo-Security Issue,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 22, no. 2 (2009): 153–176; S Wolff, “The Transnistrian Issue: Moving beyond the Status-Quo,” n.d., 44.

³⁵ Leslie Holmes, “Crime, Organised Crime and Corruption in Post-Communist Europe and the CIS,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 42, no. 2 (June 2009): 265–87, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2009.04.002>; Kucera, “The Narcostate”; Alexander Kupatadze, “Accounting for Diverging Paths in Most Similar Cases: Corruption in Baltics and Caucasus,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 67, no. 2 (March 2017): 187–208, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-016-9658-y>; Alexander Kupatadze, “Political Corruption in Eurasia: Understanding Collusion between States, Organized Crime and Business,” ed. Gavin Slade and Matthew Light, *Theoretical Criminology* 19, no. 2 (May 2015): 198–215, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480615574404>; Alexander Kupatadze, “‘Transitions after Transitions’: Coloured Revolutions and Organized Crime in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan,” n.d., 273; Lobjakas, “Moldova: Western Diplomats Say Reports Of Smuggling From Transdnierster Likely Exaggerated,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1062030.html>.

This intimates the second question raised by Chouvy’s work; namely, how is the “state,” defined? Few countries in the international system would consider adopting policies explicitly favorable to illicit narcotics trafficking. In many countries, however, individual elites or specific institutions often directly engage in illicit activity as a method of sustainment.³⁶ This is as true of quasi-states as it is of licit states and takes a variety of forms. Kleptocracy - where elites utilize the privilege and financial resources afforded by their status as state elites for personal benefit – is one such iteration. While not a new concept, various scholarship has covered this issue in detail over the past decade. This notably includes *Why Nations Fail* and *Thieves of State* – both of which are premised on the notion of kleptocracy as a key hinderance to the development of a functional state.³⁷ Central Asia is rife with examples of such behavior –sometimes linked to the politics of space, spectacle, and new nationalism.³⁸ In the case of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan there have long-existed allegations that the same elites pilfering state coffers also benefit from the narcotics trade.³⁹ In these comparatively nascent states, Charles Tilly’s characterization of state formation as a form of organized crime rings particularly salient.⁴⁰ That noted, a key flaw of Chouvy’s argument is the over-emphasis on the overall institutions of the state to the detriment of individual elites and/or singular institutions within the state engaging in illicit activity as a

³⁶ Kolstø, “The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States.”

³⁷ Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 2012); Sarah Chayes, *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*, Book, Whole (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015).

³⁸ Natalie Koch, *The Geopolitics of Spectacle: Space, Synecdoche, and the New Capitals of Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2018); Philip Shishkin, *Restless Valley: Revolution, Murder, and Intrigue in the Heart of Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

³⁹ Kupatadze, “Political Corruption in Eurasia”; Kucera, “The Narcostate”; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*.

⁴⁰ Charles Tilly, “Warmaking and Statemaking as Organized Crime,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, by Peter B. Evans 1944, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1–29.

means of personal sustainment. This is as true of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as it is of many other nation-states where patronage politics and kinship ties play a dominant role in shaping the political apparatus of the state, and where the lines between crime and politics are vague and obscured.⁴¹

Beyond Chouvy's critical scholarship in Geography on the opium trade, several other notable contributions to drug geographies include recent work on geographies of coca production and trafficking in Latin America.⁴² Other salient work includes that of Kyle T. Evered – whose historical geography and oral histories of opium-poppy cultivation in rural Anatolia served as an inspiration for interview-based fieldwork.⁴³ Considering the linkages between trafficking, political violence, and conflict, Philippe Le Billon's "The Political Ecology of War," proves similarly illuminative in examining how non-state actors utilize extraction and trafficking of illicit resources as sources of sustainment.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Kupatadze, "Accounting for Diverging Paths in Most Similar Cases"; Kupatadze, "Political Corruption in Eurasia"; Kupatadze, "Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?"; Lawrence P. Markowitz 1970, *State Erosion: Unlootable Resources and Unruly Elites in Central Asia*, 1st ed., Book, Whole (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.7591/j.ctt32b5s6>.

⁴² McSweeney et al., "Why Do Narcos Invest in Rural Land?"; Kendra McSweeney, *The Impact of Drug Policy on the Environment* (Open Society Foundations (OSF), 2015); Kendra McSweeney et al., "Drug Policy as Conservation Policy: Narco-Deforestation," *Science* 343, no. 6170 (2014): 489–490; Pearson and Crane, "The Challenge of Feminist Political Geography to State-Centrism in Latin American Geography"; Zoe Pearson, "'Coca Got Us Here and Now It's Our Weakness: Fusarium Oxysporum and the Political Ecology of a Drug War Policy Alternative in Bolivia,'" *International Journal of Drug Policy* 33 (2016): 88–95; Zoe Pearson, "Coca Sí, Cocaína No? The Intimate Politics of International Drug Control Policy and Reform in Bolivia" (PhD Thesis, The Ohio State University, 2016); Steven E. Sesnie et al., "A Spatio-Temporal Analysis of Forest Loss Related to Cocaine Trafficking in Central America," *Environmental Research Letters* 12, no. 5 (2017): 054015.

⁴³ Kyle T. Evered, "TRADITIONAL ECOLOGIES OF THE OPIUM POPPY AND ORAL HISTORY IN RURAL TURKEY*," *Geographical Review* 101, no. 2 (April 2011): 164–82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2011.00085.x>; Kyle T. Evered, "'POPPIES ARE DEMOCRACY!' A CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS OF OPIUM ERADICATION AND REINTRODUCTION IN TURKEY*," *Geographical Review* 101, no. 3 (July 2011): 299–315, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2011.00098.x>.

⁴⁴ Philippe Le Billon, "The Political Ecology of War: Natural Resources and Armed Conflicts," *Political Geography* 20, no. 5 (June 2001): 561–84, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298\(01\)00015-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298(01)00015-4).

Outside of Geography, investigative journalism and other social sciences including International Relations, Political Science, and Security Studies provide good scholarship on the relationship between trafficking, crime, political violence, and state capacity. This includes Gretchen Peters *Seeds of Terror* – which explores the linkages between the Taliban and other anti-government militants in Afghanistan and the opiate trade; Peters work also provides stark commentary on the challenges this relationship poses to long-term efforts at cultivating stability, state, peace, and prosperity in Afghanistan.⁴⁵ Sergey Gulonov’s work on trafficking between Russia and Kazakhstan goes into considerable depth in detailing the challenges encountered by Russian and Kazakh efforts to police narcotics trafficking across a seven thousand kilometer land border.⁴⁶ Finally, several further articles which examine trafficking at national and regional scales are insightful in their findings and commentary pertaining to this research.

Foremost is “The Eurasian Drug Trade: A Challenge to Regional Security,” by Svante Cornell and Niklas Swanström.⁴⁷ Cornell and Swanström are insightful about the challenges posed by trafficking at a regional level and to the individual governments of Central Asia, and also reiterate the close links between violent non-state actors and the narcotics trade. Based on the events of the late 1990s and early 2000s, at the time this analysis was well-founded. In the former Soviet periphery, Tajikistan was emerging from a brutal civil war which had generally seen an increase in criminality as a result of various factions utilizing criminal enterprise to

⁴⁵ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*.

⁴⁶ Sergey Golunov, in *Drug-Trafficking through the Russia-Kazakhstan Border: Challenge and Responses*, 2007, 331–49, http://src-home.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no14_ses/13_golonov.pdf.

⁴⁷ Cornell and Swanström, “The Eurasian Drug Trade.”

sustain their activities.⁴⁸ During the same period, a nascent militant Islamist movement – the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) – was alleged to be financing its operations across the region through involvement in the heroin trade.⁴⁹ At the current juncture, the article proves useful as a framework for examining the issue of narcotics trafficking through a Security Studies framework. It likewise serves as a temporal snapshot of trafficking and militancy of the region, but does not necessarily reflect current trends seeing as groups such as the IMU and other Islamist militants are viewed as playing an increasingly minor role in terrorism and trafficking inside Central Asia.⁵⁰

The best empirical work encountered during research is that of Mariya Omelicheva and Lawrence Markowitz. Funded by a Department of Defense Minerva Grant, their work builds on that of Cornell and Swanström – seeking to assess whether the linkages between violent non-state actors and traffickers are indeed pronounced as alleged. Using aggregate data including yearly drug seizures and geolocations of terrorist attacks and individual drug seizures, they conclude that total volume of seizures in a given province or oblast is “a significant and positive predictor of terrorist violence,” by nonstate actors.⁵¹ However, they likewise caution that there

⁴⁸ Foster, “Cleansing Violence in the Tajik Civil War”; Mitchell, “Civilian Victimization during the Tajik Civil War.”

⁴⁹ Cornell and Swanström, “The Eurasian Drug Trade.”

⁵⁰ Kapatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”; Jacob Zenn, “The IMU Is Extinct: What next for Central Asia’s Jihadis?,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 2016.

⁵¹ Mariya Y. Omelicheva and Lawrence Markowitz, “Does Drug Trafficking Impact Terrorism? Afghan Opioids and Terrorist Violence in Central Asia,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, January 29, 2018, 13–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1434039>.

are other significant covariates which may influence these patterns. They also note that state involvement in illicit trafficking is prevalent, particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.⁵²

Finally, Alexander Kupatadze provides a superb assessment of the drug trafficking landscape in Kyrgyzstan circa the early 2010s.⁵³ In “Kyrgyzstan - a virtual narcostate?” he challenges the two commonplace assumptions regarding the trafficking landscape in Kyrgyzstan based on a series of seventy field interviews he conducted during 2012 while working as a consultant to the Kyrgyz government.⁵⁴ His argument posits that an accurate picture of the narcotics trade in Kyrgyzstan remains murky. Despite this, he notes that the discussion has traditionally been dominated by two perspectives, one which alleges considerable state involvement in trafficking and the other which emphasizes the role of non-state actors including criminal and Islamist groups.⁵⁵ Kupatadze argues the reality is somewhere between, and there is evidence to support both claims.⁵⁶ As will be discussed in Chapter V, this perspective was consistently reaffirmed during interviews.

This section of literature review serves as the basis for examining the issue of narcotics trafficking in Kyrgyzstan under the discipline of Geography. As noted, existing literature within the discipline on the Eurasian narcotics trade is minimal; literature from other disciplines proves useful, albeit almost equally scant in its coverage of the subject. In terms of relating this

⁵² Omelicheva and Markowitz, “Does Drug Trafficking Impact Terrorism?”

⁵³ Alexander Kupatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?,” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 25, no. 6 (November 2014): 1178–85, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2014.01.012>.

⁵⁴ Kupatadze, 1178–79.

⁵⁵ Kupatadze, 1178.

⁵⁶ Kupatadze, 1178.

literature to the survey-site, there are several key points which should be addressed. Foremost, Kyrgyzstan proves a relevant case study for assessing the geography of narcotics trafficking and responses, as well as the subsequent influence of these processes on state capacity, due to its situation along a major trafficking route. It is a comparatively safe and open field site where the issue is pertinent, and methods such as semi-structured interviews with officials remain feasible. Furthermore, this section of literature review should make clear that examining the role of narcotics trafficking – and broader illicit activities at that – is a worthwhile endeavor within Geography given how these processes shape and are shaped by space and state, fall under a major research lacunae, and may prove useful to regionally-focused policy development efforts. Finally, while the state doubtless plays a major role in trafficking in Eurasia, key discourses in existing literature necessitate a brief exploration of the role of non-state actors in trafficking processes.

Insurgents, Criminals, and Terrorists

Within broader discourses of involvement of non-state actors in narcotics trafficking, there are several key themes which are relevant to examine in the context of this research. Foremost is the role of “lootable resources,” in the onset and sustainment of violent armed conflict. Key literature on civil war onset often ties the presence of these resources to conflict onset and sustainment – particularly as factions struggle to control and profit from these resources. While gemstones and hydrocarbon deposits are typically assessed in this regard, areas under narcotics cultivation and/or major trafficking routes have likewise proved an important consideration for social scientists studying the relationship between resources and conflict

onset.⁵⁷ In the context of this thesis, there are several important takeaways from this literature, including competition between non-state actors over the “resource,” of areas under cultivation and trafficking routes, as well as the link between these “lootable resources,” issues with state capacity, and concerns over conflict onset. Compared with neighboring states such as Tajikistan and Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan experiences few issues with regard to violent competition over narcotics resources. Nonetheless, narcotics trafficking plays a major role in government corruption and undermines the legitimacy of a state which has historically struggled with legitimacy and capacity since independence. Furthermore, in the case of Kyrgyzstan violent non-state actors derive a key source of rents from trafficking and other illicit activities - often to a degree that allows them to engage in official politics.⁵⁸ To paraphrase Clausewitz’s dictum, in Kyrgyzstan crime is merely “politics by other means.”⁵⁹

To that effect, it is also necessary to examine the various manners by which involvement by violent non-state actors in the narcotics trade is characterized. Scholarship originating from Military and Security Studies is useful in this regard. A key example of this is the idea of the “insurgent-criminal nexus.”⁶⁰ Employed across a range of contexts – albeit often with deference

⁵⁷ Richard M. Auty, *Resource Abundance and Economic Development: Improving the Performance of Resource-Rich Countries* (UNU-WIDER, 1998); Halvard Buhaug and Scott Gates, “The Geography of Civil War” 39, no. 4 (2002): 17; Indra De Soysa, “6. The Resource Curse: Are Civil Wars Driven by Rapacity or Paucity?,” 2000; Le Billon, “The Political Ecology of War”; Michael Ross, “The Natural Resource Curse: How Wealth Can Make You Poor,” *Natural Resources and Violent Conflict: Options and Actions*, 2003, 17–42.

⁵⁸ Kapatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”

⁵⁹ Carl Clausewitz, *On War* (Penguin UK, 1982).

⁶⁰ Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, “Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016); Svante E Cornell, “The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration?” 4, no. 1 (2006): 31; Glenn E Curtis and Tara Karacan, “THE NEXUS AMONG TERRORISTS, NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS, WEAPONS PROLIFERATORS, AND ORGANIZED CRIME NETWORKS IN WESTERN EUROPE,” n.d., 33; De Danieli, “Beyond the Drug-Terror Nexus”; Steven Hutchinson and Pat O’malley, “A Crime–Terror Nexus? Thinking on Some of the Links between Terrorism and Criminality,” *Studies in Conflict Terrorism* 30, no. 12 (2007): 1095–1107; Kapatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”; Lawrence P Markowitz, “STATE RESPONSES TO TERRORISM-TRAFFICKING

to Islamist militants – the nexus typology essentially argues that violent non-state actors such as insurgent or terrorist groups will cooperate with organized criminal elements in order to obtain funding and/or achieve tactical and strategic goals. In one sense, this characterization is intuitive and has several examples across a range of contexts associated with narcotics trafficking – including the Peruvian Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*; SL), the M19 Movement, and the Taliban (excluding 1999 and 2000), among others.⁶¹ With this in mind, taken to its logical extreme this characterization can become facile if not vapid – utilized for the purposes of fear mongering and propaganda within dialogues of security and securitization. Therefore, it is critical to view the concept of a “nexus,” with specific context, history, space, and place in mind to avoid falling into this trap.

A more intuitive iteration of this concept is advanced by Brad Nicholson and Arnie Hammari, who argue that violent non-state actors and organized criminal groups exist along a spectrum – alternatively a “continuum” - and move as needed between political and criminal activities in terms of necessity, expediency, and sustainment.⁶² In supporting their case, the authors cite African al Qaeda franchises such as al Shabaab in Somalia and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb as examples of groups who routinely shift their activities between crime such

NEXUS IN KYRGYZSTAN: SHORT TERM RISKS, LONG TERM PROSPECTS,” n.d., 8; Chester G. Oehme III, “Terrorists, Insurgents, and Criminals—Growing Nexus?,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 1 (2008): 80–93; Omelicheva and Markowitz, “Does Drug Trafficking Impact Terrorism?”; Mariya Y Omelicheva and Lawrence Markowitz, “A Trafficking-Terrorism Nexus in Central Asia,” n.d., 3; Peng Wang, “The Crime-Terror Nexus: Transformation, Alliance, Convergence,” *Asian Social Science* 6, no. 6 (2010): 11.

⁶¹ Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World’s Greatest Outlaw* (Grove/Atlantic, Inc., 2007); Jose E. Gonzales, “Guerrillas and Coca in the Upper Huallaga Valley,” in *The Shining Path of Peru* (Springer, 1994), 123–143; Kolstø, “The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States”; Peters, *Seeds of Terror*.

⁶² Tamara Makarenko, “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism,” *Global Crime* 6, no. 1 (2004): 129–145; Brad Nicholson and Arnie Hammari, “Obscured in the Margins: Crime, Terrorism, and the Rule of Law,” *THE NORWICH REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME* 1, no. 2 (October 2016): 5.

as smuggling and kidnapping, insurgency, and terrorism.⁶³ This characterization of such activity is well represented within a number of other examples globally encompassing everything from narcotics and antiquities trafficking to hostage taking and cigarette and oil smuggling.⁶⁴ The concept of a spectrum is particularly applicable to Kyrgyzstan, where in addition to occasional violence, criminal organizations often engage in a wide range of licit and illicit activities, from politics and legitimate business ventures to trafficking in narcotics and other goods.⁶⁵

While these conceptualizations of linkages between crime and terrorism prove useful in terms of analyzing existing discourses on the relationship between crime, political violence, and state capacity, Kyrgyzstan presents a difficult case study considering comparatively minimal political violence in relation to many traditional cases. It is thus more expedient to adapt the nexus and spectrum models to the Republic in terms of crime and politics. On one hand, individuals affiliated with the state can be directly observed cooperating with or facilitating criminal activity. On the other, rather than a nexus such state elites and criminals can be thought of as engaging in a spectrum of licit and illicit activities to further their own objectives – financial or political. This includes corruption and kleptocracy, but also extends to narcotics

⁶³ Nicholson and Hammari, “Obscured in the Margins.”

⁶⁴ Peter B. Campbell, “The Illicit Antiquities Trade as a Transnational Criminal Network: Characterizing and Anticipating Trafficking of Cultural Heritage,” *International Journal of Cultural Property* 20, no. 2 (2013): 113–153; Michel Chossudovsky, “Kosovo” Freedom Fighters” Financed by Organized Crime,” *Peace Research* 31, no. 2 (1999): 29–42; Cornell, “The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration?”; Svante E. Cornell, “The Interaction of Drug Smuggling, Human Trafficking, and Terrorism,” in *Human Trafficking and Human Security* (Routledge, 2012), 60–78; Kolstø, “The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States”; Borzou Daragahi and Erika Solomon, “Fuelling Isis Inc.,” *Financial Times* 21 (2014); Le Billon, “The Political Ecology of War”; John Pipkins, “ISIL and the Illicit Antiquities Trade,” *International Affairs Review* 24 (2016): 102; Louise I. Shelley and Sharon A. Melzer, “The Nexus of Organized Crime and Terrorism: Two Case Studies in Cigarette Smuggling,” *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 32, no. 1 (2008): 43–63; Ekaterina Sokirianskaya, “5 State and Violence in Chechnya,” *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, 2014, 93; Ben Taub, “The Real Value of The ISIS Antiquities Trade,” *The New Yorker* 4 (2015).

⁶⁵ Kupatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”

trafficking. During their tenure in power, the Bakiev family proved a notable example of this – shuttering the State Drug Control Agency (SDCA) due to their alleged ties to trafficking run by members of the *vory-v-zakone* (literally “thieves in law”). Alternatively, Bayman Erkinbaev – described as the first drug kingpin of Kyrgyzstan – began his criminal career as a street thug and gradually came to be one of the most powerful criminals in the country in addition to becoming a popular political figure in the south. This was in-part facilitated by Kyrgyz politicians seeking to balance the power and influence of organized crime affiliated with ethnic Uzbeks in the south.⁶⁶ As Kupatadze alleges, this fits within a broader pattern of state-crime collusion in many countries of the former Soviet Union.⁶⁷

Granted, this issue is not confined to the Kyrgyz Republic. All neighboring co-regionalists experience similar issues under different circumstances – whether direct state criminality in Tajikistan or widespread and deep-seated corruption that predominates the governments and political apparatuses of the region. This will be explored to a greater degree in Chapter V – namely in regard to how such criminality impacts state capacity. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to examine concepts of state capacity and how they apply to Kyrgyzstan.

Defining the State

Defining the state is as important to this thesis as defining state capacity. In many ways the former precludes the latter. As such, this section of literature review will briefly detail several

⁶⁶ Andrew R. Bond and Natalie R. Koch, “Interethnic Tensions in Kyrgyzstan: A Political Geographic Perspective,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 51, no. 4 (July 2010): 531–62, <https://doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.51.4.531>; Kupatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?,” 1179–80.

⁶⁷ Kupatadze, “Political Corruption in Eurasia.”

conceptions of state and stateness deemed relevant to this research. These include discussions of state and nation, as well as discussions of territory, typologies of state failure, and de-facto states.

In any discussion of stateness, it is critical to highlight the difference between nation, state, and nation state. Benedict Anderson provides arguably the best and most widely-cited definition of nation – “an imagined community which is both limited and sovereign.”⁶⁸ As will be discussed in the next section, states are typically defined in terms of their capacity. Traditionally, states are envisioned in Weberian terms: a set of political and bureaucratic institutions which governs a sovereign territorial entity through a legitimate monopoly on coercion by force.⁶⁹ States are likewise often conceived as entities which provide services and maintain rule-of-law within the territory they control.⁷⁰ In International Relations, a state typically denotes a Westphalian entity which holds a degree of internal and external sovereignty over a defined territory with a permanent population. Finally, the nation-state project seeks to align the boundaries of the state and the nation.⁷¹

Within Political Geography, state theory has a contentious history owing to its roots in social Darwinism and its role in the rise of Nazism. After the Second World War, the subdiscipline experienced a lull in regard to state theory. The end of the Cold War reinvigorated

⁶⁸ Benedict R. O’G. (Benedict Richard O’Gorman) Anderson 1936-2015, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Book, Whole (London;New York; Verso, 1991).

⁶⁹ Jim Glassman, “State Power beyond the ‘territorial Trap’: The Internationalization of the State,” *Political Geography* 18, no. 6 (August 1999): 677, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298\(99\)00013-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298(99)00013-X); MAX WEBER, *POLITICS AS A VOCATION*, Book, Whole, 1965.

⁷⁰ Jean-Germain Gros, “Towards a Taxonomy of Failed States in the New World Order: Decaying Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and Haiti,” *Third World Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (September 1996): 456, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599615452>.

⁷¹ Carl Dahlman and Gearóid Ó Tuathail, “The Legacy of Ethnic Cleansing: The International Community and the Returns Process in Post-Dayton Bosnia–Herzegovina,” *Political Geography* 24, no. 5 (June 2005): 569–99, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2005.01.007>.

the discussion, however.⁷² New, critical discussions of state and territory were strongly influenced by preceding developments in Marxist and Feminist Geographies, and came to encompass a number of issues tied to territory ranging from globalization to the redrawing of boundaries and emergence of new forms of state and territory.⁷³ There are several key threads to this literature, one of which challenged the continued relevance of the state as an entity. In brief, the end of the Cold War resulted in significant speculation that the processes of globalization would gradually reduce the importance of the nation-state as the primary actor in geopolitics and international relations.⁷⁴ Other scholarship in critical geography has challenged these globalization and deterritorialization narratives, in essence arguing that the frenzied discussions of globalization and deterritorialization which occurred following the collapse of the Soviet Union – particularly within news-media outlets – displayed little cognizance of the reality of the nature of both globalization and the Westphalian system.⁷⁵ Ongoing discussions in the subdiscipline have refuted the notion of the “death,” of the state – instead claiming the value of territory as a resource – with some discussions going as far to argue for the incorporation of

⁷² Virginie Mamadouh and Gertjan Dijkink, “Geopolitics, International Relations and Political Geography: The Politics of Geopolitical Discourse,” *Geopolitics* 11, no. 3 (2006): 349–366; Virginie Mamadouh, “Reclaiming Geopolitics: Geographers Strike Back,” *Geopolitics* 4, no. 1 (1999): 118–138.

⁷³ David Newman and Anssi Paasi, “Fences and Neighbours in the Postmodern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography,” *Progress in Human Geography* 22, no. 2 (1998): 186–207.

⁷⁴ Neil Brenner, “Beyond State-Centrism? Space, Territoriality, and Geographical Scale in Globalization Studies,” *Theory and Society* 28, no. 1 (1999): 39–78; Glassman, “State Power beyond the ‘territorial Trap’”; William I. Robinson, “Beyond Nation-State Paradigms: Globalization, Sociology, and the Challenge of Transnational Studies,” in *Sociological Forum*, vol. 13 (Springer, 1998), 561–594; Gearóid Ó Tuathail, “Political Geography III: Dealing with Deterritorialization,” *Progress in Human Geography* 22, no. 1 (February 1998): 81–93, <https://doi.org/10.1191/030913298673827642>.

⁷⁵ Stuart Elden, “Missing the Point: Globalization, Deterritorialization and the Space of the World,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, no. 1 (2005): 8–19; Philip F. Kelly, “The Geographies and Politics of Globalization,” *Progress in Human Geography* 23, no. 3 (1999): 379–400; Newman and Paasi, “Fences and Neighbours in the Postmodern World.”

vertical volume into conceptualizations of territory.⁷⁶ Taylor specifically conceptualizes the state as a territorial container – to be used for war-making and defense, economic development, nationalism, social welfare, and political activities.⁷⁷

Failed state literature also provides useful paradigms for examining state and territory. This includes work by Jean-Germain Gros, who seeks a more nuanced typology of failed states, as well as Pal Kolstø, who examines how quasi-states exist in a state of limbo between statehood and lack thereof. Gros' conceptualization of failed states is imagined around five typologies of failed states: the anarchic, the mirage, the anemic, the captured, and the in-vitro.⁷⁸ By contrast, Kolstø focusses on quasi-states – state projects which exist in some form as territorial entities but have otherwise failed to receive international recognition. Conditions in quasi-states often mirror those of the various typologies of failed state discussed by Gros, with several notable exceptions.⁷⁹ *Why Nations Fail* also provides a foundational work in state-failure literature, arguing that historical precedents play a key role in shaping the future of a state; likewise, a state's economic and political institutions are symbiotically linked and one cannot succeed

⁷⁶ John Agnew, "Sovereignty Regimes: Territoriality and State Authority in Contemporary World Politics," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, no. 2 (June 2005): 437–61, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.2005.00468.x>; John Agnew, "Mapping Political Power beyond State Boundaries: Territory, Identity, and Movement in World Politics," *Millennium* 28, no. 3 (1999): 499–521; Stuart Elden, "Secure the Volume: Vertical Geopolitics and the Depth of Power," *Political Geography* 34 (May 2013): 35–51, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2012.12.009>; Stuart Elden, "Land, Terrain, Territory," *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 6 (December 2010): 799–817, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132510362603>; Stuart Elden, "Governmentality, Calculation, Territory," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 3 (June 2007): 562–80, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d428t>; Peter Taylor, "The State as Container: Territoriality in the Modern World-System," *Progress in Human Geography* 18, no. 2 (1994): 151–62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030913259401800202>.

⁷⁷ Taylor, "The State as Container," 153–56.

⁷⁸ Gros, "Towards a Taxonomy of Failed States in the New World Order."

⁷⁹ Kolstø, "The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States."

without the success of another – with success defined as inclusive institutions.⁸⁰ The final key thread to examine within literature on state failure is critical scholarship – which challenges the underlying assumptions and narratives surrounding state failure through Marxist and feminist discourses. Overarching themes within this literature involve critiques of the use of body and disease narratives for describing state failure, the role and responsibility of outside entities for state failure, and the weaponization of the term as a tool to serve specific geopolitical interests.⁸¹ This critical discourse provides an important contrast to scholarship on state failure which focuses on policies rather than structures.

How then is the state defined in the context of the Kyrgyz Republic? This research adopts the approach that a single typology of state in the context of discussing capacity in the Republic is simplistic and lacks nuance. Instead, it is more useful to examine Kyrgyzstan as a state which embodies a range of characteristics embodied within various typologies of state. This includes aspects of licit, Westphalian, nation-state, territorial containers envisioned by scholarship in International Relations and Political Geography as well as aspects of illicit, failed, and quasi-states. In the former regard, Kyrgyzstan possesses international sovereignty, a consistent population, and nominal control over its territory. While not ethnically homogenous to the point of some post-Soviet states, it nonetheless strives to be titular nation-state entity based on shared conceptions of culture, history, and national identity among ethnic Kyrgyz.⁸²

⁸⁰ Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*.

⁸¹ Bøås and Jennings, “‘Failed States’ and ‘State Failure’: Threats or Opportunities?”; Manjikian, “Diagnosis, Intervention, and Cure: The Illness Narrative in the Discourse of the Failed State”; Michael J. Watts, “Conjunctures and Crisis: Food, Ecology and Population, and the Internationalization of Capital,” *Journal of Geography* 86, no. 6 (1987): 292–299.

⁸² Iraj Bashiri, “Kyrgyz National Identity,” *University of Minnesota*, 1999; Iraj Bashiri, “Manas: The Kyrgyz Epic,” *Working Papers on Central Asia and Iran*, 1999; Robert Lowe, “Nation Building and Identity in the Kyrgyz Republic,” *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, 2003, 106–131; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*; Azamat Temirkoulov,

Considering the latter, Kyrgyzstan embodies aspect of state failure and quasi-stateness, from the involvement of state elites in criminal enterprise to widespread institutional corruption and struggles to maintain sovereignty over territory. Granted, this does not mean that the Republic is at risk of state failure, but merely that the state and its institutions exhibit some characteristics of failed and quasi-states. Understanding these non-binary typologies of state embodied by Kyrgyzstan provides the basis for deeper inquiry – namely examining the larger issues of narcotics trafficking and state capacity in the Republic.

Defining State Capacity

The crux of this thesis is understanding the various inputs to narcotics trafficking and subsequent responses in the Kyrgyz Republic. This research is ultimately concerned with the role of this transnational process in questions of state capacity in Southwest and Central Asia. As such, it is necessary to review existing literature detailing state capacity in order to define what “state capacity,” means in the context of political geography. In seeking a broad-based understanding of the term, it was deemed relevant to review literature in economics, political science, development studies, and other fields. While this is not an exhaustive review of literature on state capacity, it nonetheless provides a basis for understanding the term in the context of this research.

Within political geography, there are several competing conceptions of state capacity. A key thread within these conceptualizations is that many of them assert that state capacity is a construct rather than a given; capacity is not inherent within the state entity, but rather must be built and is reliant on territory as a resource through which this process is accomplished. It is

“Tribalism, Social Conflict, and State-Building in the Kyrgyz Republic,” *Berliner Osteuropa Info* 21, no. 2004 (2004): 94–100.

likewise conceived of as performative in nature – ultimately designed to reproduce the power of the state at various scales.⁸³ While such conceptions of capacity are rooted in critical theory, critical theorists often fail to consider the key role that culture plays in reconstructing the state.⁸⁴ This is particularly true of nationalism and citizenship, as well as identity more broadly.

Sallie Marston argues these are typically conceived as subordinate to the state itself; they are fundamental to the production of states and stateness.⁸⁵ In assessing these concepts, Marston cites Joe Painter, whose conception of states combines the Weberian monopoly and the institutionalization of “spatialized social practices.”⁸⁶ Painter furthermore argues that the formation of a state is inherently cultural.⁸⁷ These processes include the recognition that state processes are symbolic, material, and organizational, that the “production of meaning is critical to the progress of state development,” and that state activities are performed by agents of the state including government functionaries and everyday citizens.⁸⁸

Alex Jeffrey’s work on the Brčko district of Bosnia-Herzegovina provides a prescient example of efforts to cultivate capacity manifesting in a post-conflict environment. Brčko sits in

⁸³ Philip Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State (1977),” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (March 1988): 58–89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6443.1988.tb00004.x>; Alex Jeffrey, “Building State Capacity in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Case of Brčko District,” *Political Geography* 25, no. 2 (February 2006): 204, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2005.11.003>; Sallie A Marston, “Space, Culture, State: Uneven Developments in Political Geography,” *Political Geography* 23, no. 1 (January 2004): 2–4, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2003.09.006>.

⁸⁴ Marston, “Space, Culture, State,” 2.

⁸⁵ Marston, 2.

⁸⁶ Marston, 7; Joe Painter, *Politics, Geography, and “Political Geography”: A Critical Perspective* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), 34.

⁸⁷ Painter, *Politics, Geography, and “Political Geography”: A Critical Perspective*, 47–48.

⁸⁸ Marston, “Space, Culture, State,” 7; Painter, *Politics, Geography, and “Political Geography”: A Critical Perspective*, 47–48.

Eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina, bounded by Croatia, the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska. As a result of international arbitration and the Dayton Peace Accords, it was established as a “neutral and multi-ethnic district,” of Bosnia-Herzegovina following inter-ethnic conflict in the 1990s.⁸⁹ The key challenge in the district following the peace deal was cultivating capacity – specifically creating a “coherent social container,” in the aftermath of the uricide and ethnic cleansing which occurred during the war.⁹⁰ In short, district authorities sought to cultivate cultural capacity in order to entice citizens to think in terms of the district rather than their ethnic identity.⁹¹ These efforts manifest spatially through dual-language street signs and home numbers, renaming of streets to embody a shared Yugoslav identity and past, and even the creation of a holiday celebrating the district. These efforts to cultivate capacity are both performative and banal.⁹² While these efforts were met with backlash - graffiti and vandalism - Brčko District is viewed by Alex Jeffrey as a model for generating capacity at a local scale.⁹³ Beyond demonstrating the inherently cultural aspect of state capacity, Jeffrey intimates two further notions regarding the political-geographic basis for capacity: the idea of the territorial container and the idea of performative capacity. While the former concept has been discussed in the previous section, the

⁸⁹ Jeffrey, “Building State Capacity in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina,” 214.

⁹⁰ Jeffrey, 218.

⁹¹ Jeffrey, 218.

⁹² Jeffrey, 218–22; Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (sage, 1995); Donald McNeill and Mark Tewdwr-Jones, “Architecture, Banal Nationalism and Re-Territorialization,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 3 (2003): 738–743; Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen, “From Socialist to Post-Socialist Cities: Narrating the Nation through Urban Space,” *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 4 (July 2013): 487–514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.768217>.

⁹³ Jeffrey, “Building State Capacity in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina,” 222–23.

latter adds a dimension to discussions of capacity which is often overlooked in other literatures but is critical to conceptualizing capacity.

The container envisioned by Taylor as well as aspects of performativity envisioned by Painter and Jeffrey are innately tied to the territory of the Kyrgyzstan. In this sense territory serves as an inherent base for nationalism. While the south may be geographically and administratively disconnected from the north, this nationalist sentiment permeates both regions down to a local scale. This manifests in the banal and the deliberate – from statues of Manas to language laws and other policies that actively discriminate against minority populations.⁹⁴ This ethno-nationalism likewise served as a driving force behind intercommunal violence in 1990 and 2010.

Beyond performing nationalism, the fundamental question when discussing performativity in the context of state capacity is, can the state act like a state? This raises further lines of questioning, including what it means to act like a state, which capacities are associated with stateness and how are they measured, and what actions are taken by states which can be construed as performative in nature. The concept of performativity has roots in feminist gender theory, namely the work of Judith Butler.⁹⁵ In political geography, it offers an equally valuable framework – in this case for exploring the behavior and capacity of states in the spaces which they control or

⁹⁴ Bashiri, “Manas”; Diener and Hagen, “From Socialist to Post-Socialist Cities”; Eugene Huskey, “Kyrgyzstan: The Politics of Demographic and Economic Frustration,” in *New States New Politics: Building the Post Soviet Nations*, ed. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 654–80; “Kyrgyz Debate Renaming Capital,” March 26, 2019, sec. News from Elsewhere, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-47700161>; “Kyrgyzstan: How To Find a Balance In Language Policy?,” *Аналитика* (blog), March 18, 2019, <https://analytics.cabar.asia/en/kyrgyzstan-how-to-find-a-balance-in-language-policy/>; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*; Grace Zhou, “Essentialist Legacies and Shifting Identities: Language in Central Asian Nation-Building,” 2010.

⁹⁵ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>; Judith Butler, “Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics,” *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 04, no. 03 (September 1, 2009): I–XIII, <https://doi.org/10.11156/aibr.040303e>; Judith Butler, “PERFORMATIVE AGENCY,” *Journal of Cultural Economy* 3, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 147–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2010.494117>.

seek to control.⁹⁶ As has been demonstrated, control of spaces and landscapes play a key role in the performative capacity of the state. This is especially true in the context of the urban, as illustrated by Jeffrey.⁹⁷ Post-socialist urbanism in the former Soviet Union also serves as an excellent case study in the performative capacity of states – particularly state efforts to cultivate new nationalisms from the banal.⁹⁸ The latter concept will be further explored in Chapter III. Critical geographers and scholars of political violence likewise offer valuable input in discussing how states engage in performative capacity through discussions of security, or how non-state actors perform capacity through provision of services and governance of captured or controlled territory.⁹⁹

Beyond discussions of capacity outright, further work by political geographers offers useful frameworks for assessing capacity, particularly that John Agnew’s work on sovereignty

⁹⁶ Catherine Nash, “Performativity in Practice: Some Recent Work in Cultural Geography,” *Progress in Human Geography* 24, no. 4 (December 2000): 653–64, <https://doi.org/10.1191/030913200701540654>.

⁹⁷ Robert Kaiser and Elena Nikiforova, “The Performativity of Scale: The Social Construction of Scale Effects in Narva, Estonia,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, no. 3 (2008): 537–62, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d3307>; Jeffrey, “Building State Capacity in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina”; Alex Jeffrey, Fiona McConnell, and Alice Wilson, “Understanding Legitimacy: Perspectives from Anomalous Geopolitical Spaces,” *Geoforum* 66 (November 2015): 177–83, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.09.005>; Alex Jeffrey and Michaelina Jakala, “Using Courts to Build States: The Competing Spaces of Citizenship in Transitional Justice Programmes,” *Political Geography* 47 (July 2015): 43–52, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2015.02.001>; Madeleine Reeves, “Materialising State Space: ‘Creeping Migration’ and Territorial Integrity in Southern Kyrgyzstan,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7, (2009): 1277–1313.

⁹⁸ Diener and Hagen, “From Socialist to Post-Socialist Cities.”

⁹⁹ Luiza Bialasiewicz et al., “Performing Security: The Imaginative Geographies of Current US Strategy,” *Political Geography* 26, no. 4 (May 2007): 405–22, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.12.002>; David Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, Book, Whole (Oxford University Press, 2009); David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, Book, Whole (US: Oxford University Press, 2010); David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerilla* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Kolstø, “The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States”; Robert W. McCOLL, “THE INSURGENT STATE: TERRITORIAL BASES OF REVOLUTION,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59, no. 4 (December 1969): 613–31, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1969.tb01803.x>.

regimes.¹⁰⁰ This is especially considering that the notion of sovereignty – internal and external – is inherent in commonplace conceptions of capacity. Agnew founds his argument by critiquing dichotomous conceptualizations of state power as despotic and infrastructural power – the former of which is the power of the state over society and the latter of which is the power of the state to penetrate, coordinate, and coopt civil society through the infrastructure of power.¹⁰¹ Agnew’s alternative envisioning of power argues:

“What is needed, therefore, is a typology of the main ways in which sovereignty is currently exercised to take account of: (1) its social construction; (2) its association with hierarchical subordination; and (3) its deployment in territorial and non-territorial forms. The two basic dimensions to the typology are defined by the relative strength of the central state authority (state despotic power) on one axis and its relative consolidation in the state territoriality (state infrastructural power) on the other.”¹⁰²

Building on this notion, Agnew envisions four historically rooted regime types which have come to dominate conceptions of capacity and sovereignty in the modern era. The first is the “classic,” Westphalian sovereignty regime, under which infrastructural and despotic power are territorially bounded. This is followed by the “imperialist,” sovereignty regime, under which infrastructural power is weak and territoriality and despotic power are in question. The “integrative,” regime is best described as a federal-style or EU-style sovereignty regime with infrastructural and despotic power distributed at various levels. Finally, the “globalist,” regime is embodied by a regime which relies on military capacity, international institutions, and hegemony to shape the global order through coercion or consensus, i.e. a superpower or hyperpower state

¹⁰⁰ Agnew, “Sovereignty Regimes.”

¹⁰¹ Agnew, 443; M. MANN, “THE AUTONOMOUS POWER OF THE STATE - ITS ORIGINS, MECHANISMS AND RESULTS,” *ARCHIVES EUROPEENNES DE SOCIOLOGIE* 25, no. 2 (1984): 188.

¹⁰² Agnew, “Sovereignty Regimes,” 445.

such as the United States.¹⁰³ Agnew's strongest example of these regimes is demonstrated through extensive review of currency practices in China, the United States, the European Union, and Latin America.¹⁰⁴ He concludes by arguing that sovereignty does not exist solely under the territorially bounded Westphalian system, and that there is "political authority beyond the sovereign construction of territorial space."¹⁰⁵ The final line of Agnew's discussion on sovereignty is key in that it links the concepts of sovereignty and capacity; just as there is no singular sovereignty regime, there is no singular capacity regime. Furthermore, considering that a lion's share of capacity literature is grounded on the notion of sovereignty – especially in the Westphalian context – it can be argued that some manner of sovereignty is a precursor for capacity, and that a firm understanding of sovereignty regimes is likewise critical to assessing capacity.¹⁰⁶

Under Agnew's framework of sovereignty and capacity, the Kyrgyz Republic falls under the category of a classic sovereignty regime; power and infrastructural capacity are territorially bounded. The south, particularly Batken Oblast, is the site of challenges to sovereignty in the form of territorial enclaves and exclaves of neighboring states, as well as a general sentiment of disconnectedness from the political and economic power in the north. Threats to Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty are far more likely to come from within than from neighbors. In this sense,

¹⁰³ Agnew, 445–46; John O'Loughlin, "The Political Geography of Conflict Civil Wars in the Hegemonic Shadow," in *Geography of War and Peace: From Death Camps to Diplomats*, ed. Colin Flint (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 86, <https://0-ebookcentral-proquest-com.library.uark.edu/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4702085>.

¹⁰⁴ Agnew, "Sovereignty Regimes," 447–56.

¹⁰⁵ Agnew, 456.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*, Rev. pbk. ed, Studies in Social Discontinuity (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992); Edward Schatz, "WHEN CAPITAL CITIES MOVE: THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF NATION AND STATE BUILDING," n.d., 3.

Kyrgyzstan's capacity suffers from internal challenges as a result of physical geography and territorial organization – mountains and exclaves, respectively – rather than direct state-state contest. Arguably a more important takeaway from Agnew's assessment of capacity through sovereignty regimes is that inherent within Westphalian concepts of sovereignty is the notion of control of territory. Thus, Kyrgyzstan's internal territorial sovereignty should be considered as a key metric when assessing the capacity of the state.

One final work in political geography serves as a bridge between political-geographic conceptions of state capacity and sociological, economic, and political science-oriented conceptions of capacity. Counter to many “neo-Weberian scholars,” Jim Glassman argues that capacity of the state is defined as the ability and willingness of state elites to facilitate international flows of capital.¹⁰⁷ Glassman's argument is fundamentally tied to the notion of deterritorialization and globalization, and relies on the notion that capital and state-elites are no longer confined or explicitly tied to the distinct territorial units of states.

Glassman's argument of regressive capacity seems well-suited for Kyrgyzstan. Following independence, Kyrgyzstan came to be characterized as the “Switzerland of the East.”¹⁰⁸ An analogy which swapped the Alps for the Tian Shan, it mirrored the “island of democracy,” rhetoric vaunted in Western circles and by the Kyrgyz government itself. Kyrgyzstan grew to resemble Switzerland in more ways than one, however, becoming a destination for international money laundering. Kyrgyzstan's own Asia Universal Bank was a chief offender for handling

¹⁰⁷ Glassman, “State Power beyond the ‘territorial Trap’.”

¹⁰⁸ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*, 2.

both foreign dirty money as well as cash pilfered from foreign aid and state coffers.¹⁰⁹ By Glassman’s definition of capacity, what appears to many as a kleptocratic backwater is in fact a highly capable state; elites actively pursued policies which facilitated international capital flows to and from the Republic. The same elites tended to benefit directly from such policies if they weren’t the ones laundering the money themselves – as was the case with the Bakiev administration.¹¹⁰

Still, Glassman’s definition of capacity proves limited in two regards despite offering a useful framework for considering capacity. Foremost, the ability to facilitate capital flows in some regards relies upon capacity as a precondition - some degree of internal and external sovereignty as well as social or political institutions. When applying Glassman’s definition, it furthermore becomes clear that the reality of the situation is considerably more nuanced. For example, by Glassman’s definition both Nigeria and Transnistria could be argued as having “capacity.” Yet one contains an international financial hub – Lagos – whereas the other is a quasi-state supported by Russia and known for chicken smuggling.¹¹¹ Furthermore, in the context of Central Asia, Glassman’s conceptualization of capacity seems counterintuitive. While states do have “capacity,” to facilitate international flows of capital, these are often one-way flows from abroad into the pockets of kleptocratic elites. Phrased differently, “capacity,” in Central Asia does not exist to benefit of global hyper-capitalism, but rather it exists to benefit local elites

¹⁰⁹ Chayes, *Thieves of State*; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*.

¹¹⁰ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*; “Justice Department Repatriates Forfeited Funds to the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic | OPA | Department of Justice,” accessed April 15, 2019, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-repatriates-forfeited-funds-government-kyrgyz-republic>.

¹¹¹ Myers, “Ukraine Battles Smugglers as Europe Keeps Close Eye”; Wolff, “The Transnistrian Issue: Moving beyond the Status-Quo.”

and their patronage networks. With regards to the latter point, Glassman's measures of capacity often directly undermine traditional measures of capacity.

Considering the work in political geography on capacity, this thesis thus proposes an ideation of capacity as a spectrum with regressive and progressive aspects. A state performing the duties of a state – providing utilities or services, maintaining rule-of-law and territorial sovereignty, defending territory – could thus be considered progressive aspects of capacity. Comparatively, state facilitation of capital flows and associated corruption can be viewed as regressive considering they diminish the public legitimacy and functional competency of a state. As capacity is explored further through other social science disciplines, this progressive-regressive scale will serve as the framework for assessing further aspects of capacity.

Beyond the scope of political geography, Charles Tilly provides foundational framework for conceptualizing capacity, oft-cited by economists and other social scientists.¹¹² Theorizing governments as racketeers, he argues that the state-system is a byproduct of elites warring to accumulate capital.¹¹³ Tilly's concept of states argues that proto-modern European states sought capacity prior to their codification as modern territorial entities. Like Agnew, Tilly uses a four-part definition to capacity. Tilly's basis for capacity is conceived as follows:

“Under the general heading of organized violence, the agents of states characteristically carry on four different activities:

1. Warmaking: eliminating or neutralizing their own rivals outside the territories in which they have clear and continuous priority as wielders of force
2. Statemaking: eliminating or neutralizing their rivals inside those territories
3. Protection: eliminating or neutralizing the enemies of their clients

¹¹² Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*; Tilly, “Warmaking and Statemaking.”

¹¹³ Tilly, “Warmaking and Statemaking,” 2–5.

4. Extraction: acquiring the means of carrying out the first three activities: warmaking, statemaking, and protection.”¹¹⁴

Tilly continues, noting that extraction – which modern theorists of capacity often view in terms of taxes – relies on a state’s monopoly on coercive force. Furthermore, each aspect of capacity is innately tied to the development of state institutions from militaries, police, and intelligence services to administrative and tax bureaucracies. Considering the critical nature of the scholarship and the emphasis on use-of-force, it is little wonder Tilly utilizes organized crime as an analogue for state-building. Both are built on coercive extraction of capital and use of violence.¹¹⁵ Likewise, it is unsurprising that this theory of state building and state capacity is considered in terms of predation.¹¹⁶ Like Agnew, though, Tilly notes that his framework for assessing the development of states – and by extension their capacity – is not a universal model considering its reliance on Europe as a primary case study.¹¹⁷

Building on Glassman’s model of regressive capacity, Tilly’s model can be construed as staunchly regressive considering it models capacity as designed to extract rents for the purpose of perpetuating conflict and benefiting select clients. Within Kyrgyzstan, political patronage networks bear strong resemblance to the second, third, and fourth aspects of Tilly’s model. While only the Bakiev regime was directly implicated in assassinating political opponents, each post-independence regime in Kyrgyzstan has embodied these aspects of capacity in some form or another, whether through wide-ranging corruption scandals or harassment and targeting of

¹¹⁴ Tilly, 15.

¹¹⁵ Tilly, “Warmaking and Statemaking.”

¹¹⁶ Cameron G. Thies, “Conflict, Geography, and Natural Resources: The Political Economy of State Predation in Africa,” *Polity* 41, no. 4 (October 2009): 465–88, <https://doi.org/10.1057/pol.2008.32>.

¹¹⁷ Tilly, “Warmaking and Statemaking.”

political opponents and civil society organizations.¹¹⁸ Granted, this model is more germane in neighboring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which both share histories of severe repression and extensive state criminality. In this regard, Tilly's model of state formation as organized crime addresses several of the key flaws of Glassman's model.

Nonetheless, there are critical shortcomings to Tilly's framework. Foremost, it fails to emphasize territory as a critical resource for states beyond strategic considerations. Territory is a critical component of state formation and state capacity; it is ultimately a precursor for all aspects of Tilly's model – particularly rent extraction. The institutions established to extract rents are inherently reliant on the territory possessed by the state as a basis for extracting rent in the form of taxes or resources. While this is hinted in Tilly's emphasis on internal and external sovereignty as critical components of state efforts to generate capacity, it lacks the emphasis of a political geographer. The other key critique of Tilly's model of regressive capacity is that it fails to acknowledge the performative aspects of state-building – primarily those tied to nationalism. While the concept of nation may have lacked resonance in the early period of Tilly's survey, by the early 19th century it was destined to play a determinative role in the modern territorial organization of Europe. Likewise, nationalism served as a guiding doctrine in the establishment of modern European empires, themselves designed to improve the rent extraction and geostrategic capacities of the metropole.

Tilly and Glassman's models of capacity imply a broader disconnect between political-geographic models of capacity and those found in other social sciences, which tend to focus on the technical aspects of state capacity over the territorial and performative. In fact, in Kyrgyzstan

¹¹⁸ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*.

and the surrounding Republics, territory and performance have played a critical role in cultivating the capacity of the post-Soviet state. Territory serves as a resource by and through which the states of the region can extract the rent required to cultivate capacity. It likewise serves as stage for capacity to be performed – often through gilded urban development, banal monuments, and efforts within currency and state-symbols to engender the notion of a nation-state tied to specific aspects of place and territory.¹¹⁹

Despite such shortcomings, Tilly and Glassman present a compelling argument for considering state-capacity in terms of a progressive-regressive spectrum closely tied to rent extraction and movement of capital. Tilly’s broader work has likewise played a key role in theories of capacity within economics and political science, which often conceive of capacity in terms of the ability to levy taxes, enforce contracts and property rights, and regulate commerce.¹²⁰ While lacking with regard to a broader concept of capacity, the fiscal view of capacity is worth exploring given it is often regarded a fundamental aspect of state capacity and the quality of “stateness.”

Besley and Persson, for example, argue that state capacity is defined by the ability of the state to enforce contracts - “legal capacity,” - as well as the ability of the state to levy taxes and spend them on public goods - termed “fiscal capacity.”¹²¹ Under this framework, Besley and

¹¹⁹ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*; Koch, *The Geopolitics of Spectacle*; McNeill and Tewdwr-Jones, “Architecture, Banal Nationalism and Re-Territorialization”; Jan Penrose, “Designing the Nation. Banknotes, Banal Nationalism and Alternative Conceptions of the State,” *Political Geography* 30, no. 8 (2011): 429–440.

¹²⁰ Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 2012), 1–529; Timothy Besley and Torsten Persson, “The Origins of State Capacity: Property Rights, Taxation, and Politics,” *American Economic Review* 99, no. 4 (August 2009): 1218–44, <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.99.4.1218>; Timothy Besley and Torsten Persson, “State Capacity, Conflict, and Development,” *Econometrica* 78, no. 1 (2010): 1–34, <https://doi.org/10.3982/ECTA8073>.

¹²¹ Besley and Persson, “The Origins of State Capacity,” 1218–19.

Persson argue that the ability to cultivate legal and fiscal capacity - i.e. the ability to enforce contracts and levy taxes for public goods - are critical to broader development of state capacity and the broader success nation-state as a whole.¹²² In a subsequent article, Besley and Persson present the idea of capacity simply as the ability of a state to “implement a range of policies,” based on the constraints of a state’s fiscal and legal capacity.¹²³ In tying implementational ability and economic development to fiscal and legal capacity, the authors likewise critique work in economics which fails to link these aspects of capacity – particularly in cases of weak or fragile states.¹²⁴ In their estimation, a lack of legal capacity contributes to both lackluster economic growth and the risk of civil conflict onset. Tangentially, a lack of fiscal capacity results in low incomes.¹²⁵ While the work of Besley and Persson seemingly provides important aspects for the overall consideration of capacity, like Tilly and Glassman it remains divorced from the importance of territory and nationalism. The authors thus acknowledge the simplicity of their model, further noting that it fails to account for the importance of political and social institutions as they pertain to capacity.¹²⁶

Whereas Besley and Persson intimate the relevance of history and institutions as they pertain to capacity, Acemoglu and Robinson provide an entire book on the subject in *Why Nations Fail*. Over the course of the book, the authors rely on a number of historical and contemporary case studies in order to demonstrate the causes of state failure. In relying on these

¹²² Besley and Persson, 1239.

¹²³ Timothy Besley and Torsten Persson, “State Capacity, Conflict, and Development,” *Econometrica* 78, no. 1 (2010): 1–34, <https://doi.org/10.3982/ECTA8073>.

¹²⁴ Besley and Persson, 3.

¹²⁵ Besley and Persson, 27.

¹²⁶ Besley and Persson, 28.

cases, they demonstrate several things. Foremost, state capacity or lack thereof is inexorably linked to the nature of the economic and political institutions which govern a given country. Acemoglu and Robinson assert that institutions which are politically and economically inclusive trend toward higher levels of success and capacity. In contrast, institutions which are repressive, and extractive coincide with low levels of capacity and/or state failure. In relating this work to Besley and Persson, it can be argued that inclusive institutions as defined by Acemoglu and Robinson typically involve legal capacity wherein contracts can be enforced by governments. Higher levels of capacity also involve governments which largely pursue public interest when it comes to policy - an extension of fiscal capacity in the sense that tax revenues are utilized to benefit the largest number of citizens.¹²⁷

Acemoglu and Robinson likewise incorporate specific concepts from political geography when crafting their conception of capacity. Primarily is the notion of political centralization. Examining the concept in the context of Somalia, they argue that the abject lack of political centralization has resulted in a state devoid of capacity.¹²⁸ This argument is couched in the notion that the lack of political centralization was fundamentally tied to the unwillingness of some elites to subject themselves to the control of others; rather than developing a centralized political core and a political periphery governed by the core, Somalia remained entirely periphery.¹²⁹ The result of a lack of political centralization is weak state capacity - particularly in the fiscal and legal sense. Despite this passing reference to political geography, however, Acemoglu and

¹²⁷ Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*.

¹²⁸ Acemoglu and Robinson, 238–42, 435.

¹²⁹ Acemoglu and Robinson, 242–43.

Robinson likewise downplay the role of territory and nationalism in their conceptualization of capacity.

In reviewing Besley and Persson and Acemoglu and Robinson, as conceived by economists, state capacity is defined as the ability of the state to exact taxation for public benefit and enforce contracts and/or property rights, and pursue policy goals. These measures raise questions about the capacity of the Kyrgyz state. Key considerations in this regard include the difficulties of centralization and rent extraction in the form of taxes, as well as exclusive economic and political institutions enveloped in the politics of kinship and patronage.¹³⁰ Tilly's characterization of state making as organized crime likewise rings salient, given evidence of close links between state-elites and organized crime in the Republic.¹³¹ These kinship and patronage networks and a strong state-crime nexus all impede spending in the good of the general populace in favor of preferential corruption. Finally, under the economic model of capacity Kyrgyzstan's ongoing political challenges and struggles are directly tied to its struggles to cultivate capacity – which are in-turn a facet of structural issues with its economic and political institutions as well as the legacies of Soviet control.

Many frameworks of state capacity originating in Political Science also adopt fiscal and legal notions of capacity. There is some work, however, that builds upon or challenges this paradigm. Cullen S. Hendrix notes lacunae of a specific definition of capacity beyond the notions of Weberian monopoly, policy enactment, provision of services, and tax collection, for

¹³⁰ Pricewaterhouse Cooper, "Kyrgyzstan - Taxes on Personal Income," December 31, 2018, <http://taxsummaries.pwc.com/uk/taxsummaries/wwts.nsf/ID/Kyrgyzstan-Individual-Taxes-on-personal-income>.

¹³¹ "Justice Department Repatriates Forfeited Funds to the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic | OPA | Department of Justice"; Kupatadze, "Political Corruption in Eurasia"; Kupatadze, "Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?"

example.¹³² With regards to conflict onset, he asserts that measures of capacity which emphasize regime type place certain regimes at higher risk of civil conflict, but prove poor predictors of conflict outcome.¹³³ This in mind, Hendrix proposes an alternative set of measures which emphasize three meta-aspects of capacity: *rational legality*, *rentier-autocraticness*, and *neo-patrimonality*.¹³⁴ Rational legality assumes that a democratic state possesses more effective and efficient bureaucratic institutions whereas autocracies exhibit opposite characteristics.¹³⁵ Rentier-autocraticness is an index spanning high-rent autocracies on one end to resource-poor democracies on the other.¹³⁶ Neo-patrimonality is defined by Hendrix as an index bounded by “monarchies where the monarch is the direct beneficiary of the country’s natural resource wealth (Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait).”¹³⁷ On the opposite end of this spectrum are resource-poor democracies.¹³⁸ The conclusion that these qualities constitute measures of state capacity is supported by Hendrix’s analysis of civil-conflict onset in 101 countries from 1984-1989.

This analysis concludes that the countries on the bottom end of these spectrums are typically more vulnerable to civil conflict onset, whereas countries at the top are less vulnerable. More

¹³² Cullen S Hendrix, “Measuring State Capacity: Theoretical and Empirical Implications for the Study of Civil Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 3 (May 2010): 273–85, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310361838>.

¹³³ Hendrix, 276.

¹³⁴ Hendrix, 280.

¹³⁵ Hendrix, 282.

¹³⁶ Hendrix, 282.

¹³⁷ Hendrix, 282.

¹³⁸ Hendrix, 282.

importantly, Hendrix concludes that fiscal capacity is significantly correlated with all three considerations.¹³⁹

In a separate analysis, Hendrix incorporates terrain modeling into his efforts to discern capacity, which he notes is a critical consideration for assessing the fiscal and bureaucratic capacity of states.¹⁴⁰ Hendrix's assessment views rough terrain – such as mountains – as a key impediment to the bureaucratic and fiscal capacities of states in the sense that ensures that a.) tax collection is more difficult and b.) tax collection is costlier. As a result, states with territorially-diminished capacity are viewed as more susceptible to civil conflict onset.¹⁴¹ This analysis is also uniquely valuable among other literature in the sense that it incorporates an aspect of territory – terrain – into concepts of capacity. Still, both of Hendrix's assessments fail to address nationalism and aspects of performativity as they pertain to capacity.

Nonetheless, Hendrix's work holds direct relevance to the Kyrgyz Republic in terms of assessing capacity. Kyrgyzstan is a largely resource-poor democracy which has experienced longstanding challenges with corruption and bureaucratic effectiveness. In terms of terrain, 90% of the country lies above 1000 meters in elevation, and the massive peaks of the Tian Shan and the Pamir bifurcate much of the country. At the same time, there is only an individual tax burden of approximately 10% across the country.¹⁴² By these measures Kyrgyzstan can be considered

¹³⁹ Hendrix, "Measuring State Capacity," 283.

¹⁴⁰ Cullen S. Hendrix, "Head for the Hills? Rough Terrain, State Capacity, and Civil War Onset," *Civil Wars* 13, no. 4 (December 2011): 346, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2011.629863>.

¹⁴¹ Hendrix, 346.

¹⁴² Maria Levina, "Kyrgyzstan: Corruption Hinders Mining Development, Investment Attraction," www.timesca.com, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.timesca.com/index.php/news/26-opinion-head/20794-kyrgyzstan-corruption-hinders-mining-development-investment-attraction>; Pricewaterhouse Cooper, "Kyrgyzstan - Taxes."

susceptible to conflict based on lacking capacity. Actual instances of internal conflict and political violence in Kyrgyzstan lend support to this assessment, including inter-ethnic violence in the 1990s and 2010s, as well as two successive revolutions and several other prominent instances of political violence.

Aside from Hendrix, Sally N. Cummings and Ole Nørgaard provide a comprehensive conception of state capacity in the context of Central Asia.¹⁴³ Utilizing Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as case studies for attempts to cultivate capacity in post-Communist states, they conceptualize for areas through which capacity can be assessed; these include ideational, political, technical, and implementational capacities.¹⁴⁴ In their assessment, the political capacity of a state is seen as defining effective governance within the context of a given state. This includes the ability of the state to draft and implement effective policy - termed “horizontal capacity,” - as well as the ability of the state to both secure resources from domestic and international society while simultaneously maintaining autonomy during the policy-drafting process - termed “vertical capacity.”¹⁴⁵ Technical capacity simply refers to the resources - both material and intellectual - which can be brought to bear on behalf of the state. Implementation capacity denotes the ability of a state to enact policy decisions.¹⁴⁶ Finally, ideational capacity

¹⁴³ Sally N. Cummings and Ole Nørgaard, “Conceptualising State Capacity: Comparing Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan,” *Political Studies* 52, no. 4 (December 2004): 685–708, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2004.00503.x>.

¹⁴⁴ Cummings and Nørgaard, “Conceptualising State Capacity,” 685, 688-689.

¹⁴⁵ Cummings and Nørgaard, “Conceptualising State Capacity.”688.

¹⁴⁶ Cummings and Nørgaard.

indicates how elites function and generate consensus within the state structure - both within the state apparatus and between the state and its citizens.¹⁴⁷

Their work then applies these concepts of capacity to an analysis of a 2002 survey of 125 mid-level officials in both countries.¹⁴⁸ The comparative analysis notes the key similarities between both countries, including sovereignty and territorial integrity, strong centralized structures and bureaucracies retained from the Soviet era, direct-rule by the executive, and state-ownership of key economic sectors; each state is likewise controlled by its titular nationality. It also highlights critical differences, including size, economic structures, political liberalization, and potential sources of rent - including tax bases, natural resource wealth, and foreign aid.¹⁴⁹ In utilizing interviews to compare the two countries, Cummings and Nørgaard assume that their respondents represent a small subset as opposed to a sample. They likewise assume that respondents provided objective responses, and that the respondents position as a mid-level official provides them with a unique perspective and insight in understanding the machinery of the state.¹⁵⁰

In reviewing interview responses based on Cummings and Nørgaard's concepts of capacity, the authors note key differences between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan pertaining to official perspectives on measures of capacity. Kazakhstan has seemingly cultivated greater capacity based on its location, resource wealth, and political centralization. Comparatively,

¹⁴⁷ Cummings and Nørgaard, 687–88.

¹⁴⁸ Cummings and Nørgaard, 685.

¹⁴⁹ Cummings and Nørgaard, 691.

¹⁵⁰ Cummings and Nørgaard, 692.

Kyrgyzstan's capacity remains challenged by a lack of resources as well as inter-regional rivalries and clan affiliations. Both states face major challenges to capacity as a result of corruption and politicization of bureaucratic apparatuses, Kyrgyzstan especially in the case of the latter. Finally, Cummings and Nørgaard specifically note the threat posed to capacity in both states by organized crime - something potentially exacerbated the embrace of Western models of governance, unfettered free markets, and privatization.¹⁵¹ In sum, while both states fare arguably better than their neighbors, each struggle with a unique set of issues when it comes to cultivating and retaining capacity.

Of the non-geographic literature reviewed, Cummings and Nørgaard provide an excellent and comprehensive ideation of capacity that expands upon otherwise truncated discourse of fiscal and legal capacities. Their methodology also proves relevant, as does their focus on Central Asia as a study site. Importantly, they address several of the key shortcomings of economic models of capacity by addressing aspects of nationalism, performative capacity, and territory in their respective discussions of ideational capacity and technical capacity – the latter being tied to the material resources available to the state within its respective territory. While it relies on data that is comparatively dated – not reflecting political strife in 2005 and 2010 in Kyrgyzstan and in 2019 in Kazakhstan – it nonetheless provides a valuable snapshot of the longstanding issues with capacity in the Kyrgyz Republic. This includes corruption, issues with political centralization, a lack of exploitable rents, and the role of crime as a key detriment to state capacity.

¹⁵¹ Cummings and Nørgaard, 703–5.

In seeking to advance from competing conceptions of state capacity, what is clear is that what constitutes “capacity,” is infinitely more nuanced than a single disciplinary approach – especially in the context of Kyrgyzstan. Perhaps this is the reason “state capacity,” remains an ill-defined yet often referenced chimera. Thus, the proper approach to defining state capacity in the context of Kyrgyzstan is the same approach employed when defining the state. Namely, capacity in the Republic incorporates various elements of literature reviewed into an overall amalgam. This includes standard-fare conceptions of capacity rooted in economics, political science, and sociology such as the ability to extract rents, collect taxes, and maintain the Weberian monopoly. However, it also involves the ability of the state to perform the functions associated with a state controlling territory as conceived by Taylor, Painter, and Jeffrey. Importantly, capacity cannot exist without territory, and territory serves as a critical resource for cultivating capacity. As will be demonstrated in Chapter III, the Republic has struggled with various aspects of capacity – particularly the political-geographic dimensions of capacity – since initial independence in 1991. These challenges persist to this day.

Conclusion: Chapter II

This chapter provided a brief overview of literature deemed relevant to this thesis during research, including work on narcotics trafficking in Eurasia, the linkages between criminals, state-elites, and non-state actors, and conceptions of state and state capacity. In reviewing this literature, this section introduces concepts relevant to the remainder of this thesis. Importantly, this section demonstrates a critical lack of scholarship examining the relationship between drug trafficking and state capacity in the context of Central Asia broadly, and the Kyrgyz Republic in particular. With this in mind, the next chapter will provide an overview of the geographic region

of scope that serves as the focus of this research – with a brief section introducing Central Asia followed by a detailed discussion of the Kyrgyz Republic as a place and space.

Chapter III: Site Survey

Beyond reviewing literature, it is critical to provide context of space and place for Central Asia at large and the Kyrgyz Republic in particular. This section will provide a brief overview Central Asia, including its composition as well as its global significance as a world region. More importantly, this section will include extensive discussion of Kyrgyzstan in terms of place and space. In doing so, this section aims to provide context for discussing fieldwork and findings.

Asie Centrale

As noted in Chapter I, defining “Central Asia,” often proves difficult owing to various competing terminologies and definitions further complicated by long histories of trade, conquest, empire, and collapse; in Western scholarship the debate over defining the region dates to the 19th and early 20th centuries. Some of the earliest attempts to define Central Asia as a distinct geographic region were undertaken by early modern geographers. Alexander von Humboldt is first credited with using the term in his so-named three-volume *Asie Centrale*, first published in 1843. To this day, it has yet to be translated from the original French.¹⁵² Other competing terminology has included “Inner Asia,” “High Asia,” and even “High Tataria,” the latter a reference to the Turkic peoples who played a central role in the region and its conquests from the Mongols to the Russians.¹⁵³ These definitions of the region also reflected imperial conquest – Russian Turkestan, “Soviet Central Asia,” and the “Soviet Orient,” have all been used to denote

¹⁵² von Humboldt, *Asie Centrale*.

¹⁵³ Alimov, *Tsentrlnaya Asiya*, 249; Paul Becker, “Defining Central Asia...,” *Central Asian Borders* (blog), February 26, 2008, <https://bordersca.wordpress.com/2008/02/26/defining-central-asia/>; Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara : Being the Account of a Journey from India to Cabool, Tartary and Persia. Also, Narrative of a Voyage on the Indus, from the Sea to Lahore. Performed under the Orders of the Supreme Government of India in 1831, 1832, 1833*, Book, Whole (London: John Murray, 1834); Joerg Stadelbauer, “Between mountains and desert - Central Asia’s natural realm,” *Osteuropa* 57, no. 8–9 (August 1, 2007): 9; von Humboldt, *Asie Centrale*.

the region as well.¹⁵⁴ Other definitions have also focused on the important cultural and historical urban centers of the region, including Bukhara and Samarqand in present-day Uzbekistan as well as Merv in present-day Turkmenistan.¹⁵⁵

Mackinder's Pivot

The birth of political geography in the late 19th and early 20th century coincided with a new ideation of Central Asia. Under the framework of geopolitics, Central Asia grew to be considered as a critical geostrategic pivot.¹⁵⁶ This idea of “Heartland Theory” was originally put forth in Sir Halford J. Mackinder in his 1904 article entitled “The Geographical Pivot of History.” Concerned with the rise of nascent powers including Russia, Germany, and China, Mackinder presented a theory of space and geopolitical organization which subdivided the world into three areas – the heartland, the inner crescent, and the outer crescent.¹⁵⁷ Both the heartland and inner crescent were contained to the Eurasian landmass, which Mackinder termed the “world island.” Mackinder’s dictum argues:

Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland:

Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island:

Who rules the World-Island commands the World.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Alimov, *Tsentrlnaya Asiya*; Francis Henry Skrine and Edward Denison Ross, *The Heart of Asia: A History of Russian Turkestan and the Central Asian Khanates from the Earliest Times*, Book, Whole (London: Routledge Ltd, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203641705>; Stadelbauer, “Between mountains and desert - Central Asia’s natural realm.”

¹⁵⁵ Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*; Dov Lynch, “The Tajik Civil War and Peace Process,” *Civil Wars* 4, no. 4 (2001): 49–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698240108402487>; Skrine and Ross, *Heart of Asia*.

¹⁵⁶ Halford J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *The Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (April 1904): 421–37.

¹⁵⁷ Mackinder; Nick Megoran, “Revisiting the ‘Pivot’: The Influence of Halford Mackinder on Analysis of Uzbekistan’s International Relations,” *Geographical Journal* 170, no. 4 (2004): 347–58.

¹⁵⁸ Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History.”

Still, in the years between delivering his initial lecture and the initial days of the Cold War, Mackinder's ideation of a "world heartland," occupying Southwest and Central Asia remained vague and undefined.¹⁵⁹

The beginning and end of the Cold War saw the reinvigoration of Mackinder's dictum. In the United States, for example, it played a guiding role in the doctrine of containment - influencing the likes of Nicholas Spykman and George F. Kennan. Beyond containing the Soviet Union, Mackinder's theory emerged as a critical aspect of security discourse on resource geopolitics. While a wellspring of critical scholarship within Geography emerged on Mackinder's work following the end of the Cold War, in other disciplines and popular mediums the term emerged alongside the idea of globalization in vapid discourse and buzzword geopolitics - often employing Mackinder's dictum to advance foreign policy discourse and geopolitical agendas.¹⁶⁰ This discourse has persisted to this day; the coverage of China's Belt and Road Initiative provides one such example.¹⁶¹

The key issue with this discourse - beyond a lack of critical engagement of Mackinder - is that it diminishes the importance and agency of Central Asia as a region in its own right. While the region remains strategically important to world powers for its situation between major world powers and its strategic resource reserves, it likewise possesses its own, unique geopolitical history predating the Westphalian system. The states of the region are likewise their

¹⁵⁹ Megoran, "Revisiting the 'Pivot': The Influence of Halford Mackinder on Analysis of Uzbekistan's International Relations," 348.

¹⁶⁰ Megoran, 354-55.

¹⁶¹ Peter Cai, "Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative," 2017; D. U. Debin and M. A. Yahua, "One Belt and One Road: The Grand Geo-Strategy of China's Rise," *Geographical Research* 34, no. 6 (2015): 1005-1014; Theresa Fallon, "The New Silk Road: Xi Jinping's Grand Strategy for Eurasia," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 37, no. 3 (2015): 140-147.

own actors, have played a major role in shaping geopolitical events on a regional and global scale. Still, the region often remains consigned to Mackinderian discourses.¹⁶²

At the Edge of Empire

Territorial organization in its modern form in Central Asia occurred in the early years of the Soviet Union. Borders were drawn and redrawn several times before the modern territorial units of Central Asia emerged (See Appendix B). Stalin's cynical cartography – particularly in the Ferghana Valley – ensured the titular nationalities of the so-named Soviet Socialist Republics were distributed across three different countries with little concern for historical and cultural ties to place.¹⁶³ Tajikistan presents a particularly egregious example; the new national capital of Dushanbe was fabricated from a market town whilst the important cultural and historical Tajik cities of Samarqand and Bukhara were placed in Uzbekistan.¹⁶⁴

The true consequences of Soviet-imperial cartography would present themselves as the Union collapsed in the early 1990s. Like so many post-colonial states, borders imposed by outsiders would contribute to internal and interstate conflict in the region; these conflicts manifested in disputes over political power, land, and resource access, and in the case of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan would all be accompanied by violence, including ethnic

¹⁶² Megoran, "Revisiting the 'Pivot': The Influence of Halford Mackinder on Analysis of Uzbekistan's International Relations," 354–55.

¹⁶³ Nick Megoran, "3 The Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Boundary," in *Borderlines and Borderlands : Political Oddities at the Edge of the Nation-State*, ed. Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 16.

¹⁶⁴ Lynch, "Tajik Civil War," 52–53; Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*

riots, inter-state conflict, and civil war.¹⁶⁵ These outbreaks of violence were concentrated in the Ferghana Valley, which to this day remains a “tinderbox,” for conflict and disputes over territory and resources in the region.¹⁶⁶ At the eastern end of this “tinderbox,” lies the Kyrgyz Republic (See Appendix B).

The Kyrgyz Republic as a Place

The Kyrgyz Republic is a small, mostly mountainous country situated in eastern Central Asia between Kazakhstan, China, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan (See Appendices B and C). A former Soviet satellite republic, it gained independence with the collapse of the Union in 1991.¹⁶⁷ It holds the distinction of being the only parliamentary democracy in a neighborhood of strongmen.¹⁶⁸ With a population of approximately six million, it is the smallest Central Asian republic.¹⁶⁹ Key economic sectors include agriculture and mineral extraction;

¹⁶⁵ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*; Valery Tishkov, “Don’t Kill Me, I’m a Kyrgyz!’: An Anthropological Analysis of Violence in the Osh Ethnic Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research* 32, no. 2 (May 1995): 133–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343395032002002>.

¹⁶⁶ “Ferghana Valley: A Tinderbox For Violence,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed March 17, 2019, https://www.rferl.org/a/Why_Is_The_Ferghana_Valley_A_Tinderbox_For_Violence/2074849.html; Aksana Islamibekova and Sophie Roche, “The Glimmer of Hope in Bloody Kyrgyzstan,” *Ferghana News*, November 8, 2010, <http://enews.ferghananews.com//article.php?id=2654>; Megoran, “Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Boundary”; Nick Megoran, “The Critical Geopolitics of the Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley Boundary Dispute, 1999–2000,” *Political Geography* 23, no. 6 (August 2004): 731–64, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2004.03.004>; Catherine Putz, “Kyrgyz and Tajiks Clash Along Disputed Border,” August 4, 2015, 2; “Residents of Border Villages of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in Dispute over Waterpipe,” accessed April 14, 2019, <https://akipress.com/news:610965/>; “Second Tajik Villager Killed In Dispute Over Road Near Kyrgyz Border,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed April 14, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajik-villager-killed-in-dispute-over-road-near-kyrgyz-border/29820974.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*.

¹⁶⁸ John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia’s Island of Democracy?* (Amsterdam, NL: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999).

¹⁶⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, “Central Asia :: Kyrgyzstan — The World Factbook - Central Intelligence Agency,” CIA World Factbook, September 26, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>.

similar to neighboring Tajikistan, a significant portion of GDP is tied to remittances from Kyrgyz guest workers in Russia.¹⁷⁰

Historically and culturally, there are strong traditions linked to nomadic lifestyle - an important aspect of national identity. Islam is widespread throughout the country; pockets of Orthodox Christianity remain - primarily concentrated with populations of ethnic Russians in the north.¹⁷¹ Russian and Kyrgyz are the official languages, however approximately 14% of the population also speak Uzbek or another language as a byproduct of internal ethnic diversity (See Appendices D and E).

Politically, the recent history of the Republic is fraught with intrigue. Since independence, there have been significant and contentious debates surrounding national identity - sometimes resulting in inter-ethnic violence.¹⁷² In 2005 and 2010 successive governments were ousted because of corruption by mass public demonstrations and protests.¹⁷³ Following the Second Kyrgyz Revolution in 2010, there was a period of interim governance which has been followed by two successive elections in 2011 and 2017. The latter was judged by international

¹⁷⁰ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*, 188–89; “Central Asia :: Kyrgyzstan — The World Factbook - Central Intelligence Agency,” accessed February 6, 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>.

¹⁷¹ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 42.

¹⁷² International Crisis Group, “The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan” (International Crisis Group, August 23, 2010), <https://web.archive.org/web/20120403072630/http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/193%20The%20Pogroms%20in%20Kyrgyzstan.pdf>; Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE EVENTS IN SOUTHERN KYRGYZSTAN IN JUNE 2010,” May 2011, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full_Report_490.pdf; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*.

¹⁷³ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*.

observers as the most competitive in the country's history despite charges of widespread vote-buying and abuse of public resources.¹⁷⁴

As will be discussed, governance and state capacity have been a near-constant challenges in Kyrgyzstan since initial independence in 1991. These challenges are resultant from the persistence of clan-based kinship and patronage networks by the political elite, privileging of select ethnicities by circumstance or by Soviet authorities, and challenging physical geography which has resulted in a pronounced north/south divide in the country.¹⁷⁵ Alongside rich historical and cultural traditions, these politics have played a critical role in shaping the Republic as a space.

A Brief History of Kyrgyzstan

Before examining Kyrgyzstan as a space, it is necessary to further examine the Kyrgyzstan's history with a special emphasis on the development of modern Kyrgyz nationalism. This provides critical context both in terms of defining Kyrgyzstan as a space as well as assessing the development of the modern Kyrgyz nation and state. In this sense, Kyrgyz is taken to mean the titular ethnicity for which the republic is named rather than citizens of the Republic; the Kyrgyz "nationality," would not emerge in the contemporary sense until after the region was brought under Russian control in the late 19th century.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ "World Factbook - Kyrgyzstan."

¹⁷⁵ Bond and Koch, "Interethnic Tensions in Kyrgyzstan."

¹⁷⁶ Huskey, "Demographic and Economic Frustration," 654–55.

Mongols, Tsars, and Soviets

The ancestry of the modern Kyrgyz can be traced to the Turkic tribes of Altai and Irtysh, the Mongols, and the other ancient peoples of the Tian Shan region.¹⁷⁷ The Kyrgyz developed a shared ethnic consciousness surrounding these very mountains, nomadic pastoralism, and the epic hero Manas, however this shared sense of ethnicity was not codified into proto-nationalism until the area fell under Russian control in the 1870s.¹⁷⁸ Russian settlement in the region caused tensions, which came to a head during widespread violence following Tsar Nicolas II's imposition of labor conscription in 1916. An estimated 120,000 Kyrgyz were killed by Russians while many others fled or perished en-route to western China.¹⁷⁹

Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the modern state boundaries of Kyrgyzstan were formally codified – first in 1924 as the Kara-Kirgiz autonomous region of the USSR's Turkestan Republic, and then again in 1936 as the Kirgiz Soviet Socialist Republic (See Appendix C). Despite being so-named for the titular ethnicity around which the state was constructed, early administration of the Republic was carried out by ethnic Slavs and Tatars transplanted into the region, despite the initial communist party cadres being mostly ethnic Kyrgyz.¹⁸⁰ While Russification began in earnest during the initial years of Russian rule, it intensified measurably under Stalin with purges of Kyrgyz cadres and the continued in-migration of ethnic Slavs, who concentrated around major urban centers of power - such as the capital,

¹⁷⁷ Huskey, 654–55.

¹⁷⁸ Huskey, 655.

¹⁷⁹ Huskey, 655–56.

¹⁸⁰ Huskey, 656–57.

Frunze.¹⁸¹ This was accompanied the continued out-migration of Kyrgyz nomads to China, Russian consolidation of power within the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, and extensive efforts by Soviet authorities to eradicate Kyrgyz culture while coopting its symbolism.¹⁸² During the Second World War, Kyrgyzstan also saw the in-migration of other Soviet nationalities and ethnic groups, including forcibly relocated Volga Germans, Koreans, and Caucasians.¹⁸³ From the late 1950s until the late 1980s, the Kyrgyz would only comprise a 40-47% plurality of their so-named national republic.¹⁸⁴

Uzbeks concentrated in the South were not immune to Soviet campaigns of repression either. Campaigns of religious repression specifically targeted the “regions around the Fergana Valley where Islam was much stronger and where the old ways retained their influence.”¹⁸⁵ These efforts were met with creative resistance; pilgrimages to the Throne of Solomon (*Sulieman-Too*) in Osh “intensified during the Soviet period as an alternative to making haj in Mecca.”¹⁸⁶ The Uzbeks also suffered at the hands of the Kyrgyz, who despite themselves being deferential to ethnic Russians, politically dominated Uzbek-majority administrative regions in the south through schemes involving rejiggering of administrative apparatuses to over-represent

¹⁸¹ Now Bishkek; renamed in 1991.

¹⁸² Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 143.

¹⁸³ Matthew Derrick, “Field Notes from Kyrgyzstan: Bishkek’s New Religious Landscapes,” *The California Geographer* 57 (2018): 245–50.

¹⁸⁴ Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 658–59.

¹⁸⁵ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 13.

¹⁸⁶ Anderson, 13; Aisalkyn Botoeva et al., “Under Solomon’s Throne: Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh,” 2018; Thomas Hale III, “Holy Places of Osh, Kyrgyzstan,” 2002; Joldon Kutmanaliev, “Public and Communal Spaces and Their Relation to the Spatial Dynamics of Ethnic Riots: Violence and Non-Violence in the City of Osh,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 35, no. 7/8 (2015): 449–77.

ethnically Kyrgyz constituents.¹⁸⁷ By the outbreak of significant interethnic violence in Osh and the surrounding area in 1990, Uzbeks comprised 26% of the population of Osh oblast but held only 4% of key government posts in the region.¹⁸⁸ By contrast, Uzbeks controlled up to 80% of trade and commerce in the region; by the late 1980s this perceived or actual inequality resulted in increased resentment by Kyrgyz struggling with the effects of *perestroika*.¹⁸⁹

Nationalism Rekindled

Modern Kyrgyz nationalism lay dormant until the 1980s, emerging by the end of the decade with decidedly cultural and economic aspects. One of the most prominent calls for a rediscovering of national identity came from Kyrgyz novelist Chingiz Aitmatov. Drawing upon the Epic of Manas, Aitmatov decried decades of Russification in *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* (1980). He likened the people of Central Asia to *mankurts* – unthinking slaves who have no memories or conceptions of culture, heritage, or self.¹⁹⁰ Aitmatov’s work proved incisive in the leadup to Soviet collapse. Some ethnically Kyrgyz party officials could not even address their countrymen in Kyrgyz; a significant portion of urban membership in new nationalist organizations were similarly “Russified.”¹⁹¹ With increasing pressure and nationalist sentiment, 1989 saw the adoption of a new language law. Kyrgyz became the official state language, while Russian was reserved as the language of inter-ethnic communication. By

¹⁸⁷ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 15.

¹⁸⁸ Nancy Lubin and Barnett R Rubin, *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia*, vol. 4 (New York, NY: Twentieth Century Fund, 1999), 47.

¹⁸⁹ Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 661–62.

¹⁹⁰ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 17; Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinsky, *The Zero Hour: Glasnost and Soviet Cinema in Transition* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 131; David D Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the near Abroad* (Cornell University Press, 1998), 135.

¹⁹¹ Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 661, 665.

contrast, Uzbek was afforded no such provisions. This angered many Uzbek residents of Jalal Abad and Osh oblasts.¹⁹² Implementation of the new law was ultimately banal; the most significant expression of involved public spaces such as streets and squares being renamed in Kyrgyz.¹⁹³ Despite such banality, the new law contributed to the reemergence of long-simmering ethno-regional tensions between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks.

A key aspect of emerging nationalist sentiment among ethnic Kyrgyz was directly tied to an economic downturn including rampant rural unemployment, low salaries, and a 1990 economic crisis.¹⁹⁴ In the south, unemployment rates rose as high as 23% during this period.¹⁹⁵ With squatter settlements forming on the outskirts of cities by the late 1980s, land reform movements were organized around alleviating housing concerns by forcing the state to formalize shantytowns, provide land for construction of new housing, or provide suitable housing to Kyrgyz migrants arriving in Kyrgyz cities – primarily Frunze and Osh.¹⁹⁶ In arguing for pro-Kyrgyz land reform, the Frunze-based “Ashar” (Solidarity) political organization adopted a decidedly nationalist tone by exploiting rumors about the reputed plans of the government to help resettle Armenian refugees from conflict in the South Caucasus.¹⁹⁷ Ashar was eventually successful in its demands. Acceptance by the government of Ashar likewise established the

¹⁹² Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 19; Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 663.

¹⁹³ During fieldwork, it was observed that many places still retain their Soviet-era names; Baitik Baatyr Street in Bishkek is still known as Sovietskaya Street by most locals, for example.

¹⁹⁴ Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 660.

¹⁹⁵ Robert D Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: From Togo to Turkmenistan, from Iran to Cambodia – a Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy*. (Vintage, 1997).

¹⁹⁶ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 19; Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 662–63.

¹⁹⁷ Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 661; Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 146.

precedent for the founding of over a three-dozen new political organizations within a year, many explicitly nationalist.¹⁹⁸ Ashar would eventually morph into the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DDK). DDK rapidly grew to be one of the largest and most prominent of these organizations, going from 300 delegates from around the country to over 100,000 members in a three-month period in 1990. DDK advocated civil society, market-economic reform, sovereignty, and the reassertion of Kyrgyz history and identity.¹⁹⁹

In Osh the issue of land reform proved more capricious. Local politicians adopted stridently anti-Uzbek or anti-Kyrgyz rhetoric in arguments over land reform and political representation, many of which played on economic disparities between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz which were being reinforced by *perestroika*'s privatization drive. Ashar's parallel organization in Osh, Osh Aimagy, demanded land for economically displaced Kyrgyz families who had recently arrived in the city. The local party chief appropriated 32 hectares of land from a predominately-Uzbek collective farm, which angered Uzbeks.²⁰⁰ The Uzbek-nationalist group "Adolat" (Justice) in-turn aired their longstanding political grievances, demanding greater cultural and political representation as well as recognition of Uzbek as an official language in south Kyrgyzstan.²⁰¹ In some cases demands included the creation of an Uzbek autonomous region in south Kyrgyzstan if not outright reunification of Uzbek-majority areas with Uzbekistan.²⁰² While the ethno-regional cleavages between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks had remained muted during the leadup to

¹⁹⁸ Huskey, "Demographic and Economic Frustration," 661.

¹⁹⁹ Huskey, 661.

²⁰⁰ Huskey, 663.

²⁰¹ Huskey, 662; Pauline Jones, *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence* (Cornell University Press, 2004), 154–56.

²⁰² Huskey, "Demographic and Economic Frustration," 663.

independence, the language law in concert with economic strife and attempts at land reform proved a catalyst for explosive violence.

Violence and Independence

The image of Kyrgyzstan as a peaceful backwater of the USSR was shattered in early June of 1990, when an outbreak of intercommunal political violence in Osh between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks resulted in several hundred casualties.²⁰³ While the local KGB office had warned of tensions, the warning went ignored by officials. Fighting between local youths – which had been sporadic - quickly devolved into violent rioting across the region following an altercation at the bazaar and bus station in nearby Uzgen.²⁰⁴ Riots began on June 4th and intensified quickly; they came to involve participation by local police on behalf of their respective ethnicity, as well as looting, destruction of property, rape, and murder in both Osh and Uzgen as well as the surrounding countryside.²⁰⁵ Harkening to the Israelites of yore, some Kyrgyz were instructed to paint their doors red in order to spare their homes and property from destruction.²⁰⁶ Rioting was finally halted on June 8th by Soviet paratroopers, who deployed within hours of initial violence with orders to use lethal force to quell the violence, if necessary.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 20; Human Rights Watch | 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor | New York, and NY 10118-3299 USA | t 1.212.290.4700, “‘Where Is the Justice?’ | Interethnic Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan and Its Aftermath,” Human Rights Watch, August 16, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/08/16/where-justice/interethnic-violence-southern-kyrgyzstan-and-its-aftermath>.

²⁰⁴ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 20; T Razakov, “Oshskiye Sobutia: Na Materialakh KGB,” *Bishkek: Renaissance*, 1993, 81.

²⁰⁵ Tishkov, “‘Don’t Kill Me, I’m a Kyrgyz!’,” 133–39.

²⁰⁶ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 20.

²⁰⁷ Anderson, 20; Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report,” 10.

At the conclusion of violence, official estimates placed casualties at between 200 and 600, however unofficial estimates allege up to 1,000 killed.²⁰⁸ The aftermath of the riots resulted in 4,000 investigated incidents, with 3,125 officially registered crimes.²⁰⁹ Young men perpetrated a majority of the violence, many of whom were allegedly intoxicated during the rioting.²¹⁰ While the riots were officially investigated by a court and saw 48 prosecutions with 46 convictions – primarily convictions of ethnic Kyrgyz for violent crimes, they nonetheless are viewed as establishing the precedent for the 2010 violence in Osh following the ouster of President Bakiev – if not being a direction continuation of the 1990s.²¹¹ Finally, despite the violence – which was predicated upon economic grievances as well as strong ethno-nationalist undertones – clan, tribal, and regional loyalties and patronage networks continued to dominate Kyrgyz politics in the early 1990s despite nascent nationalism.²¹²

Following the 1990 riots, a series of other challenges presented themselves in Kyrgyzstan. The ouster of then-Secretary of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan - Absamat Masaliyev – was hastened by the 1990 riots in his home city of Osh. Efforts to oust Masaliyev also demonstrated further ethno-regional cleavages among the ruling elite.²¹³ The traditionally-

²⁰⁸ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 20; Avenue, York, and t 1.212.290.4700, ““Where Is the Justice?”; International Crisis Group, “Pogroms”; Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report.”

²⁰⁹ Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report.”

²¹⁰ Tishkov, ““Don’t Kill Me, I’m a Kyrgyz!”,” 134–35.

²¹¹ Islamibekova and Roche, “Glimmer of Hope”; Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report”; International Crisis Group, “Pogroms.”

²¹² Bond and Koch, “Interethnic Tensions in Kyrgyzstan,” 531–35; Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 664.

²¹³ Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 664.

powerful Osh-bloc of southern elites faced new challenges from the Naryn-bloc of the east.²¹⁴ Southern elites, concerned with their diminishing power, advocated devolution and power sharing schemes including the administrative restructuring of the republic into a northern and southern region with equal representation in legislative bodies. Other schemes called for further devolution and dissolution of power ranging from a federation of two coequal republics to the creation of five autonomous regions within the republic – one for each oblast at the time – under a confederation coordinated by a rotating presidency.²¹⁵ As Eugene Huskey notes:

“The advocates of devolution and power-sharing are motivated less by a desire to promote regional social and economic development than to protect local political networks.”²¹⁶

Beyond exposing regional cleavages, the early 1990s also exposed major urban-rural divides within the political structure of the country. The 1990 Osh riots were a partial manifestation of this. Furthermore, while Russified, urban Kyrgyz based in Frunze remained in firm control of the political apparatus and nationalist movement by 1992, they were nonetheless perceived as vulnerable to non-urban nationalists and populists.²¹⁷ In both cases, the proliferation of political parties ensured difficulties in maintaining a multiethnic ruling coalition.²¹⁸ The Osh events of 1990 in concert with “political infighting,” between regionally aligned blocs – primarily Osh and Naryn – forced the government to schedule elections for October.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 145–47.

²¹⁵ Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 664–65.

²¹⁶ Huskey, 665.

²¹⁷ Huskey, 665.

²¹⁸ Huskey, 665.

²¹⁹ Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 147.

Nineteen Ninety saw the election of Askar Akaev – the first non-CPK member to be elected President of the Republic.²²⁰ With a background in physics, mathematics, and academia, he stood as a stark contrast to his predecessor.²²¹ Akaev supported some aspects of *perestroika*, despite the potentially negative ramifications for the Kyrgyz economy.²²² He likewise backed Gorbachev during the 1991 coup attempt, declaring independence immediately following the coup - having declared Kyrgyzstan sovereign less than a year prior.²²³ During the coup, Akaev deployed military units around the newly-renamed capital (Bishkek) to prevent a local iteration; once the dust settled in Moscow, he officially outlawed the CPK.²²⁴ Later that year he would be reelected President of the newly-independent republic after running unopposed.²²⁵

The Switzerland of the East?

The collapse of the Soviet Union presented a range of challenges for Central Asia, with Kyrgyzstan being no exception. While Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan could rely on their vast hydrocarbon and mineral wealth, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were less fortunate in that regard. In Tajikistan, the collapse in state capacity associated with a budget crisis – approximately 46% of the budget came from Moscow – a lack of exploitable resources, and structural instability as a result of exclusionary ethno-regionalist politics all contributed to the

²²⁰ Rashid, 147.

²²¹ Rashid, 147.

²²² Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 662–66; Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 148.

²²³ Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 147.

²²⁴ Rashid, 147.

²²⁵ Rashid, 147.

onset of civil war.²²⁶ In Kyrgyzstan, the Akaev's government attempted to head off these issues by embarking on massive privatization drives – particularly in the agricultural and real estate sectors - as well as by seeking extensive assistance in the form of foreign aid.²²⁷ Many of the foreign aid relationships established by the Akaev government between Kyrgyzstan and the United States, Turkey, and China persist to this day. While a considerable portion of this aid was based on a romanticized Western notion of Kyrgyzstan as Central Asia's "island of democracy," early-independence Kyrgyzstan still stood in stark contrast to its staunchly authoritarian neighbors – with a robust free press, political and economic liberalization, and civil and political liberties unmatched in the region.²²⁸

Problems quickly emerged in newly independent Kyrgyzstan despite a promising start to independence. One area of concern was the outmigration of ethnic Slavs and Germans. By 1993 approximately 100,000 ethnic Slavs had emigrated, accompanied by half of the country's population of 100,000 ethnic Germans; this emigration represented a drain of political and economic resources and expertise which some Kyrgyz elite viewed with concern.²²⁹ By contrast, the continued dominance of non-Kyrgyz ethnicities across many high-skill and government sectors served as a rallying point for Kyrgyz nationalism and continued backlash against ethnic Slavs.²³⁰ This is to say nothing of the challenges faced in Osh in the South in terms of ethnic

²²⁶ Hendrix, "Measuring State Capacity"; Hendrix, "Head for the Hills?"; Foster, "Cleansing Violence in the Tajik Civil War"; Lynch, "Tajik Civil War"; Mitchell, "Civilian Victimization during the Tajik Civil War."

²²⁷ Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 149–52.

²²⁸ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*; Huskey, "Demographic and Economic Frustration," 666–67; Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 151.

²²⁹ Huskey, "Demographic and Economic Frustration," 663.

²³⁰ Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 154.

tensions; despite the end of hostilities and a 1991 agreement redressing local concerns of political and cultural representation for Uzbeks, “Osh was a city where ethnic apartheid was vehemently practiced by both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz.”²³¹ This apartheid developed a distinctly spatial element as well in the form of political redistricting designed to favor Kyrgyz neighborhoods for municipal services while excluding Uzbeks.²³² Conditions for southern Uzbeks had so-deteriorated by the mid-1990s that there were renewed calls for separatism.²³³ Small communities of Russians in the south remained insular as well – abstaining from the 1995 elections en-masse.²³⁴

Religious challenges also emerged in the early years of independence, particularly with an influx of Christian and Muslim missionaries. Among the Christians, this included missionaries from Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Movement as well as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Pentecostals, and other evangelical Christian groups.²³⁵ Among Muslim missionaries, Wahhabis

²³¹ Rashid, 154.

²³² Rashid, 154.

²³³ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 40–44.

²³⁴ Anderson, 46.

²³⁵ Anderson, 33; Julie McBrien and Mathijs Pelkmans, “Turning Marx on His Head: Missionaries, Extremists’ and Archaic Secularists in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” *Critique of Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (2008): 87–103; Kanatbek Murzakhalilov, “Proselytism in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 1 (25) (2004); Mathijs Pelkmans, “Religious Crossings and Conversions on the Muslim-Christian Frontier in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan,” *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 19, no. 2 (2010): 109–28; Mathijs Pelkmans, “The Transparency of Christian Proselytizing in Kyrgyzstan,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 2009, 423–45; Mathijs Pelkmans, “Temporary Conversions: Encounters with Pentecostalism in Muslim Kyrgyzstan,” *Conversion after Socialism: Disruptions, Modernisms and Technologies of Faith in the Former Soviet Union*, 2009, 143–66; Mathijs Pelkmans, “Culture as a Tool and an Obstacle: Missionary Encounters in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 4 (2007): 881–99; Mathijs Pelkmans, “Asymmetries on the ‘Religious Market’ in Kyrgyzstan,” *The Postsocialist Religious Question: Faith and Power in Central Asia and East-Central Europe* 11 (2006): 29; Sebastien Peyrouse, “The Partnership between Islam and Orthodox Christianity in Central Asia,” *Religion, State & Society* 36, no. 4 (2008): 393–405; Sebastien Peyrouse, “Christianity and Nationality in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia: Mutual Intrusions and Instrumentalizations,” *Nationalities Papers* 32, no. 3 (2004): 651–74; Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 152.

were highly active in proselytization as well. The latter efforts were more pronounced in the Ferghana Valley in the south where audiences tended to be more receptive.²³⁶ Such efforts were likewise accompanied by a construction boom of mosques and madrasas, often funded by foreign money.²³⁷ Throughout the 1990s, concerns also arose from militant fundamentalist activity in surrounding countries, including the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) in Tajikistan, and the IMU. While the latter would violate Kyrgyz territorial sovereignty in the late 1990s, internally fundamentalism failed to take hold in any capacity which threatened overall state stability.²³⁸ As Ahmed Rashid notes, rather than being an outright political force Islam provided “a means to break with the communist past rather than a means to a new political future.”²³⁹ Nonetheless, as with other post-Soviet states religious revival unnerved secular officialdom; by 1996 a series of new laws against foreign religious proselytization were implemented by the Akaev government – a policy mirrored in Russia in 1997.²⁴⁰

The greatest challenges to emerge in newly independent Kyrgyzstan, however, involved the nature of the Kyrgyz state itself. For one, rapid economic and political liberalization proved more challenging than anticipated by the Akaev regime – who now sought to balance domestic political and economic concerns with the terms of the half-billion US dollars in outside foreign aid the country received between 1991 and 1994.²⁴¹ These economic concerns correlated with a

²³⁶ Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 152.

²³⁷ Rashid, 152.

²³⁸ Rashid, 153.

²³⁹ Rashid, 152.

²⁴⁰ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 56; T Jeremy Gunn, “Caesar’s Sword: The 1997 Law of the Russian Federation on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations,” *Emory Int’l L. Rev.* 12 (1998): 43.

²⁴¹ Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration,” 666–69.

rightward shift in Kyrgyz politics in 1994, involving Akaev shuttering several opposition newspapers and calling a popular referendum resulting in the redrafting of the constitution – itself in violation of the constitution.²⁴² This is to say nothing of the corruption which publicly emerged following Soviet collapse. Akaev was equally culpable despite his complaints – packing his cabinet with personal friends. Having become isolated from other elected officials, Akaev attempted to govern through local and oblast-level politicians, banking on the continued power of patronage across the country.²⁴³ The 1996 referendum on another constitutional redraft – one which would further broaden Akaev’s power - saw levels of turnout (96.5%) common in anocracies and autocracies. The election was likely fraudulent.²⁴⁴

Beyond domestic political concerns, the late 1990s demonstrated the challenges faced by the Kyrgyz state in dealing with neighbors. In 1999 two crises involving the border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan rocked south Kyrgyzstan. In February of 1999, Uzbekistan’s government unilaterally closed the border – citing security concerns after a string of bombings and an assassination attempt on Uzbek president Islam Karimov in Tashkent - blamed on the IMU.²⁴⁵ Uzbekistan proceeded to re-define the border, annexing Kyrgyz land that had been leased to Uzbekistan for livestock grazing during the Soviet Union. Uzbek demarcation resulted in the creation of Kyrgyz exclaves in the region – completely disconnected from Kyrgyz

²⁴² Huskey, 666–69.

²⁴³ Huskey, 668.

²⁴⁴ Anderson, *Island of Democracy*, 27–29, 41, 52–54.

²⁴⁵ Nick Megoran, “The Borders of Eternal Friendship,” *The Politics and Pain of Nationalism and Identity along the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Fergana Valley Boundary*, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, 2002.

territory.²⁴⁶ August of 1999 brought further crisis and incursion along the border, when IMU guerillas tore through Batken, in the process taking four Japanese geologists and several Kyrgyz – including a high-ranking military commander – hostage.²⁴⁷ This incursion by the IMU saw Uzbek military and police forces pursuing the guerillas into Kyrgyz territory. In the process, Uzbek government forces entrenched and laid mines – establishing semi-permanent redoubts which further exacerbated interstate tensions between the two countries.²⁴⁸ Uzbek forces also strafed Kyrgyz villages under IMU control, killing Kyrgyz civilians in the process.²⁴⁹ Four thousand civilians fled to the surrounding mountains to avoid the fighting.²⁵⁰

The crisis was resolved in October of Nineteen Ninety-nine. The militants successfully managed to ransom both the Japanese geologists and the Kyrgyz government officials – at other times freeing hostages as they retreated. The Kyrgyz government paid \$50,000 for four hostages initially taken by the IMU. Japan paid between two and six million dollars for the return of its citizens. Remaining IMU fighters were allowed passage to Tajikistan and later Afghanistan, where they were welcomed with open arms by the Taliban.²⁵¹ The following year a group of mountain climbers including four Americans were taken hostage were kidnapped in Kyrgyzstan by the IMU, escaping after they pushed their guard off a cliff and were rescued by Kyrgyz

²⁴⁶ “Uzbekistan/Kyrgyzstan: Prime Ministers Agreed On Land Swap,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1096309.html>.

²⁴⁷ Ahmed Rashid, “They’re Only Sleeping,” *The New Yorker*, January 7, 2002, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/01/14/theyre-only-sleeping>; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*, 17–19.

²⁴⁸ George Gavrilis, *The Dynamics of Interstate Boundaries* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Megoran, “The Critical Geopolitics of the Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley Boundary Dispute, 1999–2000.”

²⁴⁹ Rashid, “They’re Only Sleeping.”

²⁵⁰ Rashid.

²⁵¹ Rashid.

special forces.²⁵² This was the last major high-profile incident involving the IMU in south Kyrgyzstan.

The Batken Crisis of 1999 is important in that it demonstrated the challenges faced by Kyrgyzstan's government in maintaining internal sovereignty and quickly and competently addressing crises. Kyrgyzstan's response to IMU incursions and hostage-taking bordered on comical in terms of incompetence. Conscript units tasked with handling the situation were in some cases so poorly equipped that they were required to scrounge their own food – with one unit reportedly spending a half day hunting and barbecuing mountain goats. An additional \$420,000 in cash was reallocated from government coffers and quite literally put in a briefcase to pay ransom for the remaining hostages. It would later be alleged that in an act of particular skullduggery, Akaev and his Chief-of-Staff Medet Sadyrkulov utilized the money to bribe a foreign journalist who was preparing to publish an in-depth analysis of the Akaev family's finances, business dealings, and high-level corruption. Akaev calculated that such an expose might harm his chances at reelection.²⁵³

Revolution

Akaev's corruption and anocratic tendencies led to his ouster in the Tulip Revolution of 2005.²⁵⁴ His anocratic streak had persisted through the 1995 and 2000 elections, as well as in the

²⁵² Greg Child, "Back from the Edge," Outside Online, June 1, 2003, <https://www.outsideonline.com/1821591/back-edge>; Greg Child, *Over the Edge: The True Story of Four American Climbers' Kidnap and Escape in the Mountains of Central Asia* (Villard Books, 2002); Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, "Significant Terrorist Incidents 1961-2003: A Brief Chronology," accessed March 20, 2019, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/5902.htm>; Rashid, "They're Only Sleeping."

²⁵³ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*, 17–19, 99.

²⁵⁴ Shishkin, 1–43; "A Tulip Revolution," *The Economist*, March 24, 2005, <https://www.economist.com/unknown/2005/03/24/a-tulip-revolution>.

interim. After ceding a piece of disputed territory to China in 2002, opposition leaders led by Azimbek Beknazarov called for Akaev's impeachment based on the secrecy of the terms under which the deal was reached; they played upon traditional tropes of Kyrgyz nationalism, such as Manas expelling the *kitais* – Chinese – from premodern Kyrgyzstan. The Akaev government reacted by attempting to discredit and jail Beknazarov, resulting in protests and his eventual release.²⁵⁵ The Akaev government also sought to ban another leading opposition politician – Roza Otunbayeva – from running for parliament on absurd technicalities, namely that she did not meet residency requirements to run for office based on her years of service as an overseas diplomat.²⁵⁶ The 2005 parliamentary elections would prove the straw that broke the camel's back for the Akaev regime.

The first round of balloting on February 27th saw vocal criticism of ballot-rigging and other anti-democratic behaviors by international election monitors.²⁵⁷ In addition to a near-clean sweep by establishment candidates, including the president's children, a number of other issues presented themselves.²⁵⁸ Foreign observers noted disqualification of opposition candidates on technicalities, harassment of independent media and support of the government by state-run outlets, and outright vote-buying on both sides.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*, 19–20.

²⁵⁶ Shishkin, 29.

²⁵⁷ “A Tulip Revolution.”

²⁵⁸ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*, 32.

²⁵⁹ “A Tulip Revolution.”

By February 28th protests had started in Osh province.²⁶⁰ Several days later a grenade was thrown onto the balcony of Roza Otunbayeva’s apartment and exploded, resulting in minor damage and no injuries; the government denied responsibility for the attack.²⁶¹ Large protests which began in Jalal-Abad on March 5th spread to neighboring Osh by the 9th, with major swathes of south Kyrgyzstan falling out of government control within two weeks of initial protests.²⁶² During this period, protests also reached Bishkek. By the afternoon of March 24th, Akaev and his family fled first to Kazakhstan, and later to Russia. The Kyrgyz Supreme Court nullified the results of the parliamentary elections the same day. During this period, a potential counter-revolution of northern Akaev supporters emerged, but quickly halted their attempts after former government officials intervened.²⁶³ On April 4th, Akaev resigned from Moscow – never to return to Kyrgyzstan.²⁶⁴

Kurmanbek Bakiev – a powerful southern politician and key opposition leader during the revolution – succeeded Askar Akaev. Reform under Bakiev failed to materialize; he would prove equally if not more corrupt than Akaev. This corruption was accompanied by increasingly erratic paranoia, curbs on civil liberties, and harassment, imprisonment, and outright murder of journalists and opposition figures.²⁶⁵ He also enacted policies which resulted in increased energy costs, including raising the price of electricity. Bakiev’s behavior even concerned the Russians to

²⁶⁰ Matthew Stein, “Revolutions of Kyrgyzstan Timeline: An Open Source Look at Key Events,” n.d., 4.

²⁶¹ Stein, 5.

²⁶² “A Tulip Revolution”; Stein, “Revolutions of Kyrgyzstan Timeline: An Open Source Look at Key Events,” 4–8.

²⁶³ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*, 41–43.

²⁶⁴ Shishkin, 2; Stein, “Revolutions of Kyrgyzstan Timeline: An Open Source Look at Key Events,” 4–8.

²⁶⁵ Stein, “Revolutions of Kyrgyzstan Timeline: An Open Source Look at Key Events,” 8–9; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*, 92–197, 222.

the point that they began airing ads against him on local TV in Bishkek in the lead up to the Second Kyrgyz Revolution.²⁶⁶ Protests against Bakiev began in Bishkek on April 3rd of 2010, five years after Akaev's official resignation. Protests quickly spread across the country as they grew in Bishkek, with increasingly violent clashes between protestors and security services. By April 7th, protestors were being killed by snipers as they attempted to storm the presidential palace; Bakiev had ordered use of lethal force.²⁶⁷ Bakiev would flee to his family compound in Teyit village outside Jalal-Abad on the same day.²⁶⁸ On April 8th, Bakiev attempted to rally support in his home province for a counter-revolution, but ultimately failed. By the 16th he officially resigned.²⁶⁹

Despite Bakiev's resignation, unrest continued for several months following the revolution. The interim government was dysfunctional; it could barely manage itself let alone the affairs of the state.²⁷⁰ While Bakiev had fled to Belarus – Europe's last dictatorship – his allies in Kyrgyzstan sought to sow chaos across the south. On May 13th Bakiev supporters seized several municipal buildings across southern provinces under the direction of the President's brother as well as his chief of staff.²⁷¹ Security forces recaptured buildings in Osh and Jalal-Abad the

²⁶⁶ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*.

²⁶⁷ Shishkin, 160–97.

²⁶⁸ International Crisis Group, "Pogroms," 12.

²⁶⁹ Stein, "Revolutions of Kyrgyzstan Timeline: An Open Source Look at Key Events," 9–10.

²⁷⁰ International Crisis Group, "Pogroms," 4–8; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*, 160–97, 200–267.

²⁷¹ International Crisis Group, "Pogroms," 7; Stein, "Revolutions of Kyrgyzstan Timeline: An Open Source Look at Key Events," 11.

following day.²⁷² Opposition politicians played a key role in directing security service efforts; police and military units were initially reluctant to respond.²⁷³ In Jalal-Abad, security services were aided by approximately 3,000 armed irregulars fielded by opposition politicians. Over half of these individuals were associated with the Uzbek-dominated Rodina party – led by Kadyrjan Batyrov. That evening, Bakiev family compounds were torched – allegedly by Uzbek mobs under the direction of Batyrov. This angered many southern Kyrgyz and resulted in a flare-up in ethnic violence on May 19th following several days of protest and the ransacking of the Batyrov-funded Kyrgyz-Uzbek University of People’s Friendship – which would itself be torched during inter-ethnic violence the following month.²⁷⁴ Batyrov fled the arson charges and his arrest and is now believed to be living in Dubai. The April revolution and May events had resulted in renewed ethnic tensions between Kyrgyz and Uzbek and would ultimately serve as a catalyst for extreme violence across south Kyrgyzstan the following month.²⁷⁵

Echoes of 1990

By June, south Kyrgyzstan was on edge. Ethnic tensions were at levels unseen since the events of 1990. The events of May were followed by a series of minor inter-ethnic clashes – which gradually escalated in scope and scale. On June 9th a fight outside a *chaykhana* (teahouse) in western Osh city drew a large crowd of several hundred. Another alleged incident involved a

²⁷² International Crisis Group, “Pogroms,” 8–9; Stein, “Revolutions of Kyrgyzstan Timeline: An Open Source Look at Key Events,” 11.

²⁷³ International Crisis Group, “Pogroms,” 7.

²⁷⁴ “The Kyrgyz-Uzbek University of People’s Friendship: An Enduring Symbol of Inter-Ethnic Violence | OSCE,” accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.osce.org/hcnm/124250>; International Crisis Group, “Pogroms,” 8–9; Stein, “Revolutions of Kyrgyzstan Timeline: An Open Source Look at Key Events,” 11.

²⁷⁵ International Crisis Group, “Pogroms,” 8–10.

fight which began after a revenge killing “by one ethnic group against a man who had beaten up a prostitute at a hotel.”²⁷⁶

On the evening of June 10th violence erupted in Osh. That evening, a clash occurred outside the Al-Bukhari mosque. It drew a large crowd of 1000 – half Kyrgyz, half Uzbek. Shops were looted and approximately fifty individuals engaged in a brawl. Later that evening, a gambling dispute between a group of young Uzbek and Kyrgyz men quickly devolved into another street brawl. Later reports point to this as the trigger event which incited a week of widespread inter-ethnic violence. The brawl quickly grew into a riot which drew opposing crowds armed with crude weapons. Security forces were unable to quell the fighting, which had drawn large groups of young, unemployed men who had been loitering in the area. A false rumor that a group of Uzbek men had raped and murdered a Kyrgyz woman residing in a nearby university dormitory drew out more Kyrgyz young men. By the early hours of June 11th, the situation was out of control; the official report notes that the violence “metastasized with alarming speed.”²⁷⁷ By June 12th violence would spread to Jalal-Abad, as well as surrounding rural areas.²⁷⁸

The ensuing violence remains difficult to capture in brevity.²⁷⁹ It was extreme, targeted, and well organized in nature. Mobs of young Kyrgyz men roamed the streets targeting Uzbek

²⁷⁶ Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report,” 26–27; Stein, “Revolutions of Kyrgyzstan Timeline: An Open Source Look at Key Events,” 4.

²⁷⁷ Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report,” 27–28; International Crisis Group, “Pogroms,” 11.

²⁷⁸ Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report,” 28–30; International Crisis Group, “Pogroms,” 11; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*, 200–267.

²⁷⁹ It is strongly encouraged that those interested read the official report of events by the KIC as well as the ICG report.

businesses and neighborhoods – later reinforced by individuals from outlying districts arriving to avenge attacks or rapes of Kyrgyz by Uzbeks. Witnesses to the incidents describe squad-to-platoon sized elements under the direction of a single individual systematically moving through Uzbek *mahallas* (districts or neighborhoods) while being consistently resupplied with food, water, vodka, flammable liquids, and firearms and ammunition. A significant number of firearms were looted from security forces, while others were said to be distributed by local, regional, and national politicians from the region. Mobs also employed pickup trucks and armored personnel carriers (APCs), the latter of which were seized from security forces. In some cases, APCs were provided to mobs by security forces; some members of security forces themselves participated in the looting and razing of *mahallas* alongside marauders (See Appendix F).²⁸⁰ During this period, Uzbeks reacted by barricading and attempting to defend their neighborhoods, sometimes returning fire against Kyrgyz mobs. In areas outside the city, Uzbeks established ad-hoc checkpoints along roadways. Uzbeks also engaged in retaliatory violence against Kyrgyz during the riots, however it appears less coordinated. Over the course of the rioting, both parties – and sometimes the security services - were guilty of assault, hostage-taking, rape and other sexual violence, and murder. While some of the looting and violence was likely opportunistic, Kyrgyz violence against Uzbeks was well coordinated if not previously planned.²⁸¹

The response by the interim government proved ineffective if not incompetent. Security-services were marshalled to defend government buildings rather than intervene and halt violence

²⁸⁰ VOA News, *Fourth Day of Ethnic Violence in Kyrgyzstan*, accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS8FWIEKpUM>.

²⁸¹ Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report”; International Crisis Group, “Pogroms”; Babak Rezvani, “Understanding and Explaining the Kyrgyz–Uzbek Interethnic Conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan,” *Anthropology of the Middle East* 8, no. 2 (January 1, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.3167/ame.2013.080205>; Stein, “Revolutions of Kyrgyzstan Timeline: An Open Source Look at Key Events.”

– in stark contrast to the 1990 violence.²⁸² One of the largest and most distressing criticisms of security services during the violence is that they often surrendered their weapons without incident to rioters. Rioters obtained hundreds of government light arms – pistols, Kalashnikov rifles, machine guns, sniper rifles, and even mortars – as well as thousands of rounds of ammunition from police and military units. More concerning, security forces themselves participated in violence, rape, and looting – based on opportunism and/or shared sentiment. Even following the end of rioting, some members of the security services perpetrated kidnapping for ransom and sexual extortion. As per the official report, government officials and institutions bore significant responsibility for the violence based on lack of coordination, incompetence, and a lack of leadership.²⁸³ Official explanations for violence tended to blame outside forces, ranging from Bakiev to the Taliban and the IMU. Many government officials themselves blamed Uzbeks – accusing them of planning the uprising. In a further tone-deaf move, on June 27th, less than a month after the violence, the government also insisted holding a referendum on the new constitution based on a need to cultivate legitimacy. The referendum saw high turnout nationally according to the government, yet Osh had the lowest levels of participation anywhere in the country. International election monitors noted minor concerns but otherwise allowed the referendum to proceed unhindered.²⁸⁴

Violence ended between June 14th and June 16th. The violence and the aftermath saw significant numbers of IDPs and refugees, with up to 120,000 Uzbek women, children, and elderly fleeing the fighting by crossing the border into neighboring Uzbekistan. 80,000 returned

²⁸² Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report.”

²⁸³ Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission; International Crisis Group, “Pogroms.”

²⁸⁴ International Crisis Group, “Pogroms.”

in the immediate aftermath of the violence.²⁸⁵ Approximately 2,700 buildings were destroyed, resulting in 75,000 displaced people. Estimated death tolls ranged from the official 839 to an excess of 2000.²⁸⁶ Among 426 officially registered corpses, approximately 90% were identified; 105 of the identified were Kyrgyz while 276 were Uzbek. Of approximately 2,000 officially counted injuries, almost half suffered from gunshot wounds. The official international inquiry published in May of 2011 estimated total financial damage at approximately \$81,000,000 USD. Finally, post-violence assessments do not provide an adequate assessment of the sexual and gender-based violence which occurred during and after the rioting.²⁸⁷ Under-reporting is judged as the result of social stigmas, weak reporting mechanisms, and continued discrimination against women and the Uzbek community.²⁸⁸

In the days and weeks following the conflict, the Kyrgyz government engaged in large-scale sweep operations to apprehend those responsible for the violence; they would disproportionately target Uzbeks. These operations saw rampant police abuse, extortion, torture, and confessions obtained under duress. By December, authorities had initiated over 5,000 investigations related to the June 2010 violence. These investigations were distributed between Osh city (2,990), Osh oblast (1,227), and Jalal-Abad (900). Over 3,500 of these investigations were dropped based on the lack of an identifiable suspect. Of the criminal charges to result from these investigations, 79% of those charged were Uzbek, 18% were Kyrgyz, and 2% were of other ethnicities. Of the 27 individuals charged with murder, 24 were identified as Uzbek and 2 were

²⁸⁵ International Crisis Group, 19.

²⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, 18; Rezvani, “Explaining Interethnic Conflict,” 71.

²⁸⁷ Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report,” 39–44.

²⁸⁸ Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, 42–44.

identified as Kyrgyz.²⁸⁹ Several months following the events, 71 individuals had been officially charged with murder; of this total 83% were Uzbek and 10% were Kyrgyz. Most cases were investigated by Kyrgyz-dominated police forces, and all cases were tried in front of Kyrgyz judges.²⁹⁰ Incidentally, this was cited by some officials as a cause of inter-ethnic animus in the first place. One official noted that the entire legal system – the police, the courts, and the prosecutors – was dominated by and served the interests of ethnic Kyrgyz; he further postulated that it was little wonder Uzbeks harbored skepticism of the government and furthermore self-armed in order to defend themselves.²⁹¹

The 2010 ethnic violence which terrorized south Kyrgyzstan deepened existing divisions between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and further diminished government legitimacy in the south. Months on from the event, further political fallout would emerge after the government attempted and failed to remove the Mayor of Osh –Kyrgyz nationalist politician Melis Myrzakmatov – due to internal feuding among government officials, some of whom supported Myrzakmatov.²⁹² Myrzakmatov posed a consistent challenge to central authority in the region, with some outside observers fearing that his hardline-nationalist rhetoric may reignite interethnic violence.²⁹³ He

²⁸⁹ Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report.”

²⁹⁰ Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, 38–40.

²⁹¹ International Crisis Group, “Pogroms,” 15.

²⁹² International Crisis Group, 25–26; International Crisis Group, “KYRGYZSTAN: WIDENING ETHNIC DIVISIONS IN THE SOUTH” (International Crisis Group, March 29, 2012), [https://web.archive.org/web/20131124221720/http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/222-kyrgyzstan-widening-ethnic-divisions-in-the-south.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20131124221720/http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/222-kyrgyzstan-widening-ethnic-divisions-in-the-south.pdf).

²⁹³ International Crisis Group, “Pogroms”; “Widening Ethnic Divisions.”

was finally removed from office in 2013, and lost his reelection bid to a pro-government candidate.²⁹⁴

Over a year after the 2010 violence, Kyrgyzstan held its first elections under the new constitution on October 30th, 2011. Interim President Roza Otunbayeva stepped down instead of seeking election. Interim Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev won the in the first round of voting – winning 60% of the total vote in a national election with approximately 57% turnout and a pronounced north/south split in terms of preferred candidate. Atambayev defeated two prominent nationalist politicians on a pro-Russia platform which included closing the US airbase at Manas International Airport outside Bishkek and naming a mountain in Kyrgyzstan after Vladimir Putin. Russia’s backing of Atambayev likely contributed to his victory in a country where many voters support Russia and Putin. The election did see voting irregularities, and several opposition candidates alleged election fraud and vowed protests. Nonetheless, Atambayev successfully assumed the Presidency and served a six-year term before stepping down as constitutionally mandated.²⁹⁵

Atambayev was replaced in 2017 by Prime Minister Sooronbay Jeenbekov in what was termed “the first genuinely competitive presidential election in Central Asia.”²⁹⁶ Jeenbekov

²⁹⁴ “Osh Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov Dismissed from Post,” accessed March 21, 2019, <https://akipress.com/news:531964>; “Myrzakmatov Vows To Fight On After Losing Osh Mayoral Vote,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-osh-mayoral-contest-myrzakmatov-defeat/25230511.html>.

²⁹⁵ Sam Bollier, “Kyrgyzstan Flirts with Democracy,” accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/201110301531263183.html>; “Kyrgyz PM Wins Presidential Election,” accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2011/10/2011103164540483122.html>; “Kyrgyzstan Votes for New President,” accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2011/10/20111030836831101.html>.

²⁹⁶ “Kyrgyzstan Holds an Election That Was Not a Foregone Conclusion,” *The Economist*, October 21, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2017/10/21/kyrgyzstan-holds-an-election-that-was-not-a-foregone-conclusion>.

unexpectedly won with approximately 55% of the vote across the country compared to the 34% won by his primary opponent, Omurbek Babanov.²⁹⁷ Despite improvements from the 2011 election, there were still significant allegations of electoral misconduct including the arrest of Babanov supporters and the jailing of opposition leader Omurbek Tekebayev. Jeenbekov also vowed to imprison Babanov on corruption charges during a televised debate. Jeenbekov's party is further alleged to have engaged in vote buying and instructing civil servants to vote for him. Other candidates resorted to smear tactics, attacking Babanov's ethnic heritage and false reports claiming he was attempting to incite the Uzbeks.²⁹⁸ In a further twist, after assuming the presidency Jeenbekov's administration has opened corruption investigations into members of the Atambayev administration, including the former President himself. Charges range from standard-fare money laundering to fraud in infrastructure, development, and foreign military sales.²⁹⁹ One particularly notable incident involved the failure of a brand new Chinese-constructed powerplant in the middle of January of 2017 – leaving many Bishkek residents without heat or electricity.³⁰⁰ Two officials implicated in the incident are currently facing twenty-year prison terms.³⁰¹ Still,

²⁹⁷ Bruce Pannier, "Analysis: In Kyrgyzstan, An Unexpected Victory For Atambaev's Chosen Candidate," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, October 15, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-presidential-election-analysis-jeenbekov/28796176.html>; Kyrgyzstan Central Election Committee, "Tsentrisbirkom Opredelil Resultaty Viborov Prezidenta Kyrgyzscko Respubliki 15 Oktobrya 2017 Goda - TSEK KR," October 31, 2017, <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/news/1973/>.

²⁹⁸ "Kyrgyzstan Holds an Election That Was Not a Foregone Conclusion."

²⁹⁹ Satina Aidar, "What We Know about Alleged Elite Corruption under Former Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev," openDemocracy, accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/what-we-know-about-alleged-elite-corruption-under-former-kyrgyz-president-almazbek-atambayev/>.

³⁰⁰ Catherine Putz, "Kyrgyzstan Hunt for Power Plant Corruption Continues," The Diplomat, accessed March 21, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/kyrgyzstan-hunt-for-power-plant-corruption-continues/>.

³⁰¹ Catherine Putz, "Former Kyrgyz Prime Minister Faces 20 Years on Corruption Charges," The Diplomat, accessed March 21, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/former-kyrgyz-prime-minister-faces-20-years-on-corruption-charges/>.

these investigations appear to be politically targeted considering alleged corruption within the new administration including the appointment of former Bakiev officials as well as the distribution of key political posts through patronage networks. This is to say nothing of the entrenched corruption within state institutions themselves, and the continued reliance of Kyrgyz politicians on clan and patronage networks.³⁰²

Over nearly thirty years of independence, the Kyrgyz Republic has developed significantly as an independent country. It also continues to face significant challenges. Particularly post-independence, this history has played a key role in shaping the Kyrgyz Republic as the space it is today. This history also gives context to the place and space of the Republic and helps elucidate both existing scholarship and firsthand observations on the nature of the Republic as a political-geographic space. In observing this history, there are several key takeaways. Foremost is that the Republic occupies the space of what one interviewee termed the “experimental state.”³⁰³ It stands in contrast to its autocratic neighbors in the sense that it is a democracy, but also mirrors them in terms of anocratic tendencies and political systems embroiled in corruption and closely tied to kinship and patronage networks. Nonetheless, Kyrgyzstan has sought to break the status quo by experimenting with periodic restricting of government and the state constitution since initial independence in 1991. The other critical takeaway from observing thirty years of Kyrgyzstan’s history is that like many other relatively young states, it has consistently struggled to cultivate state capacity due to a variety of geographic, political, social, and economic factors. While things have improved since 1990,

³⁰² Aidar, “Alleged Elite Corruption.”

³⁰³ Emil Dzhuraev, Interview with Emil Dzhuraev, interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, July 4, 2018.

1999, and 2010, there are still areas of the country where the capacity of the state and the authority of the Bishkek central government is lacking – particularly in the geographically disconnected south. This struggle to cultivate capacity has been an omnipresent if not defining theme of post-Soviet politics in Kyrgyzstan and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

Kyrgyzstan as a Space

Beyond an extensive review of the history and politics of the Republic, as scholarship in Geography it is critical to provide context for Kyrgyzstan as a space. Elements of this characterization are closely tied to the physical, historical, human, and political geography of the country. What’s more, defining Kyrgyzstan as a space provides the basis for interrogating the critical themes of this research - namely the role of transnational processes in shaping space and notions of state capacity and the “experimental state.” The spaces discussed in this section should be thought of as both nested and scalar; some exist at local and regional scales whereas others span multiple regions and even extend to the national scale.³⁰⁴ These characterizations are rooted in existing scholarship on the Republic, but more importantly rely upon firsthand observations recorded during fieldwork.

Central Asia and Post-Soviet

Based on its geographic situation, history, and culture, Kyrgyzstan can foremost be classified as a uniquely Central Asian space. In the popular imagination these characterizations of space draw inspiration from the Silk Routes of yore. The local tourism industry has indeed capitalized on this narrative; promotional materials for the “land of celestial mountains,” tout

³⁰⁴ Sallie A Marston, John Paul Jones Iii, and Keith Woodward’, “Human Geography without Scale,” n.d., 18; David Delaney and Helga Leitner, “The Political Construction of Scale,” *Political Geography* 16, no. 2 (February 1997): 93–97, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298\(96\)00045-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298(96)00045-5).

urts, horse culture, and unspoiled blue-sky vistas of mountains and steppe. While cliché, these narratives serve as a useful basis for more broadly situating Kyrgyzstan as a Central Asian space based on its geography, language, culture, history, and politics.

Beyond its situation within Central Asia as a region, geographically Kyrgyzstan exhibits numerous similarities to its co-regionalists. In terms of physical geography, terrain is defined by mountains and steppe as well as several Köppen climate zones shared by neighboring countries. Language also contributes to this ideation of space. Apart from Tajikistan, the Republic shares a Turkic language with its co-regionalists. It likewise shares similar culinary traditions, which place a heavy emphasis on meat, bread, and dairy. While the Tajiks and Uzbeks were the first settled peoples of the region, Kyrgyzstan shares nomadic heritage with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. At one point, there was little distinction between Kazakh and Kyrgyz – both of whom were simply referred to as “Kyrgyz.”³⁰⁵ When the Soviets drew borders, the steppe Kyrgyz would become the Kazakhs, whereas the mountain Kyrgyz would remain Kyrgyz.

The political-geographic space of the Kyrgyz Republic also exhibits distinct hallmarks of Central Asian-ness. As noted previously, anocratic tendencies contribute to this ideation of space, as do efforts to cultivate new nationalism following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Like neighboring Tajikistan, are strong north/south regional cleavages.³⁰⁶ The phenomenon of political organization along ethno-regional lines is shared between the two countries; these identities play a key role in the formation of political-geographic space and have also served as a

³⁰⁵ Alexander Pushkin, *The Captain's Daughter*, trans. Robert Chandler and Elizabeth Chandler (New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2014).

³⁰⁶ Lynch, “Tajik Civil War,” 52–53; Bond and Koch, “Interethnic Tensions in Kyrgyzstan.”

historical catalyst for violence.³⁰⁷ Like neighbors in the region, politics are likewise closely tied to clan loyalties, kinship ties, and patronage networks.³⁰⁸ A concept familiar to scholars of Southwest Asia and North Africa, this closely resembles *wasta*, or “who you know.”³⁰⁹ This often translates into corruption. Thus, much like the other political-geographic spaces of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan is a space shaped by a political system closely linked to organized crime and likewise defined by significant levels of corruption and abuse of public resources.³¹⁰ As noted, in Kyrgyzstan organized crime is merely “politics by other means.”³¹¹ Corruption is a way to make a living – particularly as an under-compensated civil servant (See Appendix G).

Like other spaces in Central Asia there is also an element of absurdity to the Republic. Popular conceptions of this absurdity trend toward the simplistic; when many people imagine the

³⁰⁷ Foster, “Cleansing Violence in the Tajik Civil War.”

³⁰⁸ Huseyn Aliyev, “Civil Society in the South Caucasus: Kinship Networks as Obstacles to Civil Participation,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 14, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 263–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2014.904545>; Sally N. Cummings and Ole Nørgaard, “Conceptualising State Capacity: Comparing Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan,” *Political Studies* 52, no. 4 (December 2004): 685–708, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2004.00503.x>; Lynch, “Tajik Civil War.”

³⁰⁹ Andy Barnett, Bruce Yandle, and George Naufal, “Regulation, Trust, and Cronyism in Middle Eastern Societies: The Simple Economics of ‘Wasta,’” *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 44 (2013): 41–46.

³¹⁰ Aidar, “Alleged Elite Corruption”; Bond and Koch, “Interethnic Tensions in Kyrgyzstan”; Murat Cokgezen, “Corruption in Kyrgyzstan: The Facts, Causes and Consequences,” *Central Asian Survey* 23, no. 1 (March 2004): 79–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930410001711198>; Åse Berit Grødeland and Aadne Aasland, “Fighting Corruption in Public Procurement in Post-Communist States: Obstacles and Solutions,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 44, no. 1 (March 2011): 17–32, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2011.01.004>; Holmes, “Crime, Organised Crime and Corruption in Post-Communist Europe and the CIS”; Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report”; Kupatadze, “Political Corruption in Eurasia”; Kupatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”; Alexander Kupatadze, “Organized Crime before and after the Tulip Revolution: The Changing Dynamics of Upperworld-Underworld Networks,” *Central Asian Survey* 27, no. 3–4 (December 2008): 279–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930802560449>; Putz, “Former Kyrgyz Prime Minister Faces 20 Years on Corruption Charges”; Putz, “Kyrgyzstan Hunt for Power Plant Corruption Continues”; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*; Vladimir Shlapentokh, “Corruption, the Power of State and Big Business in Soviet and Post-Soviet Regimes,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 46, no. 1 (March 2013): 147–58, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2012.12.010>; International Crisis Group, “Pogroms.”

³¹¹ Clausewitz, *On War*.

former Soviet Union – especially Central Asia - they picture a corrupt, dysfunctional backwater attempting to reconcile the Soviet past with the post-Soviet present.³¹² While there is plenty worth satirizing, this discussion is not intended to explore the geopolitics of satire as they pertain to Kyrgyzstan as a Central Asian space.³¹³ Rather, it is intended to discuss the unique observations of daily oddities and absurdities in the Republic that endear it to travelers and present similar examples across the region – from slightly-off copies of global brands to creative blends of tradition and modernity - such as sheep secured to the roof-racks of Ladas at livestock markets or solar panels affixed to yurts for power to charge cell phones (See Appendix H).

Nested within this Central Asian space is a distinct aspect of post-Soviet – an aspect of space which has played a key role in the development of the Kyrgyz Republic. This manifests most-observably on the urban landscape – as noted. In terms of how the Soviet past shaped the current political geography of the Republic, bureaucratic institutions and government as well as the military retain many aspects of this Soviet past – notably corruption and inefficiency.

There is also a degree of nostalgia for the Soviet Union; one interviewee noted the belief held by some that “things just worked back then.”³¹⁴ This sentiment was catalogued in a national survey in 2014 by Central Asia Barometer, which demonstrated this sentiment among a plurality of those surveyed (See Appendix I). While more-rural oblasts such as Naryn, Talas, and Batken demonstrated less “nostalgia,” oblasts with larger and more urbanized populations displayed the

³¹² Donnacha Ó Beacháin, “Social and Political Perceptions of the Borat Phenomenon in Kazakhstan: Evidence from a Case Study of University Students,” *Studies of Transition States and Societies* 3, no. 3 (n.d.): 51–63.

³¹³ Christian Hale, *The Cynical Expat's Guide to Provoking Street Revolutions in Central Asia* (Independently Published, 2018), <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/889191>; Edward C Holland and Adam Levy, “The Onion and the Geopolitics of Satire,” *Popular Communication* 16, no. 3 (2018): 182–95.

³¹⁴ Zelichenko, Interview - Zelichenko.

opposite trend. Age and gender breakdowns also prove insightful on the distribution of this sentiment nearly thirty years after the collapse of the USSR.³¹⁵

Transition, Transit, and Exchange

A further dimension to the Republic as a space is the notion that Kyrgyzstan is a space of transition, transit and exchange. The notion of transition is closely tied to the post-Soviet space of the republic; in thirty years Kyrgyzstan has become independent, experienced two revolutions, and refigured its government several times. The economy likewise remains transitional, dominated by agriculture, mineral extraction, and remittances from Kyrgyz guest workers abroad. In the words of one interviewee, the republic remains an “experimental state.”³¹⁶

Beyond being a space of transition, Kyrgyzstan is also a space of transit and exchange. This ideation of space dates at least to the history of the Silk Routes. However, it is also closely tied to the nomadic past of the Kyrgyz people – who only became sedentary following the imposition of Russian rule. Transit and exchange in the Republic reemerged in force following Soviet collapse, and as of late Kyrgyzstan has even emerged as a key trade corridor in Eurasia under the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative.³¹⁷

That which is transiting and/or being exchanged across this space runs the gamut. While this thesis is focused on illicit traffic in narcotics, licit goods such as agricultural products are

³¹⁵ “The Central Asia Barometer,” accessed April 16, 2019, <http://www.centralasiabarometer.org/>.

³¹⁶ Dzhuraev, Interview - Dzhuraev.

³¹⁷ Liu Haiquan, “The Security Challenges of the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Initiative and China’s Choices,” *Croatian International Relations Review* 23, no. 78 (2017): 129–147; John Hurley, Scott Morris, and Gailyn Portelance, “Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective,” *CGD Policy Paper* 121 (2018); Weidong Liu and Michael Dunford, “Inclusive Globalization: Unpacking China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” *Area Development and Policy* 1, no. 3 (2016): 323–340; Stanley Toops, “Reflections on China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” *Area Development and Policy* 1, no. 3 (2016): 352–360.

just as likely to be “smuggled,” as well. Other examples of transit and exchange involve the movement of people and capital; the former is largely tied to labor migration of Kyrgyz to surrounding states as migrant workers. The latter involves the remittances which these migrants send home, as well as less-licit flows of capital. Illicit capital flows come in two categories. The first are outflows of state funds pilfered by government elites. Post-independence administrations are notorious for this alleged behavior, however only the Bakiev administration has been subject to international scrutiny. Regarding the latter category of capital flows, transit of capital typically involves inflows of foreign capital or transit of local capital destined to be laundered. Some locally based banks such as Asia Universal Bank are alleged to have been established expressly for this purpose.

Most importantly, it is critical to recognize Kyrgyzstan as a space of transit and exchange in terms of ideas. Kyrgyzstan is for better or worse the only democracy in the region – even with its flaws, caveats, and anocratic regressions. Democracy has nonetheless persisted despite such challenges – facilitated by street protests, printing presses, and ballot boxes. A comparatively free press and broad array of civil society institutions ensure a discourse which is robust and open compared to neighboring states.

Contested Space

Perhaps the most important space of the Republic is that of contested space. Rather than generalize the entire Republic as a contested space, however, it is more useful to view Kyrgyzstan as a series of nested spaces of contest spanning the local, regional, and nation-state levels. These nested spaces are punctuated by the regional divides between north and south, as well as ethnic tensions and debates over nationalism and national identity. Above the nation-state level, Kyrgyzstan is also geopolitically contested space.

At the local level the urban landscape presents an observable indicator of contested space – transitioning rapidly from the Soviet past to the post-Soviet present in terms of architecture and banal attempts at nationalism. Public spaces are especially representative; Manas and a large Kyrgyz flag sit proudly in front of the National Museum while Lenin has merely been moved behind it (See Appendix J). In other areas, squat *khrushyovka* apartments and corrugated iron convenience stores lay slumped alongside vapid, flashy new high-rise developments and local knockoffs of American fast food chains. In the eastern city of Karakol, development is far-less gaudy; the largest buildings to dominate the urban landscape are no more than a few stories. Single-family compounds and Russian-style homes comprise a bulk of the residential areas – interspersed with establishments catering to backpackers as well as several mosques and an Orthodox church.

The urban character of Osh – a city historically Uzbek in nature – is different entirely than that of Bishkek. Low-slung compounds of the Uzbek *mahallas* are occasionally interrupted by taller structures including mosques, universities, or apartment buildings. To a traveler the city feels more pious in nature than Bishkek as well, with morning and evening calls to prayer audible across the city rather than in isolated neighborhoods of Bishkek. There are other indicators of contested space in Osh as well. Most notably, a large Kyrgyz flag flies from a pole atop Sulieman-Too – perhaps intended as a reminder that while the city may historically be the site of an Uzbek plurality, it nonetheless is under the control of ethnic Kyrgyz.

This local example of banal nationalism in south Kyrgyzstan intimates the broader nature of contested space at a regional and national scale within the Republic. In practice, this contest is observable in the election returns of post-independence politics as well as broader discussions of nationalism and identity. Regarding the former, regional divides between north and south

Kyrgyzstan have historically played a significant role in the political geography of the republic, with power distributed through regional patronage networks headed by powerful local clans in the north and the South. Under the Soviets, southern Kyrgyz retained leadership of the republic; following Soviet collapse power shifted to a northern-based bloc. In subsequent elections, the presidency has been passed between regional blocs. Bakiev was from the south, whereas Atambayev and Jeenbekov are from the north. As noted, the election of Jeenbekov was the first in the history of Kyrgyzstan since initial independence to see broad-based support for the president across the country – winning an unexpected victory.³¹⁸

Historically, these north-south cleavages have been pronounced in the aftermath of revolution and political violence, as was the case in 2005 and 2010; following the Osh events of 2010 it took two years for the central government in Bishkek to bring restive Kyrgyz nationalists in the south to heel; the government still experiences issues with perceptions of involvement and legitimacy in the south. Granted, it has done itself few favors in this regard based on public pronouncements and policy directives, which can be viewed as insensitive to southern residents based on their targeted contempt for religious and cultural practices. One such incident involved then-President Atambayev remarking something to the effect of “women in mini-skirts don’t blow themselves up,” when being publicly questioned about a government-sponsored billboard campaign against *niqab* and other conservative veiling practices.³¹⁹ Absurdities aside, more

³¹⁸ Pannier, “Unexpected Victory.”

³¹⁹ Michele E. Commercio, “The Politics and Economics of ‘Retraditionalization’ in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 6 (2015): 529–556; “Kyrgyzstan President: ‘Women in Mini Skirts Don’t Become Suicide Bombers’ - BBC News,” accessed April 16, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-36846249>; Emil Nasritdinov and Nurgul Esenamanova, “The War of Billboards: Hijab, Secularism, and Public Space in Bishkek,” *Central Asian Affairs* 4, no. 2 (2017): 217–242; Michiel van de Kamp, “Reconstructing an Islamic Identity in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan” (Master’s Thesis, 2018).

concerning are recent efforts to ban languages other than Kyrgyz or Russian for religious services. Harkening to the language laws of the 1990s, the new law predominately targets Uzbeks in the south – the preferred scapegoat of ardent Kyrgyz nationalists.

Even the nationalists are subject to struggle, however. Manas – the preferred Kyrgyz national symbol – has alternatively been appropriated by the Kyrgyz, Chinese, and Russians over the past twenty years leading one to question his veracity as a national symbol. In the latter case, Kyrgyzstan willingly parted with their imposing national warrior; Atambayev claimed that Manas was in fact an ethnic Russian during his state visit to Moscow.³²⁰ Undeterred, *Manaschys* have recently advocate the renaming of Bishkek to Manas.³²¹

It is also worth noting that the “north-south divide,” and relations between the Bishkek and the southern “periphery,” are complex, nuanced, and multifaceted in terms of how they contribute to the notion of the Republic as a contested space. As Bond and Koch argue, the broader pattern of “north-south,” relations and cycles of inter-ethnic violence are in-fact the byproduct of a complex set of highly localized circumstances and experiences.³²² These range from disparities in economic prosperity, representation, and access to services to the experiences of individual communities, such as discrimination by the state. While inter-ethnic strife between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks plays a key role in the perception of a “north-south,” divide, this notion is reinforced by the inherent regionalism present within the clan and patronage structures which dominate the political-geographic landscape of Kyrgyzstan. This regional divide has become

³²⁰ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*, 7.

³²¹ “Kyrgyz Debate Renaming Capital”; Coleen Wood, “Perspectives | Kyrgyz Pop Stars Succor Kyrgyzness,” Eurasianet, September 13, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-kyrgyz-pop-stars-succor-kyrgyzness>.

³²² Bond and Koch, “Interethnic Tensions in Kyrgyzstan.”

more pronounced since independence – particularly with the formation of regionally-aligned blocs of clans from the north or south.³²³

Finally, as a contested space the republic is subject to geopolitical contest which manifests in everything from basing agreements and development aid to foreign funded mosques and universities. To be sure, these projects are more interested in furthering geopolitical interests than merely currying good favor or assisting Kyrgyzstan; the European Union, United States, China, Russia, Turkey, and the Gulf States all pursue their own interests. As with so much of the former Soviet near-abroad, Russian motivations in Kyrgyzstan are tied to maintaining a friendly buffer in the region as a hedge against other geopolitical actors; the US air base at Manas International Airport (closed in 2014) was long a point of contention for the Russians. Kyrgyzstan likewise provides Russia with a valuable source of migrant labor. The Chinese share similar concerns but are also interested in using the Republic as a corridor to link western China to the broader trade networks spanning China, Eurasia, and Europe envisioned under the Belt and Road Initiative. Turkish goals in Kyrgyzstan are less clear, however Kyrgyzstan serves as a valuable locale for Turkish investment and business activity and also shares similar linguistic and cultural traditions to Turkey.³²⁴ Uzbekistan's role in the geopolitics of the region should not be understated either, given its status as the most populous and developed country of Central Asia. Under the tenure of Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan consistently sought to influence events in

³²³ Bond and Koch, 536–42.

³²⁴ Abdykadyr Orusbaev, Arto Mustajoki, and Ekaterina Protassova, “Multilingualism, Russian Language and Education in Kyrgyzstan,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 11, no. 3–4 (2008): 476–500; Leonard A. Stone, “Turkish Foreign Policy: Four Pillars of Tradition,” *Perceptions Journal of International Relations*, 2001; Karen Thompson et al., “Kyrgyzstan’s Manas Epos Millennium Celebrations: Post-Colonial Resurgence of Turkic Culture and the Marketing of Cultural Tourism,” *Festivals, Tourism and Social Change: Remaking Worlds* 8 (2006): 172; Berna Turam, “A Bargain between the Secular State and Turkish Islam: Politics of Ethnicity in Central Asia,” *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 3 (2004): 353–374.

the region through diplomacy and through force – likewise serving as a conduit through which the United States and other superpowers exert military influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan.³²⁵ As noted, in the context of Kyrgyzstan this involved a militarized border, acceptance of ethnically Uzbek refugees fleeing ethnic violence, and military incursions into Batken Oblast.³²⁶ Finally, as the most open country in the region, the Kyrgyz Republic has understandably also attracted the US and EU – who engage in efforts to bolster or promote democracy, good governance, civil society, education, religious tolerance, women’s empowerment, and public health as well as general economic development. These efforts are accompanied by attempts to help build the security capacity of the Republic through border controls, policing, and counterterrorism.

Place, Space, and Capacity

Given the focus of this research it is imperative to discuss place and space in the context of state capacity in Kyrgyzstan. The post-independence history and nested spaces of the Republic underscore an array of challenges faced in terms of capacity. These include aspects of performative capacity, as well as aspects of rent extraction, institutions, the role of crime in the state, and longstanding challenges to Bishkek’s power in the south.

With regard to performative capacity, state efforts remain gilded. The capital provides a wellspring of examples which manifest primarily in banal forms. Wandering downtown Bishkek, these are strikingly omnipresent. Well-manicured parks are punctuated by monuments to national

³²⁵ Bond and Koch, “Interethnic Tensions in Kyrgyzstan”; Megoran, “Revisiting the ‘Pivot’: The Influence of Halford Mackinder on Analysis of Uzbekistan’s International Relations.”

³²⁶ Bond and Koch, “Interethnic Tensions in Kyrgyzstan.”

figures such as Manas and Chingiz Aitmatov.³²⁷ While monuments to WWII remain, there are newly erected monuments to the conflicts of a new nation, such as the Batken crisis of the mid-1990s as well as to the martyrs of the second Kyrgyz revolution in 2010.³²⁸ Efforts to cultivate nationalism in the Republic can and have backfired repeatedly, however.

Some efforts of state institutions and elites to emphasize the performative aspects of nation serve as a direct threat to state capacity. For example, recent efforts to revoke the official status of Russian as a language in Kyrgyzstan have resulted in fears of renewed outmigration by ethnic Slavs, as well as long-term difficulties for Kyrgyz seeking work in Russia. These serve as key challenges to state capacity in the sense they reduce the ability of the Kyrgyz state to extract rents by harming economic productivity with the emigration of high-skill ethnic Slavs. Likewise, these efforts may jeopardize a critical source of GDP – remittances from migrant workers in Russia – by worsening diplomatic relations with Moscow and reducing the number of workers who can work in Russia due to their fluency in Russian.³²⁹

This is to say nothing of the fact that language laws have – in the past – served a key grievance of minority groups. Left unaddressed, these grievances have contributed to outbreaks of political violence. In this sense, the performative aspects associated with mandating a national language can be viewed as undermining state capacity by contributing to the preconditions by which internal state sovereignty is challenged. A further spatial aspect of language laws is the space from which they originate as well as the space they shape. In Kyrgyzstan these laws are

³²⁷ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*.

³²⁸ Shishkin, 171–73.

³²⁹ Paul Goble, “Russian Language Losing Its Position in Kyrgyzstan—and Moscow May Be as Well,” Jamestown, January 28, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-language-losing-its-position-in-kyrgyzstan-and-moscow-may-be-as-well/>.

both an input and byproduct of internally contested space. Finally, these laws demonstrate a central political power which disregards the concerns of those in the minority – mainly communities of ethnic Uzbeks in the south. The marginalization of such communities is only likely to further impede the ability of the central government to exert control over the multi-ethnic south.³³⁰

It is also worth noting that state efforts at public performative capacity through monuments, for example, are closely tied to the nature of Kyrgyzstan as a post-Soviet and Central Asian space. Efforts by the state to engage in this aspect of capacity can be construed as an important aspect of building a new nation-state in the aftermath of Soviet collapse. In the different states of the region, this takes different forms. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan both rely on national figures – Timur and Manas, respectively – as symbols through which the national ideal is represented. In Kazakhstan, this project involved the construction of an entirely new capital itself. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are arguably the only two countries of the region where these projects have failed to materialize in any significant regard due to ethno-regional cleavages in the former and efforts of the leaders of the latter to establish personality cults.³³¹ As a whole, these

³³⁰ Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration”; “Kyrgyzstan”; Zhou, “Essentialist Legacies and Shifting Identities: Language in Central Asian Nation-Building.”

³³¹ Laura L. Adams, *The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan* (Duke University Press, 2010); Laura L. Adams and Assel Rustemova, “Mass Spectacle and Styles of Governmentality in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1249–1276; Shahram Akbarzadeh, “Nation-Building in Uzbekistan,” *Central Asian Survey* 15, no. 1 (1996): 23–32; Bashiri, “Manas”; James Bell, “Redefining National Identity in Uzbekistan: Symbolic Tensions in Tashkent’s Official Public Landscape,” *Ecumene* 6, no. 2 (1999): 183–213; Dagikhudo Dagiev, *Regime Transition in Central Asia: Stateness, Nationalism and Political Change in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan* (Routledge, 2013); Payam Foroughi, “Tajikistan: Nationalism, Ethnicity, Conflict, and Socio-Economic Disparities—Sources and Solutions,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22, no. 1 (2002): 39–61; Koch, *The Geopolitics of Spectacle*; Thompson et al., “Kyrgyzstan’s Manas Epos Millennium Celebrations”; Richard L. Wolfel, “North to Astana: Nationalistic Motives for the Movement of the Kazakh (Stani) Capital,” *Nationalities Papers* 30, no. 3 (2002): 485–506.

efforts by the state to publicly demonstrate capacity and demarcate space and nation are an important consideration when discussing state capacity in Central Asia.

These efforts at performative capacity are by no means unique to post-Soviet Central Asia, however they do face a challenge in the region in the form of existing Soviet monuments and nostalgia. In this sense, elements of contested space are nested within the spaces of post-Soviet Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan, this challenge is embodied by remnants of public space demarcated by Lenin and a plurality of citizens professing Soviet nostalgia.³³² While there are other considerations to retaining these statues, they still seemingly challenge state efforts to perform nationalism through monument – sometimes to the effect of sardonic satire.³³³

The final aspect of space and capacity which requires discussion is the role of crime in the state and the integrity of institutions. Both are closely tied to the nested spaces of the Kyrgyz Republic. Likewise, both are important to understanding capacity or lack thereof in the Republic. While a more robust geography of corruption is warranted, in short this thesis operates under the framework that penetration of the state by criminal actors and institutional corruption diminish state capacity due to rents lost through corruption, a breakdown of ideational capacity, and the reinforcement of exclusive and extractive political institutions.³³⁴ In Kyrgyzstan these are

³³² Diener and Hagen, “From Socialist to Post-Socialist Cities”; “The Central Asia Barometer.”

³³³ Sally N. Cummings, “Leaving Lenin: Elites, Official Ideology and Monuments in the Kyrgyz Republic,” *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 4 (2013): 606–621; Hale, *Cynical Expat’s Guide*.

³³⁴ Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*; Chayes, *Thieves of State*; Cummings and Nørgaard, “Conceptualising State Capacity”; Barney Warf, “Global Geographies of Corruption,” *GeoJournal* 81, no. 5 (2016): 657–669.

likewise closely tied to the politics of patronage – a system which itself exhibits important spatial dynamics.³³⁵

Regarding how these aspects of capacity are influenced by the space of Kyrgyzstan, there are two important considerations tied the spaces of transition, transit, and exchange and geopolitical contest within the republic. Foremost, as a space of transition, transit, and exchange Kyrgyzstan provides a space wherein corruption can flourish because the spatial infrastructure for corruption exists. While large banks have consistently proved willing to launder the proceeds from crime, in Kyrgyzstan these operations have been closely linked to the government and elected officials.³³⁶ This seemingly serves as a tailor-made case of Glassman and Tilly's conceptualizations of regressive capacity – i.e. the state as an institution designed to benefit global hyper-capitalism and/or wealthy elites respectively.³³⁷ In the case of Kyrgyzstan, regressive capacity with regards to graft and corruption more closely mirrors Tilly's ideation of regressive capacity and state-making as organized crime.³³⁸

³³⁵ Matteo Fumagalli, "Informal Ethnopolitics and Local Authority Figures in Osh, Kyrgyzstan," *Ethnopolitics* 6, no. 2 (2007): 211–233; Barbara Junisbai and Azamat Junisbai, "Regime Type versus Patronal Politics: A Comparison of 'Ardent Democrats' in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, January 29, 2019, 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1568144>; Aksana Ismailbekova, *Blood Ties and the Native Son: Poetics of Patronage in Kyrgyzstan* (Indiana University Press, 2017); Erica Marat, "KYRGYZSTAN: A PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM BASED ON INTER-ELITE CONSENSUS.," *Demokratizatsiya* 20, no. 4 (2012); Gul Berna Ozcan, "Surviving Uncertainty through Exchange and Patronage Networks: A Business Case from Kyrgyzstan," *Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Successful Start-Ups and Businesses in Emerging Economies*, Welter, F. and Aidis, R. (Eds), Edward Elgar, 2008, 69–88.

³³⁶ Alan Katz, "The Cost of Dirty Money," accessed April 18, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2019-dirty-money/>; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*; "Life Sentence For Bakiev's Son," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed April 18, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-bakiev-maksim-life-sentence/26650920.html>.

³³⁷ Glassman, "State Power beyond the 'territorial Trap'"; Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*; Tilly, "Warmaking and Statemaking."

³³⁸ Tilly, "Warmaking and Statemaking."

Beyond the transit of capital from state coffers, spaces of transition and geopolitical contest also contribute to corruption and regressive capacity in the Republic. This is a byproduct of several spatial circumstances in Kyrgyzstan which have allowed corruption to persist. Despite political transition, Kyrgyzstan has failed to transition from a reliance on subsidies. Prior to 1991, these were provided by Moscow. After the Soviet collapse, Western foreign donors were more than happy to subsidize the only democracy in the region.³³⁹ Continued support has resulted in an estimated \$13 billion US in aid and loans to Kyrgyzstan since independence. For reference, Kyrgyz GDP in 2015 was \$6.5 billion; official estimates placed annual losses from official corruption at \$700 million.³⁴⁰ Outside backers remain determined to support Kyrgyzstan through loans, aid, and grants, however. There is little doubt that the contested geopolitical space of the Republic serves as a key motivator in this willingness on the part of outside backers to continue to subsidize the Kyrgyz government. In terms of relation to state capacity, foreign assistance without accountability has allowed for continued official corruption and aid fraud in the development sector, reducing the effectiveness of aid and contributing to the broader capacity issues of ideational and implementational capacity.³⁴¹

The typologies of space embodied by the Kyrgyz Republic underscore the challenges faced by the republic in cultivating capacity. Each of the nested spaces of the republic presents unique challenges – particularly in state efforts to cultivate performative, fiscal, ideational, and implementational capacity. Furthermore, a space where corruption persists contributes to the

³³⁹ Rashid, *Islam or Nationalism?*, 228; Ryskeldi Satke, “The Downside of Foreign Aid in Kyrgyzstan,” *The Diplomat*, June 10, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/the-downside-of-foreign-aid-in-kyrgyzstan/>.

³⁴⁰ Satke, “Downside of Foreign Aid.”

³⁴¹ Cummings and Nørgaard, “Conceptualising State Capacity”; Satke, “Downside of Foreign Aid.”

notion of the state as a victim of regressive capacity. In some cases, state efforts to remedy these issues have further exacerbated them. In short, state capacity in the Republic is inexorably linked to the nested spaces of the republic. It is an input upon how these spaces are shaped and exist and is likewise a product of the spaces which it shapes.

Conclusion: Chapter III

This section provided a brief overview of Central Asia as well as a detailed summary of the Kyrgyz Republic as a place and space. In doing so, it ties the history, politics, and space of the Republic to critical issues of capacity – with a general theme of a struggle to cultivate capacity over nearly thirty years of independence. Importantly, it also introduced the notion of the republic as an “experimental state,” that is a state which is periodically refiguring its institutions and politics. In discussing the findings of field interviews, Chapter V will explore these concepts further in the broader context of state and societal responses to narcotics trafficking in the republic and the ramifications for state capacity. The next Chapter will concisely detail field research, data collection, and treatment before discussing results in the following section.

Chapter IV: Research Design and Methodology

This section will detail the design and methodology employed during research - specifically the collection and analysis of primary source narratives and data. This research relies on two chief sources of information. Foremost, it relies on field interviews - which provided key insight into the political and criminal landscape of the Kyrgyz Republic. Beyond interviews and field observations, this research utilizes publicly accessible data to visually and cartographically represent some of these trends - specifically with regards to political sentiment and counter-narcotics efforts.

Rationale: Field Interviews

The primary source information around which this thesis is structured are a series of field interviews conducted in the Kyrgyz Republic during the summer of 2018. The decision to pursue field interviews was guided by several considerations. Owing to a firm-footing in human geography dating to the inception of this research project, it was deemed imperative that this research incorporate a fieldwork component. This component was designed to obtain primary-source data in the form of narratives. It furthermore was designed to provide the firsthand observations necessary for contextualizing the Kyrgyz Republic as a space. Literature review - as demonstrated in Chapter II - strongly supports the use of field interviews for conducting this manner of research - namely the work of Alexander Kupatadze and Kyle Evered.³⁴² Kupatadze's work especially provided a model which this research sought to emulate.

³⁴² Kyle T. Evered, "TRADITIONAL ECOLOGIES OF THE OPIUM POPPY AND ORAL HISTORY IN RURAL TURKEY*," *Geographical Review* 101, no. 2 (April 2011): 164–82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2011.00085.x>; Kyle T. Evered, "'POPPIES ARE DEMOCRACY!' A CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS OF OPIUM ERADICATION AND REINTRODUCTION IN TURKEY*," *Geographical Review* 101, no. 3 (July 2011): 299–315, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2011.00098.x>; Alexander Kupatadze, "Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 25, no. 6 (November 2014): 1178–85, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2014.01.012>.

Most importantly, the rationale for conducting field interviews was firmly rooted in prior fieldwork conducted by the Department of Geosciences at the University of Arkansas - specifically the work of thesis director Ted Holland.³⁴³ Specifically, Holland's work in Kalmykia in the North Caucasus provided a framework for designing interviews - including consent agreements, prompts, and interview structure.³⁴⁴ Finally, the decision to pursue fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan was strongly influenced and encouraged by geographers Alex Diener and Matt Derrick, both of whom have previously conducted fieldwork in the Republic and provided input during the early stages of planning - and fieldwork itself in Derrick's case.³⁴⁵

Research Design and Overview of Fieldwork

Research was designed around fieldwork featuring semi-structured interviews utilizing eleven prompts, as well as follow-up questions deemed relevant during the course of the interview, approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Arkansas (See Appendix K). Fieldwork was conducted in the Kyrgyz Republic between late June and early August of 2018 under affiliation with the Central Asian Studies Institute at the American University of Central Asia, during which time fifteen interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted in English and Russian, with an interpreter facilitating in the case of the latter.

³⁴³ Edward C. Holland, "A View from the South: Reflections on Dagestan," *The Russia File* (blog), July 31, 2017, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/view-the-south-reflections-dagestan>; Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (July 3, 2015): 948–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2015.1054259>.

³⁴⁴ Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia."

³⁴⁵ Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen, "From Socialist to Post-Socialist Cities: Narrating the Nation through Urban Space," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 4 (July 2013): 487–514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.768217>; Matthew Derrick, "Field Notes from Kyrgyzstan: Bishkek's New Religious Landscapes," *The California Geographer* 57 (2018): 245–50.

Interviewees came from a variety of backgrounds including international organizations, local NGOs, academia, and the national government. Interview questions are as follows:

1. How would you describe yourself? Do you identify with a particular religion or ethnic group?
2. What do you think influences responses to narcotics trafficking? Do you think these influences impact the effectiveness of these responses? How?
3. Do you see religion as a factor influencing responses to narcotics trafficking? Likewise, do you see ethnic affiliation or personal kinship ties playing a role?
4. Specifically regarding societal responses to narcotics trafficking, do you believe religion plays a major role? If so, how and why?
5. Could you provide the following information: age, educational level, the nature of your employment, and general outlook?
6. Generally speaking, how do you perceive the issue of narcotics trafficking in the Kyrgyz Republic?
7. Are you familiar with some of the government and societal responses to narcotics trafficking in the Kyrgyz Republic?
8. What are some of the government and societal responses you've personally observed? Are you familiar with other responses?
9. Do you think political issues in surrounding countries have influenced narcotics trafficking? To what degree?
10. Do you think the transition away from the Soviet Union to an independent country has affected narcotics trafficking and responses to trafficking? How/Why?
11. Do you think societal changes which accompanied the transition from the Soviet Union to an independent country, such as the revival of Islam, have impacted responses to narcotics trafficking, or trafficking itself? How/why?

Regarding interview protocols and procedures, each interviewee was asked to sign a consent form prior to the beginning of the interview owing to the sensitive nature of the topic of research. They were also asked how they would like to be identified in any research products which resulted from fieldwork - i.e. conference papers, planned articles, and this thesis. Several interviews went unrecorded at the explicit request of the interviewee, however most interviewees consented to having the audio from their interview recorded. All interviewees consented to notes being taken during interviews.

Following each interview, the interviewee was assigned a UID number by which the interview and subsequent summary report are identified. Reports were drafted following each interview, and utilize notes, audio, and transcripts to summarize key information provided by each interviewee.

The metadata related to field interviews is relatively straightforward. During the fieldwork period, fifteen interviews were conducted with representatives from government, diplomatic missions, international governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and academia. Interviews themselves were conducted between June 28th and July 30th - occurring at regular intervals between one and five days apart depending on scheduling availability and travel logistics. Of the fifteen interviews conducted, eleven were conducted in English and four were conducted in Russian. Of the interviews conducted in Russian, one was conducted with an interpreter - Mrs. Ainura Sulaimanova - present. The three additional interviews conducted in Russian were conducted independently and recorded. Sulaimanova produced transcripts of these interviews based on the recordings. Regarding geographic distribution, eleven of the fifteen interviews were conducted in Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek. These interviews were conducted in English - with one exception. Three interviews - all in Russian - were conducted outside of Bishkek, all with locally based NGOs. One of these was conducted in Karakol in the eastern part of the country, while the other two were conducted in Osh in the south. Of the individuals interviewed, five work for IGOs. Another five respondents direct NGOs; four of these are locally based whereas one is the local office of an international NGO. Of the remaining respondents, two work for a diplomatic mission, two are professional academics, and one works for the national government.

At least a dozen interview requests went unanswered, were delayed, or were outright

refused - including requests submitted to the Ministry of Interior Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The latter requests were bureaucratically ping-ponged from initial submission to the conclusion of fieldwork. Despite setbacks, interviews provided valuable insight into the topic at hand, as well as some quantitative data pertaining to drug trafficking, governance statistics, and public attitudes towards government. This included providing direction to publicly available data through Kyrgyzstan's National Statistics Committee (stat.kg), as well as a catalogue of stamps utilized by heroin producers and traffickers to mark their product – aggregated at a country scale.³⁴⁶ Fieldwork also yielded a series of firsthand observations - complete with photographic documentation - related to space, crime, trafficking, and state capacity; these will be further discussed in Chapter IV. In short, these observations included drug-related graffiti as well as a number of crypto-currency exchange facilities, luxury vehicles, and high-end real-estate developments. While not explicitly tied to narcotics trafficking, several interviewees pointed to these as evidence of broader issues of public confidence in government, corruption, and money laundering. Critically, fieldwork provided the context for defining Kyrgyzstan as a place and space. This is crucial given this research originates in Geography and assumes that narcotics trafficking and subsequent responses are spatial processes.

Rationale: Cartographic Representation

This research is rooted in Geography. As such, it seeks to demonstrate the spatial and temporal aspect of trends and data encountered during research. These trends innately tied to the political geography of Kyrgyzstan. The representations in this thesis thus rely on cartographic training received over the past year in order to visually represent areal data in several

³⁴⁶ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, "Statistics of the Kyrgyz Republic," Statistics of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2015, <http://stat.kg/en/>; UNODC, "The Afghan Opiate Trade Project (AOTP)," The Afghan Opiate Trade Project, 2019, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/aotp.html>.

capacities.³⁴⁷ They primarily seek to represent single-variable areal data through use of choroplethy. In this case, choroplethy was selected to demonstrate spatial patterns based on intensity of color – with darker colors indicating higher rates of seizures.

Overview of Data Collection and Review of Data Collected

In addition to field interviews, this research makes use of publicly available data provided through several organizations in order to cartographically represent key aspects of public attitudes, state capacity, governance, and narcotics trafficking. The three primary sources through which data was obtained were the UNODC, the National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (stat.kg), and the Central Asia Barometer. Stat.kg and the UNODC both provided seizure statistics for Central Asia up until 2015 and 2016, respectively. As previously noted, this data is used as an approximation based on longstanding issues regarding the validity of state-reported seizure statistics. From both sources, research sought to collect drug seizure totals measured in kilograms for as many years possible. During the fall of 2018 this data was collected for Central Asia and Transcaucasia from 2005-2015 - the years for which most countries in the region possess reliable data. Data for additional years - from the mid-1990s and 2016 was collected during the spring of 2019. For this survey period, the twenty years between 1996 and 2016 provide the most complete dataset for the region. For Kyrgyzstan specifically, in addition to country-scale UNODC data stat.kg provided seizure statistics dating from dating from 2010 until 2014. Both collection efforts specifically targeted heroin and raw and/or processed opium. These efforts did not assess reported seizures of other opiates or opiate-related precursors such as illicit morphine, prescription opiates, poppy plants, poppy straw, or precursor

³⁴⁷ Borden D. Dent, Jeffrey S. Torguson, and Thomas W. Hodler, *Cartography: Thematic Map Design*, vol. 5 (WCB/McGraw-Hill Boston, 1999).

chemicals. They likewise did not assess seizures of NPS, cannabis, or cocaine - considering that the focus of this research is trafficking of opiates.

While stat.kg provides some measures of governance, upon initial assessment they proved unclear in terms of what indicators were being assessed, and furthermore how they were being assessed. They were equally vague in terms of methodology. As such, governance statistics provided by stat.kg were eschewed in favor of several large- n surveys conducted across Kyrgyzstan in 2013, 2014, and 2015 by the Central Asia Barometer. These surveys provide useful information regarding public views on everything from institutional credibility to geopolitics, religion, and national direction. Each survey assessed different series of questions, grouping respondents based on region, age, and gender. The total number of participants (n) was 1000 in the 2013 survey, 800 in the 2014 survey, and 1906 in the 2015 survey.

Data Treatment

The primary data treatment involved with this research was ensuring that quantitative data was suitable for accurate cartographic representation. These treatments primarily involved normalizing country-level and oblast-level areal data pertaining to narcotics seizures and crimes. In the case of seizure data obtained through UNODC and stat.kg, reported seizures in kilograms were normalized by population - specifically per 100,000 inhabitants. These normalizations were constructed utilizing historical population data respective to the year represented by each map. These normalization techniques were utilized based on their common usage in geographical and statistical analyses of crime. Data from Central Asia Barometer was obtained pre-normalized. In addition to providing a total n for each survey, survey data indicated the number of respondents based on oblast, age, and sex/gender. Responses are measured in percentages along these lines. For the purposes of this research, analysis and representation focused on *oblast*-level (provincial-

level) responses. Following normalization and data-tidying, it was possible to generate a series of tables and maps utilizing represent the trends in narcotics seizures and political attitudes in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Conclusion: Research Design and Methodology

This section detailed the design and methodology employed during research - specifically the collection and analysis of primary source narratives and data. These data sources both provide valuable insight into the issue of narcotics trafficking and state capacity in the Kyrgyz Republic, even if they are admittedly limited in scope. As will be discussed in the next chapter, fieldwork provided unique insight into issues of trafficking and capacity - both through interviews and through direct observation. It likewise served as the basis for understanding the key limitations and assumptions of this research. The open data utilized for this thesis also provides key insight and context into the trends being studied. Similarly, it allows for the spatial and temporal situation of these trends through cartographic representation - key considering this thesis is rooted in political geography and argues the inherently spatial nature of the trends being studied.

Chapter V: Findings

This section will discuss the findings of research conducted over the past two years. Specifically, it will detail key information which was conveyed during field interviews conducted in the Kyrgyz Republic during the summer of 2018. Likewise, it will detail spatial and temporal trends observed in publicly reported and available data provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime as well as the Kyrgyz government through their public data portal, stat.kg. Finally, this section will include a discussion of this information as it relates to one another as well as the broader issue of state capacity in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Trends in Trafficking

Since obtaining independence in the early 1990s, the Central Asian republics have long struggled to combat narcotics trafficking originating in Afghanistan. The problem has persisted to the present day but received considerable attention in the early 2000s following the US invasion of Afghanistan and concerns over terrorist finance tied to the narcotics trade. The concern among the United States and other Western countries was that insurgents and terrorist groups operating in the region were drawing significant funding from the narcotics trade – which may in-turn be utilized to finance international terrorism or at a minimum destabilize the fragile regimes of the region. In Central Asia, groups such as the Taliban and the IMU represented a particular concern, considering both groups deep involvement in the heroin trade.³⁴⁸ These concerns have continued to guide policy discourse and academic scholarship on the issue, however interviews and in-depth research elucidate a more nuanced picture of trafficking in the region, particularly Kyrgyzstan.

³⁴⁸ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, 121, 145.

As noted in scholarship and during interviews, for example, organized crime syndicates play a significantly larger role in trafficking than militant organizations. These include Kyrgyzstan chapters of the infamous *vory v zakone*, or “thieves-in-law” – a criminal syndicate rooted in the Stalin-era gulags with branches throughout the former Soviet Union. At a local level, groups organized along the basis of ethnicity also play a significant role in trafficking within Kyrgyzstan – including groups comprised of ethnic Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Azeris, Chechens, and Russians. More so than these ethnic mafias, corrupt police and government officials are believed to be responsible for a lion’s share of trafficking – both internal and transnational – within the Republic.³⁴⁹ One interviewee also alleged that Chinese organized crime is making inroads in Kyrgyzstan.³⁵⁰

The other key development to emerge from interviews which challenged existing scholarship is the nature of what is being trafficked to and through Kyrgyzstan. Historically, Kyrgyzstan has been subject to high rates of opiate trafficking due to its proximity to Afghanistan and its situation along a major drug trafficking corridor. Bishkek and Osh represent major hubs of this activity. Those interviewed noted increasing concern over trafficking in synthetic narcotics, particularly those produced in or destined for local markets.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Austin Cowley, Caitlin Micaela Ryan, and Elizabeth Cullen Dunn, “The Law, the Mafia, and the Production of Sovereignities in the Kyrgyz Penal System,” *Ab Imperio* 2015, no. 2 (2015): 183–208, <https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2015.0048>; Kapatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”

³⁵⁰ Kairat Osmonaliev, Interview with Kairat Osmonaliev, interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, July 14, 2018.

³⁵¹ Zelichenko, Interview - Zelichenko; Anonymous UN Official, Interview - Anonymous UN Official.

Designated “NPS,” by policymakers and authorities, these included locally produced or imported amphetamines, club drugs, hallucinogens, and synthetic cannabinoids (e.g. “K2”).³⁵² Field observations were able to verify some aspects of this burgeoning trade, particularly through documentation of graffiti tags advertising various types of synthetics for sale via encrypted messaging services and dark-web marketplaces. Several of these “advertisements,” could be interpreted as targeting tourists based on the language in which they appeared as well as their location – in one case in near a tourist hostel (See Appendix L). Of less concern is internal trafficking of cannabis, which grows wildly throughout the country and is often harvested and processed into hashish resin by the rural poor.³⁵³

The Spatial Nature of Trafficking and Responses

Trafficking and subsequent responses are fundamentally spatial processes. They are processes that occur in space but also which shape space. Trafficking involves the transfer of a commodity and capital across space, however this transfer also shapes space and contributes to the spatial condition of the Kyrgyz Republic as an experimental state. It is an act which elicits corruption, influences the political landscape, and challenges internal sovereignty and state capacity. Trafficking in Kyrgyzstan also seeks to maintain a status quo - neither anarchy nor state competence.

Responses ostensibly seek to counter these challenges by themselves seeking to control space. Checkpoints, border guards, anti-corruption drives, and a significant presence of

³⁵² Anonymous UN Official, Interview - Anonymous UN Official.

³⁵³ Gulzat Botoeva, “The Local Drug Economy: The Case of Hashish Production in a Post-Soviet Kyrgyz Village” (PhD Thesis, University of Essex, 2016); Gulzat Botoeva, “The Monetization of Social Celebrations in Rural Kyrgyzstan: On the Uses of Hashish Money,” *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 531–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2015.1092742>; Gulzat Botoeva, “Hashish as Cash in a Post-Soviet Kyrgyz Village,” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 25, no. 6 (2014): 1227–1234.

international organizations and foreign actors all represent spatial manifestations of a desire to combat trafficking. In some ways by attempting to control space these measures counteract their goal. Checkpoints present further opportunities for police harassment, bribery, and corruption, from everyday citizens to traffickers moving product.³⁵⁴ Graft in foreign aid tied to these efforts is a widely recognized but little acknowledged problem.³⁵⁵ Even then, the sheer amount of aid available in the Republic precludes any substantive change - if one donor balks there are many others willing to accommodate. Responses are also concentrated in the north and dismissive of the south. A recurring complaint among officials familiar with the issue is the unwillingness of government agencies responsible for policing trafficking to establish headquarters or even larger branches in south Kyrgyzstan, where the problem is viewed as more acute.³⁵⁶ This reinforces the notion among southerners of the south as a periphery – ensuring that enforcement efforts in the region are more difficult. One interviewee even referred to the south as “semi-autonomous,” while others noted government ineffectiveness across the south, even alleging that organized crime syndicates played a larger role in maintaining peace in the south between ethnic groups than the government.³⁵⁷

This is not to say responses are wholly negative. As later noted, Kyrgyzstan is considered one of the most progressive countries in the region. This contributes to the conception that it is a space unique from its neighbors - a more liberal social and political regime. While trafficking has

³⁵⁴ Anonymous US Official, Interview with Anonymous US Official, interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, July 20, 2018.

³⁵⁵ Anonymous US Official.

³⁵⁶ Anonymous UN Official, Interview - Anonymous UN Official; Anonymous US Official, Interview - Anonymous US Official.

³⁵⁷ Anonymous US Official, Interview - Anonymous US Official; Anonymous UN Official, Interview - Anonymous UN Official; Dzhuraev, Interview - Dzhuraev.

rendered the Republic a contested space, subsequent responses contribute to the concept of it being an experimental state. This comes with benefits and drawbacks, but the harm reduction measures in the Kyrgyz Republic are arguably better than the alternatives in surrounding countries.

State and Societal Responses to Narcotics Trafficking

The ultimate thrust of this fieldwork was to determine what influences state and societal responses to narcotics trafficking in Kyrgyzstan. Prior to fieldwork, there was a strong assumption that ethnic identity would be presented as a major aspect of trafficking and responses. Fieldwork and continued research indicate that regionalism and kinship ties outstrip ethnic identity in terms of importance to trafficking. Still, there remain distinct spatial and geographic elements to drug trafficking and responses, ranging from Kyrgyzstan's location to internal political geography.

Regarding positive responses to trafficking, interviewees were quick to cite the Kyrgyz Republic as one of the most progressive countries in the region in terms of local harm reduction and demand reduction.³⁵⁸ Harm reduction programs are primarily designed to diminish harm associated with narcotics use – but not to reduce narcotics use itself.³⁵⁹ Examples of harm reduction involve measures such as distributing prophylactics and clean needles to registered

³⁵⁸ Anonymous NGO Official, Interview with Anonymous NGO Official (2; Osh), interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, trans. Ainura Sulaimanova, July 27, 2018; Osmonaliev, Interview - Osmonaliev; Ernest Robello, Interview with Ernest Robello, interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, June 30, 2018.

³⁵⁹ McCann and Temenos, "Mobilizing Drug Consumption Rooms: Inter-Place Networks and Harm Reduction Drug Policy"; Alison Ritter et al., "A Review of the Efficacy and Effectiveness of Harm Reduction Strategies for Alcohol, Tobacco and Illicit Drugs," *Drug and Alcohol Review* 25, no. 6 (2006): 618; Eric Single, "Defining Harm Reduction," *Drug and Alcohol Review* 14, no. 3 (1995): 287–290; Robello, Interview - Robello.

drug users as well as providing drug users with legal assistance and personal support.³⁶⁰ By contrast, demand reduction is designed to reduce the overall demand and use of narcotics in society.³⁶¹ Demand reduction efforts in the Republic encompass everything from establishing detox centers in prisons to methadone clinics and youth education programs.³⁶² Both efforts are heavily supported by international funding and partnerships.

Many interviews proved candid in discussing the challenges to responses to trafficking. Widespread government corruption was universally cited and was a common theme between all interviews. This corruption - embodied by patronage, misuse of funds, and preferential treatment of elites - engenders widespread cynicism and undermines government credibility. Another common theme in most interviews was the lax attitude that permeates official policy regarding trafficking, what one interview described as a problem viewed with “little sense of urgency.”³⁶³ Because of low salaries, widespread corruption, and structural instability within law enforcement and state bureaucracy, many of those interviewed noted the low incentive to police narcotics flows.³⁶⁴ Structural instability, in this case, is embodied by regular restructuring of institutions

³⁶⁰ Anonymous NGO Official, Interview with Anonymous NGO Official (1; Osh), interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, trans. Ainura Sulaimanova, July 27, 2018; Anonymous NGO Official, Interview - Anonymous NGO Official (2; Osh); Sergei Bessenov, Interview with Sergei Bessenov, interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, trans. Ainura Sulaimanova, July 18, 2018; James A. Inciardi, *Harm Reduction: National and International Perspectives* (Sage, 1999); Robello, Interview - Robello; Kamil Ruziev, Interview with Kamil Ruziev, interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, trans. Ainura Sulaimanova, July 22, 2018; Zelichenko, Interview - Zelichenko.

³⁶¹ Patricia G. Erickson, “A Public Health Approach to Demand Reduction,” *Journal of Drug Issues* 20, no. 4 (1990): 563–575.

³⁶² Osmonaliev, Interview - Osmonaliev; Robello, Interview - Robello; Zelichenko, Interview - Zelichenko.

³⁶³ Dzhuraev, Interview - Dzhuraev.

³⁶⁴ Anonymous US Official, Interview - Anonymous US Official; Anonymous US Official, Interview with Anonymous US Official Speaking in Personal Capacity, interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, July 2, 2018.

and high rates of employee turnover - both of which contribute to the notion of an experimental state.

Officials provided several examples of this. One interviewee expressed frustration with international efforts to train police and government agencies to utilize specialized equipment or software, only to have trainees transfer to different agencies or private-sector jobs following the training. This undermines purpose of such programs.³⁶⁵ Some international officials were also critical of the restructuring of the State Service for Drug Control (SSDC). This was viewed as diminishing the independence and operational effectiveness of the agency. The alleged benefit of this restructuring is that because SSDC budgets were previously subsidized by foreign aid, they had grown difficult to independently sustain. Placing the agency under the jurisdiction of the MoIA ensures that it will continue to receive funding.³⁶⁶ In a final example, interviewees lauded a program that utilized foreign aid budgets to subsidize police salaries an effective anathema to corruption.³⁶⁷ It was in-fact judged as one of the most effective programs against low-level police corruption implemented in Kyrgyzstan. Despite this, it was eventually shuttered. While there are legitimate questions over the long-term sustainability of the program, frustration over counteracting an effective program was apparent.

Effectiveness of individual programs aside, interviewees also noted an attitude of realism on the part of the Kyrgyz government. This attitude is encompassed by the sentiment that due to a low-level of violence associated with drug trafficking in Kyrgyzstan, and the fact that it will

³⁶⁵ Anonymous UN Official, Interview - Anonymous UN Official.

³⁶⁶ Anonymous US Official, Interview - Anonymous US Official.

³⁶⁷ Anonymous US Official, Interview - US Official (Personal Capacity); Zelichenko, Interview - Zelichenko.

happen regardless, it doesn't benefit the Kyrgyz government to bear the brunt of a supply-focused campaign against opiate trafficking. This was alternatively construed as the Kyrgyz government being unwilling to accept increased levels of violence associated with a campaign to combat narcotics trafficking on behalf of high-demand countries that engage in comparatively few demand and harm reduction measures.³⁶⁸ There is potentially an element of corruption at play as well; as long as narcotics trafficking remains a security issue in Central Asia, the state will be eligible for counter-narcotics and security assistance packages associated with the War on Drugs, which presents an opportunity for further official corruption. In short, it behooves the corrupt elites of the Kyrgyz state to maintain the status quo.

Finally, policing methods themselves are viewed as an issue. Foremost is the deference to Soviet methods, which emphasize control of physical space - through checkpoints and border guards - over good police work. Many experts assert that intelligence-led policing is a far preferable strategy; there is little will for it.³⁶⁹ The tendency to request aid in the form of equipment was also cited as a major source of frustration among international agencies, many of whom argued that good police work does not require high-end 4x4s or new computers.³⁷⁰

In a repudiation of the historically dominant narrative, several interviewees noted that there remains little to suggest that narcotics trafficking within the Kyrgyz Republic is directly tied to terrorist finance.³⁷¹ While this may have been the case when the IMU was active, most

³⁶⁸ Anonymous US Official, Interview - US Official (Personal Capacity).

³⁶⁹ Anonymous Official, interviewed by Chris Cowan, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, 28 June 2018; Anonymous UN Official - 29 June 2018 - Bishkek; Anonymous Official, interviewed by Chris Cowan, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, 11 July 2018.

³⁷⁰ Anonymous UN Official, Interview - Anonymous UN Official.

³⁷¹ Robello, Interview - Robello.

“green trafficking,” - trafficking tied to Islamists - is local distribution.³⁷² One interviewee even noted - half jokingly - that some more pious Muslim drug dealers stop dealing during Ramadan and resume after Eid al-Fitr.³⁷³ Still, most trafficking and in-country distribution is controlled by corrupt officials and local mafias based on kinship ties or ethnic affiliation. Despite insufficient evidence to substantively tie narcotics trafficking in the Republic to militant Islamist groups and other violent non-state actors, it remains a concern for foreign officials - particularly those distributing foreign aid. In terms of responses, there is a general sense that the Islamic revival in the period following the Soviet Union has - in fact - served as a deterrent against local narcotics use, especially in the south.³⁷⁴

Beyond corruption and lacking political will, there are significant stigmas against drug use in Kyrgyzstan when it comes to hard drugs including opiates and synthetics - so much so that several NGOs described facing criticism for working with drug addicts.³⁷⁵ These stigmas are extremely strong in the south - described ostensibly as a result of stronger religious influences.³⁷⁶ One interviewee provided an anecdote detailing how drug users sent to prison in the south were sometimes “beaten clean,” by other prisoners under the guise of religion.³⁷⁷ Beyond public scrutiny, other interviewees noted that NGOs and Civil Society Organizations have broadly

³⁷² Kupertadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”

³⁷³ Anonymous UN Official, Interview - Anonymous UN Official.

³⁷⁴ Anonymous NGO Official, Interview - Anonymous NGO Official (1; Osh); Anonymous NGO Official, Interview - Anonymous NGO Official (2; Osh); Bessenov, Interview - Bessenov.

³⁷⁵ Anonymous NGO Official, Interview - Anonymous NGO Official (1; Osh); Anonymous NGO Official, Interview - Anonymous NGO Official (2; Osh).

³⁷⁶ Anonymous NGO Official, Interview - Anonymous NGO Official (1; Osh); Anonymous NGO Official, Interview - Anonymous NGO Official (2; Osh); Bessenov, Interview - Bessenov.

³⁷⁷ Bessenov, Interview - Bessenov.

faced increased government scrutiny in the region. Some interviewees whose organizations work on drug issues or issues surrounding corruption, human rights, and peacebuilding described direct personal harassment by government officials.³⁷⁸

Finally, there are two temporal narratives which deserve attention. Foremost is the evolving landscaping of trafficking and responses in the post-Soviet era. In the immediate collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia was subject to a mass-influx of opiates from war-torn Afghanistan. Drugs were cheap and widely available - a running joke among police was that a gram of heroin was as cheap as a bottle of good import beer.³⁷⁹ Things have improved since the heyday of narcotics trafficking in the early 1990s, but they have also evolved. While opiates remain a concern, officials are increasingly worried about the growing trade in NPS produced locally and trafficked from neighboring China.³⁸⁰ Fieldwork uncovered direct evidence of this development (See Appendix L).

The other key temporal narrative is that of that of the post-Soviet. The post-Soviet dimension of contested space also has a temporal dimension. Some things have gone unchanged over 27 years, from policing strategies to Soviet monuments. There furthermore remains a nostalgia for the Soviet Union - things “worked,” back then. Trafficking was by no means nonexistent, but merely unacknowledged - a problem of bourgeoisie Western states.³⁸¹ Policing under the Soviet Union was also viewed by many as more competent; police were viewed as

³⁷⁸ Anonymous NGO Official, Interview with Anonymous NGO Official, interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, July 3, 2018; Ruziev, Interview - Ruziev.

³⁷⁹ Osmonaliev, Interview - Osmonaliev.

³⁸⁰ Anonymous UN Official, Interview - Anonymous UN Official; Anonymous US Official, Interview - Anonymous US Official; Osmonaliev, Interview - Osmonaliev; Zelichenko, Interview - Zelichenko.

³⁸¹ Zelichenko, Interview - Zelichenko.

better compensated and more professional.³⁸² Likewise, police budgets and structure were not subject to significant fluctuations resultant from political transitions and upheaval. These temporal narratives are posited alongside a reality which an equal number of people acknowledge - that of the shift from Soviet satellite to experimental state which has seen continuing struggles of governance and development – likely to the benefit of the narcotics trade.

Even with such issues, in the overall context of the region Kyrgyzstan is seen in much better terms than neighboring countries. Uzbekistan’s crackdown on narcotics trafficking has been described as draconian, ineffective, and a pretext for repression and targeting of political opposition.³⁸³ A significant portion of Tajikistan’s GDP - estimated at between 30% and 50% - is tied to the narcotics trade.³⁸⁴ The harm reduction strategy in Kyrgyzstan is seen as comparatively progressive as well; it is the only country in the region investing in substantive resources for recovering drug users - ranging from clean zones in prisons to methadone clinics and public health campaigns. These efforts are widely praised by the international community, who has invested heavily in them.

Competing Narratives

The breadth of qualitative data gathered during fieldwork is illuminative in its scope, however it elucidates the competing narratives surrounding this issue. Such narratives are

³⁸² Bessenov, Interview - Bessenov.

³⁸³ Nancy Lubin, “Central Asia’s War on Drug Takes A High Human Toll,” Eurasianet, May 14, 2001, <https://eurasianet.org/central-asias-war-on-drug-takes-a-high-human-toll>; Bakhtiyor Rasulov, “Uzbekistan Downplays Drug Problem,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, December 14, 2009, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/uzbekistan-downplays-drug-problem>; Aram Roston, “Central Asia’s Heroin Problem,” March 7, 2002, <https://www.thenation.com/article/central-asias-heroin-problem/>.

³⁸⁴ The Economist, “Addicted - Drugs in Tajikistan,” The Economist, April 21, 2012, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2012/04/21/addicted>.

doubtless influenced by a range of factors including individual perceptions, personal experiences, and even geographic location. Furthermore, information from several interviews directly contradicted information from other interviews, or even information that is publicly available. One such case involved disagreements officially reported numbers of registered drug users as compared to estimates by individuals being interviewed.³⁸⁵ There was likewise a palpable cynicism in many of the interviews, with some interviewees expressing strong disagreements with the policies and positions of others. Some local NGOs and foreign officials noted their skepticism to the efficacy of international efforts coordinated by large IGOs, for example. The sense among some is that the funding available through these organizations combined with a lack of accountability contributes to larger issues of graft, corruption, and aid fraud in the Republic. Another complaint is that some IGOs are all mouth and no trousers – they contribute nominally to policy discourse but do little in the way of facilitating policy implementation. One interviewee even alleged that some NGOs are established for the sole purpose of aid fraud, with little intention to implement projects for which they receive grants. This was described as “grant eating.”³⁸⁶

Situating competing narratives in a quantitative context proves even more difficult. Many interviewees urged skepticism of publicly available data and statistics related to narcotics trafficking in the Kyrgyzstan. This extends to data and statistics provided by the Kyrgyzstan’s government. Depending on the interviewee, official estimates were either exaggerated or conservative to the point of being misleading. Several interviewees couched their skepticism of

³⁸⁵ Bessenov, Interview - Bessenov; UNODC, “Fact Sheet: Kyrgyzstan (Republic Of)” (UNITED NATIONS, August 2017), <https://www.paris-pact.net/upload/0f801831645c2f37a8ed85d2e61476f1.pdf>; Anonymous UN Official, Interview - Anonymous UN Official.

³⁸⁶ Bessenov, Interview - Bessenov; Anonymous US Official, Interview - Anonymous US Official.

seizure data in terms of police corruption - “skimming,” captured product for resale on local markets, for example. Interviewees likewise noted that official numbers of drug users across the country are either over-estimated/reported or vice versa; considering that drug users are self-registered this information is difficult to verify. The UNODC estimated three times as many active drug users as publicly reported – likely because drug users are self-registered and often avoid registration to avoid police harassment.³⁸⁷ Most importantly, there is also a widespread belief that seizure statistics represent a mere fraction of what actually passes through Kyrgyzstan. It is with this skepticism in mind that data was examined.

Spatial and Temporal Trends from Data

As noted in Chapter IV, this research relies on three primary sources of data. Foremost are narcotics seizure statistics provided by the UNODC – which are viewed as an approximation of what is passing through the Republic. While reporting dates to the early 1990s, reporting of opium and heroin seizures for the region does not become consistent until 1996. In the twenty-year period for which data was available, Kyrgyzstan seized an average yearly total of 573 kilograms of opium and heroin per year. By contrast, the regional average was 1,495 kilograms of opium and heroin seized. Of the five republics, Tajikistan’s twenty-year average of 3,399 kilograms seized stands out as the highest – more than 2,000 kilograms more than Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan which respectively seized an average of 1,381 kilograms and 1,476 kilograms per year. Interestingly, Kazakhstan reported the second lowest average for the twenty-year period assessed, seizing an average of 744 kilograms of opium and heroin per year. UNODC reporting also includes Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia in this region, however reporting for these

³⁸⁷ “Kyrgyzstan Fact Sheet.”

countries – particularly Armenia – remains too sporadic to utilize them as a point of comparison.³⁸⁸

Examining these seizures temporally also proves valuable. For example, Tajikistan’s total seizures dropped by almost 2,000 kilograms following the end of the civil war in 1997, only to increase to over 6,600 kilograms in 2000 and 7,900 kilograms in 2001. By contrast, all other countries in the region experienced a net drop in seizures between 2000 and 2001 – Kyrgyzstan’s drop being over 1,000 kilograms. Fluctuations in Kyrgyzstan’s seizure numbers likewise appear to be correlated with fluctuations in Kyrgyzstan’s internal politics. While there were minor increases in seizures following the 2005 Tulip Revolution, the years between 2006 and 2010 demonstrate significant fluctuation, dropping by over 500 kilograms between 2009 and 2010 – when the Bakiev regime shuttered the state drug control service due to their alleged involvement in trafficking. Numbers have since fluctuated but have not returned to the high rates of seizures observed in 2000, 2007, and 2009.³⁸⁹

Beyond these numbers, stat.kg reported select data on narcotics trafficking and related offenses for several years – the most complete being 2011 and 2014. For both years, stat.kg published data detailing various aspects of drug-related crime in the Republic, including total numbers of drug-seizures on a regional level, the nature of drug-related crimes, and national seizure statistics by drug type. Regional-scale data for all categories of drug seizures is displayed in Appendix M.³⁹⁰ These representations excluded Bishkek and Osh administrative areas –

³⁸⁸ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2018 (Set of 5 Booklets)*. (Vienna, Austria: UNITED NATIONS, 2018), <https://www.unodc.org/wdr2018/>; UNODC, “Data: Annual Seizures.”

³⁸⁹ Kapatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”; Kapatadze, “Organized Crime before and after the Tulip Revolution”; UNODC, *World Drug Report 2018 (Set of 5 Booklets)*; UNODC, “Data: Annual Seizures.”

³⁹⁰ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, “Stat.Kg.”

Kyrgyzstan's most populous cities – which both saw high rates of seizures. Seizure data was normalized per 100,000 people as is convention with crime statistics. The result of this analysis indicates that Chui Oblast – excluding Bishkek – experienced the highest rates of seizures for both years assessed, while Naryn experienced the lowest rates of seizures. Over this three-year period, seizure rates dropped in Talas and Issyk-Kul in north Kyrgyzstan but increased in across south Kyrgyzstan.³⁹¹

This temporal shift can be interpreted as coinciding with a return to normalcy following the Second Kyrgyz Revolution. During this period the Bishkek government engaged in efforts to counter the influence of southern populist politicians – who were viewed to a threat to central governance. In this sense, the increasing seizures across south Kyrgyzstan could be interpreted as indicating the increasing capacity of the central government to manage borders and territory in the south. The idea that government authority and legitimacy has increased in the south is also supported in some sense by election returns from the 2017 presidential election, when Atambayev's hand-appointed successor Jeenbekov carried a majority of voting districts across the region.³⁹² While there are likely more complex dynamics contributing to the situation as well, these patterns can be interpreted in one sense as demonstrating increased capacity of the central government in Kyrgyzstan's southern periphery. Detracting from this are the views presented in some interviews that the south remains semi-autonomous, and that the prevailing peace between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks is both latent and the result of efforts by criminal syndicates.³⁹³

³⁹¹ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.

³⁹² Kyrgyzstan Central Election Committee, “Tsentrisbirkom Opredelil Resultaty Viborov Prezidenta Kyrgyzsko Respubliki 15 Oktobrya 2017 Goda - TSEK KR.”

³⁹³ Anonymous NGO Official, Interview - Anonymous NGO Official (1; Bishkek); Anonymous UN Official, Interview - Anonymous UN Official; Dzhuraev, Interview - Dzhuraev.

Analysis and Discussion: Narratives, Spatial Trends, and State Capacity

One of the key questions associated with this research is determining how spatial trends in trafficking and narratives presented during fieldwork can be interpreted in order to intimate a broader picture of state capacity in the Kyrgyz Republic. Likewise, this research is interested with how capacity is tied to issues of identity in a state where kinship, patronage, and ethnic affiliation play a key role in politics from the local to national scales.

As demonstrated in Chapter III, the place, space, and history of Kyrgyzstan is intimately tied to the capacity of the Kyrgyz state. This relationship is pronounced within state and societal responses to the narcotics trade. In terms of physical geography and state capacity, the challenging peaks of the Tian Shan Mountains serve to divide the country – resulting in center-periphery disconnects as well as issues related to state fiscal capacity.³⁹⁴ They likewise serve as an impediment to the state exerting itself over the periphery, a key challenge to implementational capacity in outlying areas.³⁹⁵ In the case of performative capacity, the periphery is alternatively disregarded by Bishkek or poses a challenge to its authority.³⁹⁶ With regard to the narcotics trade, narratives and data indicate that responses to drug trafficking in south Kyrgyzstan suffer considerably as a result. Osh and Osh Oblast a major transit point for traffic transiting the Republic, but often reports lower seizures than Bishkek and Chui Oblast. There are other potential explanations for this, but the fact that state resources are centralized around Bishkek may play a role.

³⁹⁴ Hendrix, “Head for the Hills?”

³⁹⁵ Cummings and Nørgaard, “Conceptualising State Capacity.”

³⁹⁶ International Crisis Group, “Pogroms”; Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, “KIC Report”; “Myrzakmatov Vows To Fight On After Losing Osh Mayoral Vote”; “Osh Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov Dismissed from Post.”

Beyond the performative, ideational, and implementational capacity of north-south relations, the north-south disconnect serves as a reminder that the Kyrgyz government has historically struggled to maintain a Weberian monopoly on violence in the south. While the 1990 Osh riots were halted by Soviet Interior Ministry troops, the bumbling responses to the Batken Crisis and the 2010 Osh riots evidence this.³⁹⁷ Worse, the allegations among some of those interviewed allege that organized crime syndicates serve as a key challenger to state power in the south and continue to play an important role in the politics of the periphery.³⁹⁸ This challenge is not one in the traditional sense of armed clashes between the state and a non-state actor or insurgent force. Rather, these organizations engage in a number of licit and illicit activities that serve to coopt the authority of the state in the region. This includes drug trafficking, but also includes engaging in local and regional politics – such as ensuring peace between ethnic groups following the 2010 violence. Some groups possess paramilitary wings, and in the past state elites have used these syndicates and/or paramilitaries to accomplish state-parallel objectives such as countering the power of other non-state actors viewed as a threat to the state or reclaiming government buildings following civil unrest.³⁹⁹ In terms of capacity, the presence of these powerful local actors ensures continued struggles for the Kyrgyz state in terms of maintaining the monopoly on control of territory viewed by so many as a critical facet of state capacity. In this sense, there is a

³⁹⁷ Huskey, “Demographic and Economic Frustration”; Marston, Iii, and Woodward’, “Human Geography without Scale”; Painter, *Politics, Geography, and “Political Geography”: A Critical Perspective*; Shishkin, *Restless Valley*; WEBER, *POLITICS AS A VOCATION*.

³⁹⁸ Anonymous UN Official, Interview - Anonymous UN Official; Dzhuraev, Interview - Dzhuraev; Kupatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”

³⁹⁹ Kupatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”; Stein, “Revolutions of Kyrgyzstan Timeline: An Open Source Look at Key Events”; International Crisis Group, “Pogroms.”

More important to the relationship between space, trafficking, and capacity in the Kyrgyz Republic is the fact that the Republic exhibits nested spaces of contest and transition. As noted in Chapter III, the foreign aid flows associated with both spaces have proved a significant contributor to regressive capacity within the Republic.⁴⁰⁰ The fact that the republic is a space of transit for illicit goods merely compounds this problem, as trafficking provides another means by which corrupt elites can extract revenue to benefit themselves and their patronal networks.⁴⁰¹ Kinship and patronage networks play a key role in this extraction as they often serve as a money laundering network not directly tied to the elite.⁴⁰² Given the existing criminal penetration of the state, this behavior further serves to diminish state capacity by reducing fidelity in the state on behalf of citizens to the detriment of ideational, implementational, and performative aspects of state capacity.⁴⁰³ The issue of the windfall effects of regressive capacity is compounded when state agents and resources allocated to combat the narcotics trade are themselves implicated in trafficking – as alleged by interviewees and literature.⁴⁰⁴

Granted, international funding plays a key role in subsidizing the regressive capacity of the Kyrgyz state. This is especially true with regards to counter-narcotics and other securitization efforts - such as counterterrorism. Elites in the Kyrgyz government take advantage of threats

⁴⁰⁰ Glassman, “State Power beyond the ‘territorial Trap’”; Satke, “Downside of Foreign Aid”; Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*; Tilly, “Warmaking and Statemaking.”

⁴⁰¹ Markowitz, *State Erosion*.

⁴⁰² Anonymous US Official, Interview - Anonymous US Official.

⁴⁰³ Bond and Koch, “Interethnic Tensions in Kyrgyzstan,” 540–41; Cummings and Nørgaard, “Conceptualising State Capacity”; Jeffrey, “Building State Capacity in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

⁴⁰⁴ Anonymous Official, Interview with Anonymous Official, interview by Christopher Cowan, In-Person, June 28, 2018; Bessenov, Interview - Bessenov; Kupatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”; Ruziev, Interview - Ruziev.

perceived by outside donors, such as terrorism and political instability, while doing little to address some of the underlying causes of this behavior, such as prosecuting elite corruption, working to counteract patronal politics, or addressing the grievances of citizens. The effects in terms of regressive capacity are as much a result of Kyrgyz elites as they are the donors who continue to subsidize their behavior.

Corruption in counter-narcotics efforts is not isolated, however. Instead, it is part of a larger pattern of general corruption within the development sector contributes significantly to the regressive capacity observed in the Republic. To reiterate the takeaway from one interview in particular – aid fraud is a widespread but little acknowledged problem.⁴⁰⁵ Aside from manifesting in terms of regressive capacity, such corruption in the aid sector in-effect diminishes the fiscal capacity of the Kyrgyz state. If foreign aid is indeed a critical aspect of fiscal capacity in the Republic, losing hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars each year to graft is doubtless a detriment to this fiscal capacity.⁴⁰⁶ It likewise diminishes implementational capacity via patronage; mid-level civil service positions and political appointeeships are often viewed as money-making ventures. This contributes to bureaucratic corruption at the expense of merit and expertise.⁴⁰⁷

Beyond issues of state capacity, this research supports the conclusions of some other work conducted on narcotics trafficking in the Kyrgyz Republic. Most importantly, it supports

⁴⁰⁵ Anonymous US Official, Interview - Anonymous US Official.

⁴⁰⁶ Bessenov, Interview - Bessenov; Satke, “Downside of Foreign Aid.”

⁴⁰⁷ Dzhuraev, Interview - Dzhuraev; Johan Engvall, *The State as Investment Market: Kyrgyzstan in Comparative Perspective* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016); Johan Engvall, “The State as Investment Market: A Framework for Interpreting the Post-Soviet State in E Urasia,” *Governance* 28, no. 1 (2015): 25–40; Johan Engvall, “Why Are Public Offices Sold in Kyrgyzstan?,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2014): 67–85.

the view that the nature of trafficking in Central Asia broadly and the Kyrgyz Republic specifically is nuanced and multifaceted.⁴⁰⁸ It likewise challenges discourse which posit the states of the region are “narco-states,” despite significant state criminality and deeply-rooted corruption.⁴⁰⁹ Likewise, there is little evidence supporting a broad insurgent-criminal nexus or spectrum in Kyrgyzstan. Foreign-based militants such as largely defunct IMU play a significantly smaller role in trafficking than may have been true historically. Instead, trafficking is predominately affiliated with local mafias and criminal gangs as well as the state itself, as it is in neighboring Tajikistan.⁴¹⁰ While there are doubtless ties between militant groups and illicit activities, with regards to the threat crime poses to state capacity, the most pressing concern remains state involvement in criminality.

Finally, in terms of the role of identity, religion, kinship, and patronage in trafficking and responses, there are several key takeaways. Foremost, many ethnically affiliated organized crime syndicates remain active participants in narcotics trafficking alongside corrupt state officials. In terms of responses, while some interviewees disputed the notion of state targeting of certain ethnic groups with regard to narcotics policing, others refuted this notion. This competing narrative is tempered by longstanding histories of ethnic strife in the Republic with acute spatial dimensions. Law enforcement and judicial institutions dominated by ethnic Kyrgyz have historically targeted ethnic Uzbeks, especially in the south. The current degree of discriminatory policing with regards to narcotics trafficking remains unclear from interviews and literature

⁴⁰⁸ Kupatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”

⁴⁰⁹ Chouvy, “The Myth of the Narco-State.”

⁴¹⁰ Johan Engvall, “The State under Siege: The Drug Trade and Organised Crime in Tajikistan,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 6 (2006): 827–854; Kupatadze, “Political Corruption in Eurasia”; Kupatadze, “Kyrgyzstan – A Virtual Narco-State?”

review. By contrast, there appear to be few religious dimensions to trafficking beyond religion as a specific marker of identity among crime syndicates. As noted, trafficking associated with militant Islamists remains difficult to unearth. Arguably, kinship and patronage networks play the single most significant role in trafficking and responses, as well as broader issues of crime and corruption in general. Interviews consistently reiterated broader issues with corruption, and in Kyrgyzstan as with many other countries, corruption has a certain element of *wasta*.

Conclusion: Chapter V

This section details the key findings of research conducted over the past two years, including the findings of field interviews as well as assessments of publicly available data regarded to narcotics trafficking. Importantly, this research challenges several longstanding tropes regarding the Central Asian narcotics trade. Likewise, it supports the conclusions of other research conducted in the social sciences on narcotics trafficking, crime, and capacity in Kyrgyzstan. It concludes that while narcotics trafficking is a key challenge to state capacity in Kyrgyzstan, there are other more significant challenges including broader state criminality, challenging physical geography, patronage politics, and political and institutional experimentation. With regards to how these processes manifest spatially, state capacity in the Republic displays distinct aspects of center-periphery relations common in many countries which face challenges of state capacity.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

This research has sought to explore the effects of narcotics trafficking on the political geography of the Kyrgyz Republic, with a specific interest in the role of kinship, ethnicity, patronage, and religious affiliation as they pertain to narcotics trafficking and subsequent responses. This section will provide a brief review of the findings of this research, followed by the suggestion of several future areas of inquiry as well as key considerations for conducting future research.

Summary of Research Findings

In short, this research draws several key conclusions with regard to narcotics trafficking, state and societal responses, space, and state capacity in the Kyrgyz Republic. With regards to trafficking, many discourses have historically been rooted in trafficking as a larger threat to regional stability and the stability of individual republics in the region due to ties between traffickers and militant groups. While some of these discourses indicate the issues associated with trafficking and state-stability in terms of corruption, only relatively recently has work emerged which presents a more nuanced view of trafficking in the region that disputes the predominant narrative of an insurgent-criminal nexus. This thesis supports such scholarship; it presents the view that trafficking in Central Asia broadly and Kyrgyzstan specifically is a nuanced, multifaceted spatial process with a number of inputs and actors ranging from organized crime syndicates to corrupt law enforcement and state elites. In this regard, while trafficking has historically been viewed as a state-stability concern in terms of a source of revenue for militants, there are other more significant threats to state capacity in the Kyrgyz Republic. Namely, broader issues with patronal state-criminality present a more significant threat to capacity than trafficking alone.

Like trafficking itself, state and societal responses to narcotics trafficking prove equally diverse in their aims and effectiveness. Some means of response actively contribute to corruption and broader issues of regressive capacity within the Republic. Discussions of such responses likewise indicated a significant albeit underacknowledged level of graft within the aid and development sector within Kyrgyzstan. On a positive note, many of those interviewed indicated that broader societal responses to trafficking in the republic are positive and preferable to responses in surrounding countries.

In considering the role of ethnicity, religion, kinship, and patronage in these responses, kinship and patronage predominate the discussion. Kinship and patronage are key dimensions along which trafficking, corruption, and state crime are prosecuted. Religion was not viewed as a significant aspect of trafficking – reinforcing the notion that trafficking by militant Islamists remains scant. By contrast, religious revival following the end of the Soviet Union was construed in interviews as a net-benefit to addressing issues of drug use and addiction, particularly among youths in the South. The role of ethnicity in these processes remains more difficult to discern. While some crime syndicates tend to be organized along ethnic lines, it is unclear based on interviews alone whether responses to trafficking exhibit discrimination based on ethnicity. Literature review would support this assessment of discriminatory enforcement by the state based on longstanding historical precedents. Interviews, however, disputed this notion. Regardless, ethnic issues remain a sensitive issue within the Kyrgyz Republic.

Finally, this thesis demonstrates that there are distinct spatial aspects to how the processes of trafficking, and responses manifest. In one sense, they are tied to issues of state capacity within the republic – with capacity itself a byproduct of political-geographic space. Challenges to state capacity in-turn mean challenges to counter-narcotics efforts. Likewise,

counter-narcotics efforts present a challenge to state capacity through official corruption, the reinforcement of center-periphery relations, and the tolerance of powerful non-state actors who may pose a threat to the state on a local or regional scale. These issues with capacity are innately tied to development of political-geographic space in the republic.

Key Considerations and Future Research

Beyond providing a brief conclusion of research findings, it is necessary to note key considerations and areas for future research. Concerning these considerations, this thesis operates under the assumption that it presents an extremely limited view of an extremely complex criminal environment and political-geographic landscape. This is a byproduct of research design, fieldwork, and the two-year scope of this project. Future work would be well-served to incorporate broader and more extensive fieldwork including more in-country travel and interviews as well as focus-groups. Future work may also seek to broaden focus to the transportation networks along which illicit goods are trafficked – as was suggested during field interviews as well as the defense of this thesis.⁴¹¹ In the case of Kyrgyzstan, networks which may serve as the basis for future analysis consist primarily of surface roads (See Appendix C). Finally, the safety considerations for future work should not be understated. While this researcher encountered no significant safety issues during field research, the topics investigated remain sensitive within the Kyrgyz Republic. Any future work in Central Asia anticipates more robust safety considerations.

Considering future directions of research, this thesis asserts that there are several areas within geography which warrant further inquiry. This includes building upon Geography of

⁴¹¹ Anonymous US Official, Interview - Anonymous US Official.

Drugs literature outside the context of Latin America, where there is already significant scholarship. While this thesis does not claim to fall within the purview of critical geography, future work could benefit from incorporating critical-geographic approaches. This is particularly with regards to examining discourses of the Eurasian drug trade as they pertain to the geopolitics of security and securitization. Future critical work would likewise benefit in applying critical discourses of the “War on Drugs,” to the Eurasian drug trade.

Beyond drug geographies, political geography would be well-served to devote efforts to scholarship on state capacity. While this research benefited from examining state capacity from the perspective of other social science disciplines, the dearth of work in political geography on state capacity is surprising. In this sense, political geography and its focuses can bring valuable perspective to broader social science discourses on capacity by emphasizing the role of space and territory as aspects of capacity, among other considerations.

Broader inquiry in geography could also benefit by expanding the geographic scope of this research to other countries in Southwest and Central Asia and North Africa. Unfortunately, depending on the location the challenges of safety and access increase significantly. Likewise, as noted in Chapter V, trafficking in synthetic narcotics represents a comparatively understudied field of inquiry. Geography would be well served to capitalize on the current lack of scholarship on trafficking in synthetic narcotics, especially in Southwest and Central Asia and North Africa.

Finally, this thesis should make clear that corruption and state crime prove more pressing to issues of state capacity in Central Asia than narcotics trafficking – despite the close linkages between the two. Much like state capacity, political geographies of corruption and state-crime appear to be lacking. This thesis suggests that political geography would be well served at devoting scholarship to examining political geographies of corruption and state-crime in Central

Asia and elsewhere. While these topics present challenges of safety and access, future research in these subject areas is both warranted and justified given the current lacunae. Such work would be well represented within political geography as well as regional studies of Southwest and Central Asia. As is demonstrated, such work would likewise provide a valuable resource for informing current and future policy debates on Central Asia – particularly those which pertain to counter-narcotics, aid, and development.

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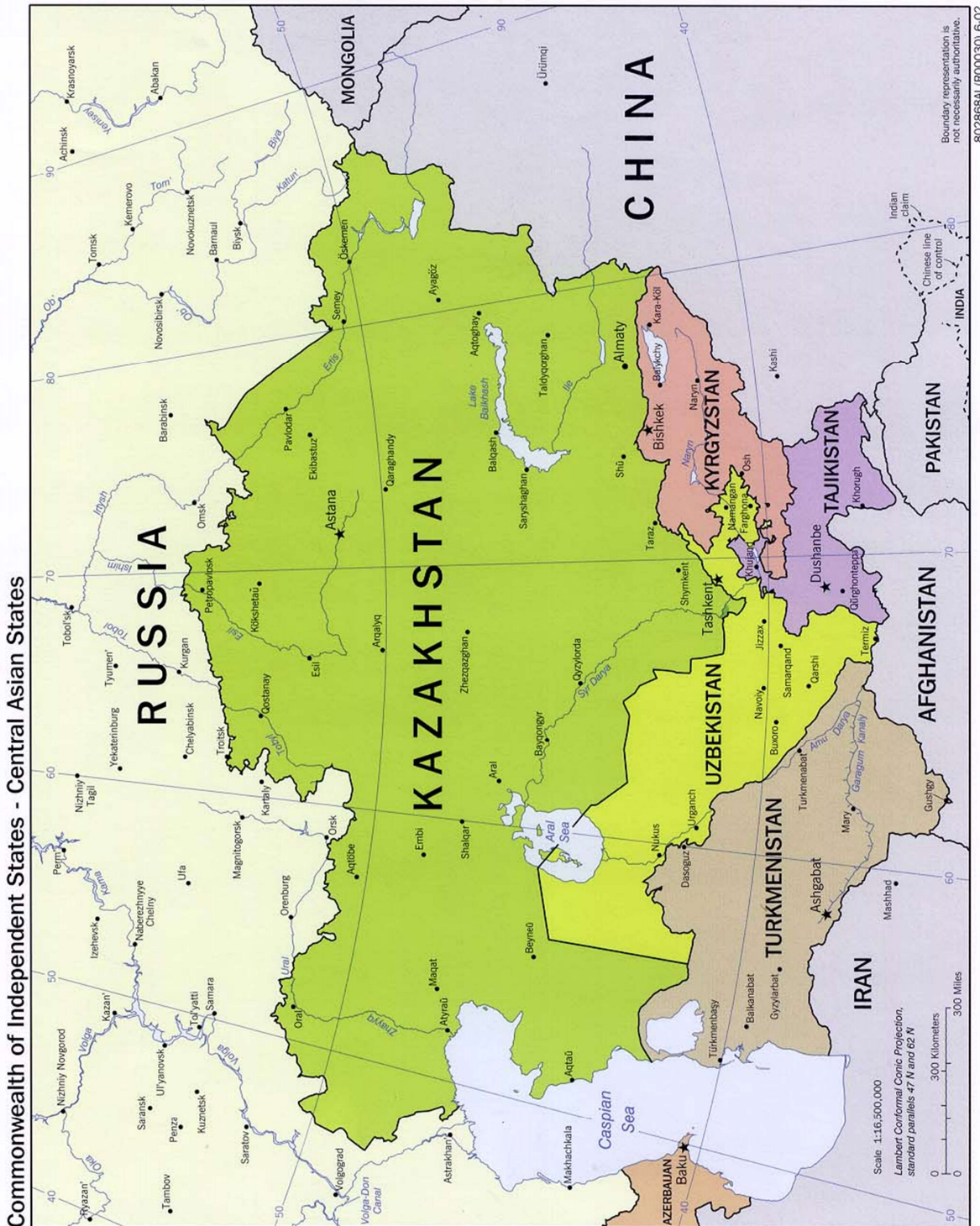
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Appendix

Appendix A: Table of Acronyms

APC	Armored Personnel Carrier
AUCA	American University of Central Asia
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CPK	Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan
DDK	Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan
IGO	International Governmental Organization
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IRP	Islamic Renaissance Party (Tajikistan)
MoIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs (Kyrgyz Republic)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPS	New Psychotropic Substances; Synthetic Narcotics
stat.kg	National Statistics Committee for the Kyrgyz Republic
SWANA	Southwest Asia and North Africa
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; The Soviet Union

Appendix B: Map of the Central Asia - 2002⁴¹²



⁴¹² “Russia and the Former Soviet Republics Maps - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection - UT Library Online,” accessed April 18, 2019, <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth.html#K>.

Appendix C: Map of the Kyrgyz Republic - 2005⁴¹³



⁴¹³ “Kyrgyzstan Maps - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection - UT Library Online,” accessed April 18, 2019, <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/kyrgyzstan.html>.

Appendix D: Ethnic Diversity in the Kyrgyz Republic (2017)⁴¹⁴

Ethnicity	Percentage of Population
Kyrgyz	73.2%
Uzbek	14.6%
Russian	5.8%
Other*	6.4%

“Other” includes Dungan, German, Kazakh, Korean, Tajik, Tatar, Turk, Ukrainian, and Uyghur

⁴¹⁴ “World Factbook - Kyrgyzstan.”

Appendix E: Distribution of Ethnic Groups in the Kyrgyz Republic (2009)⁴¹⁵



⁴¹⁵ Bond and Koch, "Interethnic Tensions in Kyrgyzstan."

Appendix F: 2010 Violence in Osh



Osh's Prominent Lenin statue – located outside city offices – during the violence of 2010 June (top)⁴¹⁶ and during 2018 July (bottom; Photo by Author)

⁴¹⁶ VOA News, *Fourth Day of Ethnic Violence in Kyrgyzstan*.

Appendix G: Police Corruption



Kyrgyzstan’s traffic police are notoriously corrupt – often stopping motorists at random to extort bribes for speeding – actual or perceived – and other minor violations or infractions.⁴¹⁷ In this case, the “extra trouble,” was included in the final taxi fare. (Photo by Author)

⁴¹⁷ Shishkin, *Restless Valley*.

Appendix H: Sheep and Ladas



Sheep secured to the roof rack of a Lada sedan at a Saturday livestock market in Karakol
(Photo by Author)

Appendix I: Views of Kyrgyz Citizens on the Collapse of the USSR⁴¹⁸

<i>"It is a tragedy that the Soviet Union ceased to exist."</i>	<i>Totally agree</i>	<i>Rather agree</i>	<i>Rather disagree</i>	<i>Totally disagree</i>	<i>Refused to answer</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
Kyrgyzstan (n=1000)	34.50%	17.45%	18.25%	23.47%	0.20%	6.12%
Bishkek (n=178)	46.63%	15.17%	14.61%	8.99%	0.56%	14.04%
Chui Oblast (n=138)	34.06%	13.77%	31.16%	15.22%		5.80%
Issyk-Kul Oblast (n=87)	41.38%	27.59%	13.79%	3.45%	1.15%	12.64%
Naryn Oblast (n=47)	10.64%	8.51%	31.91%	48.94%		
Talas Oblast (n=46)	23.91%	30.43%	10.87%	34.78%		
Osh Oblast (n=191)	29.32%	14.14%	12.57%	38.74%		5.24%
Jalal-Abad Oblast (n=183)	43.96%	15.93%	18.13%	21.98%		
Batken Oblast (n=78)	19.23%	11.54%	17.95%	48.72%		2.56%
Osh (n=51)	22.00%	42.00%	20.00%	6.00%		10.00%
Male (n=493)	30.22%	15.01%	21.50%	27.59%		5.68%
Female (n=507)	38.66%	20.12%	14.99%	19.33%	0.39%	6.51%
25-35 y.o. (n=409)	26.03%	16.55%	20.19%	29.20%	0.49%	7.54%
36-45 y.o. (n=293)	34.93%	19.52%	17.81%	19.52%		8.22%
46-60 y.o. (n=298)	45.48%	17.06%	15.72%	19.40%	0.33%	2.01%

⁴¹⁸ "The Central Asia Barometer."

Appendix J: Manas



Manas and the Kyrgyz national flag on Bishkek's main square (Photo by Author)

Appendix K: IRB Approval



To: Christopher G Cowan
From: Douglas James Adams, Chair
IRB Committee
Date: 04/16/2018
Action: **Expedited Approval**
Action Date: 04/16/2018
Protocol #: 1802103275
Study Title: Hard Drugs and Porous Borders: State and Societal Responses to Narcotics Trafficking in the Kyrgyz Republic
Expiration Date: 02/22/2019
Last Approval Date:

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Edward C Holland, Key Personnel

Appendix L: Drug Graffiti



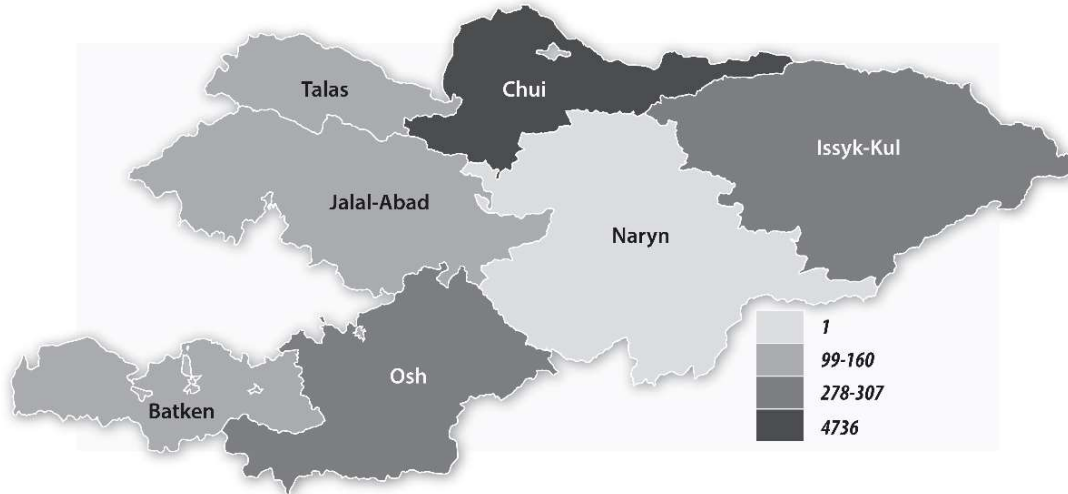
Examples of drug graffiti in Bishkek (top row, bottom row, center right) and Osh (center left; near tourist hostel) advertising synthetic narcotics for sale via encrypted messaging services.

Tags affiliated with “@HORDE_KG” appeared outside the apartment of the author shortly before the conclusion of fieldwork. (Photos by Author)

Appendix M: Total Drug Seizures in 2011 & 2014⁴¹⁹

2011 Total Narcotics Seizures

Kyrgyzstan • Kilograms Seized per 100,000 People



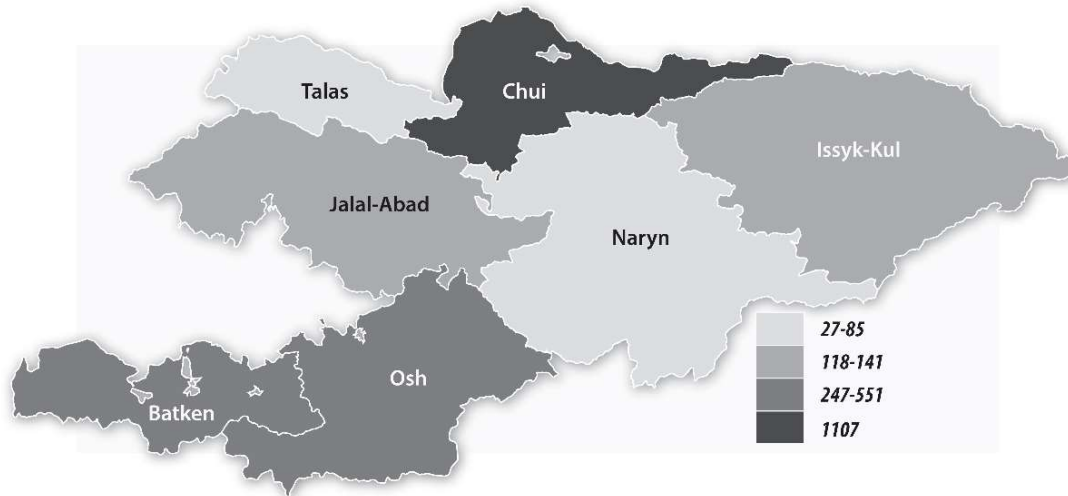
Data: stat.kg

Bishkek and Osh Administrative Areas were excluded from this representation.

© Chris Cowan 2019

2014 Total Narcotics Seizures

Kyrgyzstan • Kilograms Seized per 100,000 People



Data: stat.kg

Bishkek and Osh Administrative Areas were excluded from this representation.

© Chris Cowan 2019

Data was provided by stat.kg; Bishkek and Osh Administrative Areas were excluded from this representation (Maps by Author)

⁴¹⁹ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, “Stat.Kg.”