

## Institutional Legacies and Political Transition in Central Asia

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### Abstract

This essay presents a framework for analyzing political transition in postcommunist Central Asia by examining the legacies of both the traditional model of Central Asian societies in the prerevolutionary period and the political institutions under the Soviet regime. It argues that, although societies and the influences of traditional genealogical and familial identities persisted and the structure of societies remained unchanged under tsarist authority, kinship ties and networks were difficult for the Soviet state to control and firmly adapt to its institutions, despite the Soviet system's attempt to eliminate these traditional social elements. The institutional legacies from both the precommunist and Soviet eras have continually affected nation building and subsequent development since Central Asian states gained their independence. Politics in Central Asia are currently characterized by neopatrimonialism, in which the authoritarian system serves as a formal institution, and behind it an informal, patron—client relationship can be observed. Therefore, regarding political transition in Central Asia, it is difficult to conclude that democratization has developed in Central Asian countries.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, institutional legacy, neopatrimonialism, political transition.

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Following two decades of reform, the five former Soviet republics in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) have demonstrated that their commitment to democratization has been only a façade covering a resurgence of authoritarianism. The reality of political development in Central Asian states is no longer in line with the transition paradigm. The transition paradigm depicts the stages of democracy and is based on the decisions and abilities of political elites and the importance of

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state institutions, especially the determinant role of elections. Accordingly, scholars are beginning to study the effects of institutional legacies on the political transition of the countries, which have not been emphasized in past explanations of the transition paradigm. However, scholars have differed in their perspectives regarding the role of institutional legacies in political transition in post-Soviet Central Asia.

One of these perspectives examines the traditional institutions of Central Asian societies, such as kinship, family, and ethnic ties, which play a major role in society and thereby provide useful criteria for exploring politics in Central Asia. This perspective contends that Central Asians resisted the Soviet regime through maintaining traditions, informal kinship networks, and “underground” Islamic practice. These forms of resistance were described as parallel structures through which both the Central Asian elites and masses deliberately circumvented the Soviet system. Therefore, Central Asian societies have been essentially unchanged since the pre-Soviet period.

Conversely, the other perspective of the Soviet legacy emphasizes the effect of the Soviet totalitarian regime on the political transition and development of post-Soviet Central Asia. Scholars argue that the processes of the Soviet administrative structure, economic specialization, and creation and expansion of national cadres transformed kinship connections into regional ties. This perspective therefore holds that post-Soviet governments have been established by elites with shared regional bases.<sup>1</sup>

This essay presents a framework for the analysis of political transition in postcommunist Central Asia by examining the legacies of both the traditional model of Central Asian societies in the prerevolutionary period and political institutions under the Soviet regime. As the terms “clan” and “tribe” “are heavily burdened with evolutionary assumptions of 19<sup>th</sup>-century theories,” according to Gullete, this essay will use the Russian terms *rod* for “clan” and *plemya* for “tribe.”<sup>2</sup> Gullete noted that these Russian terms have been appropriated and are used in local discourse. In addition, both *rod* and *plemya* imply different forms of groupings on the basis of genealogical knowledge.<sup>3</sup> These terms are prevalent, and they express individual and group identities. This essay argues that kinship ties and networks were difficult for the Soviet state to control and largely remained unaffected, despite Soviet

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<sup>1</sup> These two perspectives are held, respectively, by Kathleen Collins and Pauline Jones Luong. See Kathleen Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories,” *World Politics*, no. 2 (2004): 224-261; id., *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Pauline Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Power, Perceptions, and Pacts* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> David Gullette, “Theories on Central Asian Factionalism: The Debate in Political Science and Its Wider Applications,” *Central Asian Survey*, no. 3 (2007): 374.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

attempts to eliminate these traditional social elements. This institutional legacy has continually affected nation building and subsequent development since Central Asian states gained independence. Politics in Central Asia are currently characterized by neopatrimonialism, in which formal institutions are characterized by an authoritarian system and a patron—client relationship can be observed in informal practice. Therefore, in the short term, it is difficult to develop a Western style of democracy in Central Asia.

## **Theoretical Discussion of Institutional Legacies and Political Transition**

The neoinstitutionalism paradigm has received considerable attention from scholars amid the background of political transition and democratization in the postcommunist states during the 1990s. Numerous studies focus on institutional design and socioeconomic settings because they are considered fundamental variables for democratization. Perspectives differ as to whether a leader's political will or institutional legacies dominate institutional design and policy decisions, particularly at critical junctures. For example, regarding the underlying factor of political will, Elster, Offe, and Preuss, as well as Johnson, have indicated that the collapse of communist regimes in 1989 created a social and political vacuum. At this critical juncture of discontinuous change, the institutional legacy as the foundation of dependency was weakened; thus, the possibilities for state policy decisions greatly expanded.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, Shugart, Pop-Eleches, and Clare emphasize the role of historical legacies in shaping the political environment and newly formed institutions. They argue that any systematic analysis of democratization in the postcommunist context should be based on historical legacies. Although policy decisions are made rationally, the preferences and choices of politicians are largely the products of long- and short-term legacies.<sup>5</sup>

The above distinct perspectives indicate scholars' attempts to determine the sufficient and necessary conditions for democratic development among the different cases of countries worldwide. However, the distinct outcomes of political transition in postcommunist countries over more than twenty years have revealed that different factors have existed and been influential within

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<sup>4</sup> Jon Elster, Claus Offe, and Ulrich K. Preuss, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at Sea* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 296, and Juliet Johnson, "Path Contingency in Post-Communist Transformations," *Comparative Politics*, no. 3 (2001): 257.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Soberg Shugart, "Politicians, Parties, and Presidents: An Exploration of Post-Authoritarian Institutional Design," in *Liberalization and Leninist Legacies: Comparative Perspectives on Democratic Transitions*, ed. Beverly Crawford and Arend Lijphart (Berkeley: Regents of the University of California, 1997), 40-41; Grigore Pop-Eleches, "Historical Legacies and Post-Communist Regime Change," *Journal of Politics*, no. 4 (2007): 909; and Joe Clare, "Democratization and International Conflict: The Impact of Institutional Legacies," *Journal of Peace Research*, no. 3 (2007): 262.

these countries. Accordingly, Johnson defined active institutional design and passive institutional design, in which institutional legacies exhibit differing influence and thus lead to distinct institutional outcomes. The success of active institutional design depends largely on a sufficient state capacity to achieve consensus, consistency, and credibility in policy implementation. From this perspective, institutional legacies constitute only one of numerous factors that affect a postcommunist state's capacity, because, in active institutional design, "a policy choice replaces, creates, or alters an institutional framework through direct state efforts."<sup>6</sup>

By contrast, policymakers attempt to use the passive design to incite others, such as supporters or like-minded people, to create or adapt institutions according to personal motivations, rather than changing institutional frameworks directly; for example, privatization in existing economic structures reduces state control over institutions without reconfiguring them. Therefore, in passive institutional design, the state acts as an indirect agent of change.<sup>7</sup> To achieve successful outcomes, a passive design requires a favorable institutional context and, thus, institutional legacies exert a greater effect on this design. This is because the initial power relationships among actors are defined by institutional legacies; in other words, some actors have institutional advantages and are in a more favorable position than others to leverage opportunities during opportunities for change. Besides, implementing desired institutional changes is easier if they are based on and supported by the existing institutional context; hence, passive design policies are more appropriate and successful.<sup>8</sup>

The two aforementioned conditions—state capacity and institutional legacy—separately played an influential role in institutional change immediately following the collapse of communism, thus leading to different results. The relationship between these conditions and the democratization of postcommunist countries has been the focus of empirical studies, most of which underscore the strong connections between state capacity and democratization. For example, Elster, Offe, and Preuss focus on overcoming the social and political vacuum left by the collapse of the communist regimes since 1989. Through a comparative analysis of state capacities for constitution making, political parties, economic reform, social policy, and ideological change in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria, they contend that the formative impact of new institutions is the major determinant of democratic consolidation, which they define as the "capacity for self-consolidation through the sedimentation of the spirit of supportive orientations and attitudes, rather than the inert legacies of the past."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Johnson, "Path Contingency in Post-Communist Transformations," 258.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid..

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>9</sup> Elster, Offe, and Preuss, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies*, 296.

Conversely, in contrast to countries in Central Eastern Europe, those of the former Soviet Union lacked truly independent statehood before and during the Soviet era and were largely governed by the central authority in Moscow; hence, the capabilities of these countries were more limited after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, while they simultaneously and rapidly began the process of transition at the juncture of an institutional vacuum and faced the challenges of intense domestic political, economic, and social disputes, the leaders of these countries tended to adopt familiar practice; that is, remedying the weakness via vertical power structures, thus hindering the attainment of democracy.<sup>10</sup>

Because of the weak and limited capabilities of an authoritarian state, institutional legacy is crucial to political transition. In short, successful democratic transition depends on effective state capacity. However, as Way suggests, “strong states...have translated into greater autocratic stability”,<sup>11</sup> effective and strong state capacity does not inevitably create democracy, despite being necessary for democracy. This has been demonstrated by some scholars using the J-curve to explain the relationship between state capacity and democratization. They find that democratic countries, on average, have higher-quality state capacities compared to weak democratic and strong authoritarian states. However, while democratization may weaken the state capacities of strongly authoritarian countries, it does not affect the capacity of moderate democratic countries.<sup>12</sup>

In countries that have transitioned more successfully than others, such as those in Central Eastern Europe, institutional legacies have been more favorable to democratization. For example, such countries were independent states prior to communist dominance, and, following the fall of communism, new political leaders were former opponents of communism who more actively promoted postcommunist reform.<sup>13</sup> Central Eastern European countries, while under the control of Soviet rule, maintained local control over the state apparatus. Therefore, at the initial stage of transition, core institutions such as state administration, the treasury, the military, the police, and the courts, already were in place. Thus, Central Eastern European countries faced less

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<sup>10</sup> Jessica Fortin, “Is There a Necessary Condition for Democracy? The Role of State Capacity in Post-Communist Countries,” *Comparative Political Studies*, no. 7 (2011): 906-907.

<sup>11</sup> Lucan Way, “State Power and Autocratic Stability,” in *The Politics of Transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Enduring Legacies and Emerging Challenges*, ed. Amanda E. Wooden and Christoph H. Stefes (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2009), 104.

<sup>12</sup> Hanna Bäck and Axel Hadenius, “Democracy and State Capacity: Exploring a J-Shaped Relationship,” *Governance*, no. 1 (2008): 1-24; Nicholas Charron and Victor Lapuente, “Which Dictators Produce Quality of Government?” *Studies of Comparative International Development*, no. 4 (2011): 397-423; and Jorgen Moller and Svend-Eric Skaaning, “Stateness First?” *Democratization*, no. 1 (2011): 1-24.

<sup>13</sup> Max Bader, “The Legacy of Empire: A Genealogy of Post-Soviet Election Laws,” *Review of Central and East European Law* 37 (2012): 453-454.

severe challenges than countries of the former Soviet Union.<sup>14</sup> It appears that some elements of legacy may play roles that are more crucial to supporting and facilitating state capacity toward the development of democracy in active institutional design.

Additionally, state capacity also appears to be important in passive institutional design, despite its emphasis on institutional legacy. A strong, or at least capable, state is indispensable to maintaining the stability of a regime. The stability of regimes in former Soviet states indicates the coercive state capacity created by political leaders in those states.<sup>15</sup> As Pridham notes, although historical legacies are significantly influential in democratization, the democratic outcome cannot be predicted by historical legacies. “Their effects are usually qualified by the manner in which regime change occurred initially... and above all how the subsequent transition is handled.”<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, institutional design is constrained by the circumstances in which institutional legacy and state capacity interact. In other words, policymakers must quickly make decisions to respond to problems and challenges, while facing ambiguity and uncertainty of information and future outcomes at a critical juncture; consequently, both experience (institutional legacy) and current conditions or resources (state capacity) markedly influence decision making.

Not all points of view support strong state capacities in authoritarian regimes. Melville, Stukal, and Mironiuk note that postcommunist autocracies do not have high levels of state capacity or effective institutions, although they agree on a certain general trend of gradual growth in the state capacity of postcommunist countries. On the basis of the “king of the mountain” model,<sup>17</sup> they explain that the priorities of leaders of postcommunist nondemocracies are stability and preservation of the status quo, which translates to staying in power and maintaining vested interests and equilibrium in society. The most effective way for such leaders to ensure these aims is to interact with the elites and organizations that support them through economic and political rent rather than economic or political competition. Through the manipulation of formal institutions (e.g., through false elections, a dominant party, and the state apparatus), the problems of legitimacy, the loyalty to and support of leaders, and the potential for mass protest can be controlled. Moreover, because rent

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<sup>14</sup> Fortin, “Is There a Necessary Condition for Democracy?” 906.

<sup>15</sup> Way, “State Power and Autocratic Stability,” 104, and Lucan Way, “Authoritarian State Building and the Sources of Regime Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave: The Cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine,” *World Politics* 51 (2005): 250-251.

<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, “Post-Communist Democratizations and Historical Legacy Problems,” *Central Europe*, no. 1 (2014): 89.

<sup>17</sup> This model shows a negative correlation between rent extraction (axis Y) and the quality of institutions (axis X) in post-Soviet nondemocracies. See Andrei Melville, Denis Stukal, and Mikhail Mironiuk, “‘King of the Mountain,’ or Why Postcommunist Autocracies Have Bad Institutions,” *Russian Social Science Review*, no. 4 (2014): 16-38.

is generally redistributed along informal channels of patronage, developing effective institutions is unnecessary for achieving these aims.<sup>18</sup>

The above contention implies that the role of informal institutions is stronger than formal institutions. According to North, informal institutions are constraints related to “sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct” that—with formal rules including constitutions, laws, and property rights—compose the institutions that construct political, economic, and social interaction in society.<sup>19</sup> In recent years, scholars such as Lauth, Helmke and Levitsky, and Grzymala-Busse have constructively proposed types of interaction between formal and informal institutions.<sup>20</sup> They have considered the relationships between formal and informal institutions to be generally complementary, alternative, reconciliatory, undermining, or replacing.<sup>21</sup> However, focusing on only the interactions of formal and informal institutions is not helpful for determining how such activities affect the political transition, because they persist in all types of political systems: not only nondemocratic or transitional regimes but also liberal democracies. Through the example of a sports game, North illustrates the dynamics of informal institutions that underlie and supplement formal institutions. He contends that, in order to win, “some teams are successful as a consequence of constantly violating rules and thereby intimidating the opposing team. Whether that strategy pays off obviously depends on the effectiveness of monitoring and the severity of punishment.”<sup>22</sup> Separating rules from the strategy of the players highlights the operational feature of informal institutions; that is, informal practice (which is the effect of players’ individual strategies of manipulating formal and informal rules) thus merges into patterns of group behavior.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, identifying these strategies of informal practice enables an understanding of how players achieve aims under existing constraints.<sup>24</sup>

The breakdown of the communist regime and the subsequent collapse

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 31-33.

<sup>19</sup> Douglass C. North, “Institutions,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, no. 1 (1991): 97.

<sup>20</sup> Anna Grzymala-Busse, “The Best-Laid Plans: The Impact of Informal Rules on Formal Institutions in Transitional Regimes,” *Studies in Comparative International Development*, no. 3 (2010): 311-333; Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, “Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda,” Working Paper 307 (September 2003), <https://www3.nd.edu/~kellogg/publications/workingpapers/WPS/307.pdf> (accessed September 19, 2015); and Hans-Joachim Lauth, “Formal and Informal Institutions: Structuring Their Mutual Co-existence,” *Romanian Journal of Political Science*, no. 1 (2004): 66-88.

<sup>21</sup> Rico Isaacs, “Nur Otan, Informal Networks and the Countering of Elite Instability in Kazakhstan: Bringing the ‘Formal’ Back In,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, no. 6 (2013): 1058-1059.

<sup>22</sup> Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Changes, and Economic Performance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> Alena V. Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works: The Informal Practices That Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 20.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

of the Soviet Union intensified informal practices and the decline of formal institutions. However, informal institutions and their practices are not the product of the collapse of the communist regime; they existed during the late-Soviet period because of the rigidity and incapacity of the centralized planning economic system.<sup>25</sup> Currently, political and economic actors continue to adjust informally to the rapid changes of formal institutions and to overcome uncertainty. Nevertheless, while institutional legacy reduces transitional costs and fills the institutional vacuum, it leads to the construction of “slow and insider-dominated transitions” by formal institutions<sup>26</sup> and, subsequently, to a pattern of “weak parties with a strong president.” In slow and insider-dominated transitions, insiders are mostly from old political apparatuses, or those whose standpoints between progovernment and opposition forces are vague. They guide transition typically by beginning careers in government or parliament, that is, by making pacts, thus demonstrating a type of transition without a clean break with the past or substantial personnel changes. The slow decomposition of old regimes not only leads them to seek methods to disassociate themselves from the previous regime but also provides to them economic interests from the old system.<sup>27</sup> Such politicians are the least likely to represent a party with strong policy commitments to coordinate their activities; instead, they focus more on personal reputation than those in outsider-dominated transitions.

In the above context, rank-and-file politicians prefer to endow an executive, rather than party leadership, with the power to establish new policy directions, thus leading to electoral laws that provide the opportunity to campaign for personal votes and enable politicians to block or mitigate changes.<sup>28</sup> This logic of transition defines the fundamental difference in political trajectories and outcomes between Latin American and Southern and Central European countries, and conversely, former Soviet Union countries. Countries in Latin America and Southern and Central Europe have experienced in the construction of the national state a certain level of rational bureaucratic transformation, whereas the countries of the former Soviet Union have not.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to influencing formal institutions, institutional legacy also affects informal institutions. This can be seen in the practice of

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<sup>25</sup> Vladimir Gel'Man, “The Unrule of Law in the Making: The Politics of Informal Institution Building in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, no. 7 (2004): 1024.

<sup>26</sup> Shugart identifies two variables in explaining transitions for new democracies: the pace of the transition, and the dominant tendency among institutional designers, insiders versus outsiders. Primarily, members of the preexisting leadership or dominant party are insiders, and representatives of new political forces are outsiders. See Shugart, “Politicians, Parties, and Presidents,” 49.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>29</sup> Aleksandr Anatolyevich Fisun, “K Pereosmysleniyu Postsovetskoy Politiki: Neopatrimonial'naya Interpretatsiya” [Rethinking of post-Soviet politics: A neopatrimonial interpretation], *Politicheskaya Kontseptologiya*, no. 4 (2010): 160.



neopatrimonialism, whereby political elites use state resources to gain loyalty. The practice of neopatrimonialism implies an interconnectedness of a political system with the formal institutions of a modern state (e.g., government ministries, and a legislative body) and informal patron—client relationships based on regional and kinship networks.<sup>30</sup> The concept of neopatrimonialism is distinct from Max Weber’s traditional “patrimonialism,” which described how a ruler could establish legitimate authority by securing compliance from subjects.<sup>31</sup> Patrimonialism represented a specific form of regime, stemming from a society’s loyalty to an individual; its legitimacy was derived from the voluntary obedience of people to the domination of their rulers. In contrast to patrimonialism, the patron—client relationships of neopatrimonialism repetitively function and form a hierarchy of dominance. Brokers in a neopatrimonial system mediate the exchange between subjects of the lower echelon and rulers of the upper echelon through a network of brokers or traditional patrons. Thus, the political center is linked with the countryside.<sup>32</sup> In this well-constructed network of patron—client relationships, the ruler controls the political and economic life of the country. Individual client relationships with the ruler play a crucial role in accumulating personal wealth and in the rise and fall of the political elites.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, the function of power in neopatrimonial regimes is unstable and unpredictable because exercise of power is not based on formal laws and rules. “Public norms under neopatrimonialism are formal and rational, but their social practice is often personal and informal.”<sup>34</sup> Consequently, formal institutions such as elections, the judiciary, and constitutions are easily manipulated to favor the incumbent presidents. From this perspective, formal institutions with liberal democratic ideas are dominated by neopatrimonialism. This is essential for understanding the dynamics of post-Soviet regimes in this type of personalist—authoritarian regime. As Fisun argues, a neopatrimonial model compensates for the failures of modern nation-state building and unsuccessful rational-bureaucratic transformations.<sup>35</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a critical juncture of discontinuous institutional change for Central Asian countries. Because these countries lacked the state capacity to contend with the challenges of transition, the operation of informal institutions (which are mostly connected with legacies) exerted the

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<sup>30</sup> David Lewis, “Understanding the Authoritarian State: Neopatrimonialism in Central Asia,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2012): 116.

<sup>31</sup> Fisun, “K Pereosmysleniyu Postsovetskoy Politiki” [Rethinking of post-Soviet politics], 161.

<sup>32</sup> Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, “Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered: Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, no. 1 (2007): 107.

<sup>33</sup> Aleksandr Fisun, “Rethinking Post-Soviet Politics from a Neopatrimonial Perspective,” *Demokratizatsiya*, no. 2 (2012): 91.

<sup>34</sup> Erdmann and Engel, “Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered,” 114.

<sup>35</sup> Fisun, “Rethinking Post-Soviet Politics from a Neopatrimonial Perspective,” 89-90.

most influence on institutional change. Thus, a type of passive institutional design occurred, in which neopatrimonialism became the center of the political system. In this context, the main feature of neopatrimonialism is the patron–client relationship as the informal mechanism and practice. Formal institutions, such as parliament, party system, and election, are permeated with and distorted by these informal practices. The consolidation of neopatrimonialism provides to Central Asian leaders a wide range of discretionary power as an instrument to restrain their “clients.” Neopatrimonialism is the institutional legacy generated not only from the Soviet era, but also by precommunist group hierarchy, kinship loyalty, and regional identities.

## **Institutional Legacies of Central Asia**

### ***Traditional Model of Central Asian Societies in the Pre-Soviet Period***

Central Asia was populated mainly by races that were admixtures of Europeans, Mongols, and Iranians. Turkic migration began in the sixth century from the Mongolian Plateau or Altai Mountains, and Islam was introduced to the western part of Central Asia and the hinterlands of Transoxiana in the seventh century. While Central Asia was conquered by Arabs in the mid-eighth century, a mutual admixture and assimilation between Turkic people and the indigenous Transoxianans occurred. Most of Central Asia was settled by Turkic people by the tenth century. In the sixteenth century, two social types—nomadic and sedentary—further formed. Whereas the Uzbeks and Tajiks adopted sedentary lifestyles, groups in southwest Central Asia (Turkmen) and the inhabitants of the Asian steppe (Kazakhs and Kyrgyz) remained nomadic. In sedentary societies, a leader who claimed authority as a supra-*premya* leader ruled each khanate. The khanates incorporated all of the major ancient cities of Central Asia, and the peoples were contained within their borders. Conversely, whereas the nomadic periphery contained no great cities and was inhabited by groups of *premya*, they alternately invaded the khanates and served as mercenaries for the khans.<sup>36</sup> Central Asia comprised three states in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the Bukhara Emirate, Khiva Khanate, and Kokand Khanate. These state-kingdoms were not established according to national boundaries of modern Central Asian republics.<sup>37</sup>

Through the Islamization of the Turkic khanate, a cultural system combining the traditional cultural characteristics of Turkic society and Islamic

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<sup>36</sup> Andrew Phillips and Paul James, “National Identity between Tradition and Reflexive Modernization: The Contradictions of Central Asia,” *National Identities*, no. 1 (2001): 26–27.

<sup>37</sup> Zubaidullo Ubaidulloev, “The Russian-Soviet Legacies in Reshaping the National Territories in Central Asia: A Catastrophic Case of Tajikistan,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, no. 6 (2015): 80, [http://ac.els-cdn.com/S1879366514000104/1-s2.0-S1879366514000104-main.pdf?\\_tid=965ac446-100d-11e5-bfef-00000aabb0f01&acdnat=1434008804\\_67b5487a4e0ea9e3e2922b971993d911](http://ac.els-cdn.com/S1879366514000104/1-s2.0-S1879366514000104-main.pdf?_tid=965ac446-100d-11e5-bfef-00000aabb0f01&acdnat=1434008804_67b5487a4e0ea9e3e2922b971993d911) (accessed June 9, 2015).

law and ethics formed in Central Asia. However, Islamization did not result in a pure Islamic theocracy or caliphate such as in Arabia, nor did it create an ethnic empire united by Turkic—Islamic civilization. Before Russians arrived, areas in Central Asia possessed a rich heritage of historical monuments and functioned as eminent centers of Islamic learning. They refrained from interfering with traditional ways of life, which was in accordance with Islamic law and with the decrees issued by rulers in consultation with their cabinet. The ruler, emir, or khan ruled provinces through governors called *beks* or *begs*, who created laws.<sup>38</sup> Succession of royalty was based primarily on kinship ties within *rod* and *premya*.

Russian colonization of Central Asia in the nineteenth century introduced Russian culture and modernization to the region. Although the Central Asian territories, newly invaded and occupied by tsarist Russia, “were organized according to the traditional Russian administrative system, which did not reflect historic, economic, and national specifics of the region,”<sup>39</sup> the traditional social structure and Muslim identity were not completely altered because the Russian empire ruled indirectly, through small imperial outposts. The Russian government left native customs and institutions intact wherever possible, similar to how the emirates and khanates that encompassed parts of contemporary Central Asia did not undermine local native groups of *rod* and *premya*. In addition, emirates, like the Russians, often brokered feudal-like deals with these communities regarding tax collection or military support.<sup>40</sup> However, the 1886 Turkestan Statute by the Empire undermined the economic power of local native chiefs, changed property relations, and altered elections for administrative positions, creating a new class of local administrators. Wealthy merchants who were trained in the Russian language, technology, management, and navigation of the tsarist bureaucracy became interested in the development of economic ties and served as intermediaries between the Russian colonial regime and local Central Asian societies.<sup>41</sup>

The Russian government did not interfere with religion and related affairs in Central Asia. The Russian Orthodox Church served only the Slavic settlers at the Russian outposts and did not conduct missionary activities in the region. Islamic cultural and educational institutions were largely left intact by the Russian colonial administration. There were several reasons tsarist Russia implemented a noninterventionist policy regarding religion in Central

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<sup>38</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2009), 27-29.

<sup>39</sup> Peter L. Roudik, *The History of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 77.

<sup>40</sup> Kathleen Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories,” *World Politics*, no. 2 (2004): 238.

<sup>41</sup> Roudik, *The History of the Central Asian Republics*, 84-85.

Asia. First, to legitimize the initial colonization to the new Islamic region in Central Asia, the Russian administration used repressive methods, yet actively cooperated with Muslim leaders as well, in support of goals for which there was mutual agreement, such as social peace.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the government pledged to uphold local religious leaders' authority and Islamic institutions in exchange for their loyalty and that of the local people.

Second, tolerance toward Islam was a reflection of the traditionally suspicious and cautious attitude of Russian authority toward local societies. In addition to the official state religion of orthodox Christianity, all other beliefs were tolerated as long as they did not contradict state interests. Loyalty to the state system was the only requirement for all subjects, including Muslims. Therefore, the policy of nonintervention in Muslim affairs also reflected the Russian administration's attempts to ignore Muslim institutions and downgrade their political influence.<sup>43</sup> No religious dignitaries were appointed to positions of authority, and administrative positions filled by religious leaders were abolished. Individuals who were graduated from Islamic religious schools were not employed by government institutions because a civil education and knowledge of the Russian language were required.

Prior to the formation of the Soviet Union, no modern state bureaucracy or direct state rule existed in Central Asia, where states were not built on vertically integrated societies. The authorities ruled over the area through indirect administration and did not interfere with societies or the influences of local factions (e.g., *Khan, Malek, Bey, Katkhoda, Aksaqal*). In reality, the authorities had a vested interest in the diversity of *rod* and *premya* and in maintaining dominance in the competition among these local factions.<sup>44</sup> Because of the absence of definite national borders and the subsequent lack of national identity in Central Asia, attributes of *rod* and *premya* were major symbols of identity. Loyalty to kinship ties also prevented the delineation of borders and the formation of concepts of nationality. Although during the 1890s the notion of a pan-Turkic nation gained increasing traction and support among Central Asian intellectuals and elites, such nation-building attempts eventually failed. The emirs of the khanates could not accept the notion of a nation in the modern sense, and this conservatism was also in line with the interests of tsarist colonialism. In addition, elites' contrasting opinions led to unsuccessful mobilization of anticolonial sentiment. In contrast to Europe, where modernity emerged gradually from tradition, in Central Asia, the collision of modernity and tradition were diffused by imperialist activities. This caused intellectuals and clerics to seek salvation in reconstituted variants of traditional identities,

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>43</sup> Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 53.

<sup>44</sup> Oliver Roy, *The New Central Asia* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 10.

such as pan-Turkists and pan-Islamists. However, *rod* and *premya* separatists of the steppes supported the continuation of tradition, rather than succumb to the modern European notion of nationalism.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Soviet Legacy in Central Asia***

The persistence of the traditional model of Central Asian societies was due to the role of informal institutions, in particular, the local factions of *rod* and *premya* during the Soviet Union period. As informal organizations, they consisted of a network of individuals linked by kinship bonds, and their members shared an organizational identity.<sup>46</sup> However, the preexisting traditional social and cultural bonds were not completely preserved by the Soviet regime and its policies, but rather were fused into a new form of Soviet structures.<sup>47</sup>

The Soviet Union was a mechanism for nation building in Central Asia. Republics were created according to decrees issued between 1924 and 1936, which not only determined their frontiers and names but also reinvented pasts and languages. Despite an emphasis on the principles of equality and self-determination of nationalities in the union framework, the Soviet policy did not create true nation-states or peoples, but rather administrative divisions as an initial stage in the formation of a “Soviet people.” Through its administrative territorial divisions, the Soviet regime attempted to destroy all forms of *rod* and *premya* links and to replace these traditional and informal networks with more modern forms of social organization; however, such attempts reinforced the local identities in Central Asia. On the basis of real and perceived distinctions among the newly formed titular nationalities, territorial divisions intensified the historical cleavage structures among these Soviet republics in Central Asia. Several *rod* within the same *premya* might have been enclosed by boundaries of *oblast* (region) that did not completely correspond with the preexisting boundary of the *premya* or with local identities.<sup>48</sup> In addition, while preserving some preexisting *rod* and *premya*, the system of administrative boundaries also preserved inherent patronage networks in a new form. The traditional political and economic authority of *premya* and local leaders was replaced by the first secretary of an *obkom* (regional party committee), who represented the chief executive of a particular territory and had the power to allocate various resources at regional and local levels. As the primary dispenser of political and economic resources, an *obkom* first secretary “skillfully used this position to build loyalty and support throughout his oblast.”<sup>49</sup>

Collectivization enforced from 1928 consolidated labor and individual

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<sup>45</sup> Phillips and James, “National Identity between Tradition and Reflexive Modernization,” 28.

<sup>46</sup> Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics,” 231.

<sup>47</sup> Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, 63.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-67.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

land into *kolkhozy* (collective farms) or *sovkhozy* (state farms). In this Soviet system, social existence, including the availability of basic social services and the right to housing and travel, was based on belonging to and identifying with a collective. However, the creation of *kolkhozy*, which tended to be based on local villages, resulted in a syncretic fusion of the *premya* or *rod* structure and agricultural production units.<sup>50</sup> As Roy argued, because lineages of *rod* and *premya* were often integrated into *kolkhozy* as individual brigades,<sup>51</sup> the cores of kinship structures, such as *qawm* (solidarity networks) or *mahalla* (the neighborhood community), were not completely destroyed by Sovietism. The *kombedy* (committees of poor peasants), which were formed for social functions and control of the collective farms at the local level, were “merely the renamed *qishloq* (rural settlements), *aul* (village), or *mahallakomitei* (village or neighborhood committee)”; in other words, the local village elders informally played the same role as governor of their communities as before.<sup>52</sup> Although the authorities exerted efforts to concentrate the number of *kolkhozy*, and thus regroup *sovkhozy* to break and transform the structure of traditional life and kinship, the pre-Soviet groupings such as *rod* and *premya* suited the new institutional conditions. The former *kolkhoz* facilitated the formation of the new *sovkhov*, thus forming a new group similar to *premya*, while preserving their specific identities.<sup>53</sup>

Because traditional kinship structures were preserved, the daily practice of religion, an integral part of people’s lives in Central Asia, could continue largely without interruption. This, despite the atheistic and antireligious ideologies of communism and the destructive Soviet policy regarding Islam. Moreover, the adaptability of the clerical structure of the Sunni branch of Islam to the Soviet system helped it to avoid destruction. For example, imams could be selected by the local population, and all rituals, from prayers to funerals, could be held at home. Therefore, religious culture and activities were retained, together with *rod* and *premya* lineages, within villages, *mahalla*, or *kolkhoz*. As Glenn notes, the fact that Central Asia was distinguished by an extremely low rate of population movement from local rural environments to urban centers also meant that these practices could continue unreported because each inhabitant’s loyalty remained at the local level.<sup>54</sup>

The *korenizatsiya* (the nativization and indigenization of local elites) of the early Soviet nationality policy, promoted primarily in the 1920s, also led the traditional kinship groups to accommodate Soviet institutions. To fight the backwardness of Central Asia and resolve the problem of the lack of party

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<sup>50</sup> John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 96.

<sup>51</sup> Roy, *The New Central Asia*, 87.

<sup>52</sup> Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, 87.

<sup>53</sup> Roy, *The New Central Asia*, 86-90.

<sup>54</sup> Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, 89.

cadres after the communist revolution, the Soviet regime assigned power to native elites to restructure the new Soviet republics. Through the process of *korenizatsiya*, natives were involved in Sovietized institutions, namely governmental and educational systems. Meanwhile, because populations of ethnic Russians who were ordered to migrate to Central Asia were typically technical cadres, they were concentrated in industrial centers and urban areas; institutions in rural areas were ruled by native staffs.<sup>55</sup> As a result, party cadres originated in districts, and links with the *kolkhoz* remained strong. Additionally, personnel in the Communist Party, government organizations, and industry were recruited through kinship ties. The native cadres of the district or regional committees placed members of their *rod* and *premya* in positions because they considered kinship ties to be more reliable for surviving in competitive and hierarchical party power struggles.<sup>56</sup>

Personnel recruitment based on kinship ties occurred in institutional hierarchies at both the local level and the highest tiers of authority, as well as within in the party structure.<sup>57</sup> The highest Communist Party posts in Soviet republics, including the post of first secretary, were occupied by natives or the traditional leading groups in the newly formed nations. In Kazakhstan, the *Senior jüz* (hordes), from the southeast of the country, held influential positions within the political apparatus. In Kyrgyzstan, two major groups, *Salto* and *Sary Bagish*, were the traditionally predominant military and political powers. The hegemony of elites from the Khozhent region of Tajikistan from 1946 to 1992 demonstrated that they were trusted by Moscow. In Turkmenistan, *Teke* held power, whereas in Uzbekistan, a Tashkent–Ferghana regional alliance held power from 1937 to 1959, when the hegemony was ended by a Samarkand–Bukharan alliance.<sup>58</sup>

In addition, patron–client relationships were established among key members of the political apparatus in Moscow (including the general secretary after 1937) and the leaders of the republics. Although the cadres were loyal to the Soviet system and maintained power with the support of Moscow, the central powers in Moscow “rapidly settled for manipulating political factionalism, either by supporting one faction against another or by maintaining a balance between them.”<sup>59</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, Moscow attempted to suppress such locally based political networks in the region. However, soon after Stalin’s death, Moscow allowed them free rein, as long as they exerted the economic production and social control that the Communist Party demanded

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<sup>55</sup> Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, 91.

<sup>56</sup> Alexandra Bennigsen and Marie Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 136, quoted in Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, 97.

<sup>57</sup> Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, 97.

<sup>59</sup> Roy, *The New Central Asia*, 103-104.

of all republics.<sup>60</sup> Thus, Moscow acted as a referee to balance these divergent interests, and each faction strived to gain and maintain support from Moscow. Strong local leaders, such as Rashidov in Uzbekistan, Usualiev in Kyrgyzstan, Kunaev in Kazakhstan, Aliyev in Azerbaijan, Gapurov in Turkmenistan, and Rasulov in Tajikistan, were backed by the central authority because the local power brokers supported them.<sup>61</sup>

After 1938, a two-tier policy was introduced in Central Asia that allowed dual societies to exist. The upper tier consisted of the Russified urban centers where Russian culture and language predominated. Any Central Asian elite wishing to be promoted to the higher echelons of Soviet institutions was required to be fluent in Russian and, ostensibly at least, to demonstrate his communist credentials. Conversely, the lower tier consisted of regions retaining traditional ways of life, which included the traditional social and religious positions, as well as the hierarchies of *rod* and *premya* in the newly formed nations.<sup>62</sup>

### Political Transition in Central Asia

After their independence, Central Asian republics started the process of transition. Between 1992 and 1994, the five countries adopted constitutions that met the basic principles of democracy. However, transition in the region has not been as expected. Most of the regimes are considered to exhibit a democratic façade that conceals authoritarian rule. According to Freedom House, Kyrgyzstan has been a partially free country because of its additional reforms after the two revolutions in 2005 and 2010. By contrast, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have not been free countries for many years, and, in 2015, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were the least free countries.<sup>63</sup> Nondemocratic political transition was a rational choice for Central Asian elites “who actually did not, for the most part, view their states as being ‘in transition’ from an oppressive Soviet past to a democratic future.”<sup>64</sup> However, as mentioned, for countries without democratic experience or the capacity to resolve problems of transition, the role of informal institutions was extended. Due to the combination of authoritarian presidencies and clientelism, the political transition of postcommunist Central Asian countries is characterized by neopatrimonialism. Neopatrimonialism emphasizes personal rule, rather than

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<sup>60</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *Clans, Authoritarian Rulers, and Parliaments in Central Asia* (Uppsala, Sweden: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program-A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, 2006), 8.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Donald S. Carlisle, “Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks,” *Problems of Communism* 40, no. 5 (1991), quoted in John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 98.

<sup>63</sup> Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/> (accessed May 1, 2015).

<sup>64</sup> Lewis, “Understanding the Authoritarian State,” 116.



rule of law, and promotes patron—client relationships. As a result, it leads to embezzlement of state resources, a feudal-type relationship between the central leader and the local elites, and a “model of center-periphery relations.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, neopatrimonialism corresponds with authoritarian politics.

### ***Passive Institutional Design***

Although the constitutions in each of the five Central Asian countries divide powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, in reality, authoritarianism has been an entrenched practice. The first elected presidents in these countries, except Askar Akayev in Kyrgyzstan, were former top leaders of the Communist Party. They dominated the constitutional processes, sought to accumulate power, and gained direct control of the executive office.

The choice of presidential-style authoritarianism, which is partly the result of a Soviet legacy of strong leadership, also exhibits a preference for an individual to symbolize and represent the polity.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, by creating a presidential system, the costs of manipulation are lower. In contrast to the parliamentary system, in which the high number of elections of members of parliament renders manipulating the outcome more difficult, in a presidential system, it is easy to ensure reelection for the president because only one election is held every five or seven years.<sup>67</sup> Presidentialism can be reinforced by legal reforms, as well as by other mechanisms such as elections, referenda, and amendments to constitutions for extensions of terms of office, thereby creating plebiscitary regimes.<sup>68</sup> By manipulating these institutions through leveraging incumbency advantage, a favorable environment is created. Thus, it is common for an incumbent to receive more than 90 percent of the votes, and voter turnout is typically high.

Through constitutional amendments or the manipulation of election laws and regulations, long tenures of the Central Asian leaders have been achieved. President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan and President Karimov of Uzbekistan were elected in December 1991, following ethnic rioting in both republics. In 2015, both were reelected for additional five-year terms, after gaining overwhelming support of more than 90 percent of the voters in presidential elections.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, for leaders in Central Asia, it is unnecessary to hold

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<sup>65</sup> Fisun, “Rethinking Post-Soviet Politics from a Neopatrimonial Perspective,” 89.

<sup>66</sup> Sally N. Cummings, *Understanding Central Asia: Politics and Contested Transformations* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2012), 66.

<sup>67</sup> Sherzod Abdukadirov, “The Failure of Presidentialism in Central Asia,” *Journal of Political Science* 17, no. 3 (2009): 290.

<sup>68</sup> Laruelle, “Discussing Neopatrimonialism and Patronal Presidentialism in the Central Asian Context,” 310.

<sup>69</sup> Islam Karimov won the March 29 election with 90.4 percent of the vote on a 91.1 percent turnout in 2015. Nazarbayev had a crushing election victory, with results showing that he won 97.7 percent of the vote. See “Presidential Elections: Preliminary Results Announced,” Central

elections according to a fixed schedule; the date can be changed with any “righteous” pretext. The March 29, 2015 presidential election was the second occasion on which Uzbekistan held a presidential election long after its leader’s term had expired. In Kazakhstan, elections have been held earlier than the end of the presidential term three times. The ostensible reasons for holding the 2015 election early were a “growing economic crisis” and “heightening geopolitical tension.” This allowed Nazarbayev to compete with opponents who were unprepared.<sup>70</sup>

Similar situations have occurred in other Central Asian countries. Constitutional changes in Tajikistan in 1999 and 2006 and a referendum in 2003 allowed Rahmon to run for additional consecutive seven-year terms. Thus, in autumn 2013, he won a fourth consecutive term. Niyazov, the former first secretary of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan, was elected president in October 1990, and reelected unopposed, receiving 99.5 percent of the votes in June 1992. After a referendum in January 1994 extended Niyazov’s term of office to 2002, in December 1999, a resolution of the People’s Council of Turkmenistan effectively rendered him president for life.

Central Asian leaders prioritized retaining control of power over obeying formal laws. Immediately after Niyazov’s death in 2006, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, who was not a legal successor to Niyazov, according to the constitution, gained the backing of the powerful security council and engaged in a political battle with the chairman of parliament to become the acting president. The Kyrgyz ex-president, Askar Akayev, also retained control of the government after independence. While the economy worsened, Akayev’s governance became more authoritarian. Thereafter, years of ongoing conflict with parliament caused Akayev to hold a referendum seeking support directly from the public, including constitutional amendments in February 1996 and October 1998 to expand presidential powers and change election rules. Although the Tulip Revolution in 2005 forced Akayev out of office, his successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, did not improve the situation. Violent upheaval in 2010 led to constitutional reform, through which the powers of parliament were increased and the role of the president was reduced. In December 2011, the pro-Russian candidate, Almazbek Atambayev, was elected to office. Despite the 2010 constitutional reforms aimed at preventing the resurgence of the superpresidential system, Atambayev successfully acquired all political power. The judiciary is still not independent and remains dominated by the

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Election Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan, [http://www.elections.uz/en/events/current\\_topics/5558/](http://www.elections.uz/en/events/current_topics/5558/) (accessed June 5, 2015), and “Preliminary Results of Early Election of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Held on 26 April 2015,” Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, [http://election.kz/portal/page?\\_pageid=153,2281087&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://election.kz/portal/page?_pageid=153,2281087&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL) (accessed June 5, 2015).

<sup>70</sup> Abdujalil Abdurasulov, “Five Ways to Stay in Power in Central Asia,” *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-31705746> (accessed June 5, 2015).

executive branch.<sup>71</sup>

Maintaining power cannot be accomplished by the president alone. The executive needs support from other formal institutions to maintain patron–client relationships. Establishing a stable and less competitive playing field is crucial for the existence of proregime parties. In Central Asia, proregime parties include parties of power and satellite parties.<sup>72</sup> With the support of proregime parties, not only is the legitimacy and power of the president more consolidated, but also oppositional forces can be controlled and further integrated into the patronage network.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, although the proregime party dominates in parliament, it enlarges the role of the president in legislative exercise of power. This facilitates the possibility of successful and “legal” informal manipulation. Conversely, by associating themselves with the president, proregime parties more easily access state or private resources, which helps them to distort the playing field and win elections, thus becoming dominant in parliament.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, party politics in Central Asia is not based on party ideology or party programs (i.e., policy seeking), but rather on vote seeking and office seeking.<sup>75</sup>

The proregime parties in Central Asia, with their overwhelmingly majority of seats in parliament, have caused the legislatures to become rubber stamps for the ruling authorities; the legislatures do not play an opposing or monitoring role. The president’s *Nur Otan* party in Kazakhstan won all of the parliamentary seats in the lower house (*Majilis*) in 2007. Although in the 2011 election the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan Bright Path won eight seats, and the Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan won seven seats, *Nur Otan* still held eighty-three seats (81 percent). Hence, the situation of one-party dominance did not change.<sup>76</sup> Tajikistan’s proregime People’s Democratic Party gained 65.4 percent of the vote in the March 2015 parliamentary elections, and won fifty-one of the sixty-three seats in the lower chamber, Assembly of Representatives (*Majlisi namoyandagon*).<sup>77</sup> In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which do not have true multiparty systems, parliament is dominated entirely by propresidential

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<sup>71</sup> Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/kyrgyzstan> (accessed September 25, 2015).

<sup>72</sup> Max Bader, “The Curious Case of Political Party Assistance in Central Asia,” *The OSCE Academy*, [http://www.osce-academy.net/upload/file/osce\\_academy\\_paper.pdf](http://www.osce-academy.net/upload/file/osce_academy_paper.pdf) (accessed September 25, 2015).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Max Bader, “Understanding Party Politics in the Former Soviet Union: Authoritarianism, Volatility, and Incentive Structuresa,” *Demokratizatsiya*, no. 2 (2009): 115.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> “Elections of the Mazhilis 2007,” and “Elections of the Mazhilis 2012,” Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, [http://election.kz/portal/page?\\_pageid=153,511661&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://election.kz/portal/page?_pageid=153,511661&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL) (accessed June 9, 2015).

<sup>77</sup> “Central Electoral Commission Releases the Final Parliamentary Election Results,” *Media Group ASIA-Plus* (Dushanbe, Tajikistan), <http://news.tj/en/news/central-electoral-commission-releases-final-parliamentary-election-results> (accessed June 11, 2015).

and proregime parties. In Kyrgyzstan, which has a more developed multiparty system than other countries in Central Asia, parliamentary seats were held by five parties before October 2015. Thus, a coalition government was formed by the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), *Ar-Namys*, and *Ata-Meken*.<sup>78</sup> The president's party, SDPK, with its privileged access to state resources, was helped by the state broadcaster, Kyrgyz Teleradio Company (KTRK), during the election campaign in the October 2015 elections in an attempt to influence the voting outcome.<sup>79</sup>

Although most Western research institutes and analysts contest the fairness of the electoral process and the OSCE frequently reports violations of fair elections, governments in Central Asia never question the fairness of their elections and dispute the existence of irregularities. When Central Asian leaders discuss democracy, they often argue that the historical development of Central Asia differs from that of other regions and that Central Asian values cannot be compared with Western values. Similar to most Asian countries, Central Asian states assert that they must be carefully examined in the context of the historical, cultural, social, and political experiences of each country.<sup>80</sup> Thus, democracy must be in line with the unique characteristics of these civilizations and societies.<sup>81</sup> This idea is closely linked to the negative connotation and uncertainty of democracy and capitalism experienced during the 1990s, and implies that strong leadership and social stability are necessary. An emphasis on history and traditional culture not only filled the ideological vacuum when communism failed, but also legitimized authoritarianism and the political, economic, and social interaction in various fields of informal functioning.

### ***Patron—Clientelism as a Routinized Informal Practice***

Adherence to tradition assists authoritarian rulers in assuming a dominant role over the state and legitimizes power so that the paternalism of the state over society and individuals is ensured.<sup>82</sup> In this circumstance, state governance is not based on legal legitimacy, but instead seeks to establish “rule of man” and profit from rents in exchange for the protection of individual or group interests. As Laruelle noted, “there is no distinction between office and officeholder: subordination to a position is the same as being subordinate to a man, and

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<sup>78</sup> Zhogorku Kenesh Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki [Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic], [http://www.kenesh.kg/RU/Articles/15411-Stanovlenie\\_kyrgyzskogo\\_parlamenta.aspx](http://www.kenesh.kg/RU/Articles/15411-Stanovlenie_kyrgyzskogo_parlamenta.aspx) (accessed June 9, 2015).

<sup>79</sup> “Kyrgyzstan: Public Television Gives Presidential Party Unfair Boost,” *Eurasianet.org*, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/75281> (accessed October 1, 2015).

<sup>80</sup> Mirzohid Rahimov, “From Soviet Republics to Independent Countries: Challenges of Transition in Central Asia,” *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 6, no. 1 (2007): 305.

<sup>81</sup> Alexey Malashenko, “Doomed to Eternity and Stagnation,” *Russian Politics & Law* 50, no. 4 (2012): 80.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-82.

bureaucrats have a kind of property right over their position... . Once the boss departs, contracts must be renegotiated with his successor.”<sup>83</sup> Therefore, the establishment of networks as social safety nets is necessary, because such private connection adjustments are allowed under uncertain and unreliable governance and by public services.

Governance in Central Asia is typically based on informal rules and patron—client networks in which kinship and regional loyalties are crucial. Numerous other types of connections, including relationships of family, friendship, work, and education, also are important to patron—client networks. A president’s widespread informal power distribution causes personal loyalty to overtake rational and objective law, implying that loyalty to a president is more important than loyalty to institutions. Accordingly, the political dynamic of the patron—client relationship in each country is between the president and the groups of elites that dominate family groups and regional networks, and elites who control sectors of the economy.<sup>84</sup> The first group of elites is mostly defined by kinship ties. Members of genealogical networks have long memories, and most of them know their lineage affiliation. Because rulers in Central Asia originate from influential familial networks, traditional kinship ties should be accounted for when people are appointed to administrative posts at various levels. Presidents cannot ignore this condition because they must mediate and maintain a balance among various forces from different familial or kinship networks.<sup>85</sup> In addition, the members of a president’s family are predominant over a country’s political and economic power, a condition that is one of the transitional characteristics of post-Soviet Central Asia. Through family networks, presidents establish loyal groups, while political resources provide necessary political patronage for expanding family influence to ensure long-term interests in ruling.

The second group of elites comprises regional networks. These elites are influential not only because of their close economic and political ties but also because they frequently reflect the diverse power centers that have developed in previous centuries.<sup>86</sup> For example, many historically prestigious local leaders and Soviet republic officials were from the Tashkent, Samarkand, and Fergana regions in Uzbekistan, the Khujand region of Tajikistan, the *Senior jüz* within southeastern and southern Kazakhstan, and the northern Kyrgyzstan Chu and Talas regions. Political elites from these regions in modern Central Asian regimes still play crucial roles; some of them have entered the state power system, becoming dominant local political forces. Moreover, because

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<sup>83</sup> Laruelle, “Discussing Neopatrimonialism and Patronal Presidentialism in the Central Asian Context,” 314-315.

<sup>84</sup> Starr, *Clans, Authoritarian Rulers, and Parliaments in Central Asia*, 7-8.

<sup>85</sup> Malashenko, “Doomed to Eternity and Stagnation,” 82.

<sup>86</sup> Starr, *Clans, Authoritarian Rulers, and Parliaments in Central Asia*, 8.

regional elites occupy a key intermediate level of authority, they are frequently in contact with local power brokers as well as with the central government, and therefore can advance their personal political careers and direct public subsidies or obtain financing for large infrastructure projects. Therefore, regional elites are powerful, and the relationship between them and central executive elites is not always top-down and unidirectional.<sup>87</sup>

The third group in the patron—client relationship consists of the elites who control sectors of the economy (e.g., cotton, power, mineral extraction, construction, transportation) in Central Asia. Although, according to Starr, they reflect the emirs' control of irrigation systems in the pre-Soviet period, the power of these oligarchs can be traced to the Soviet period.<sup>88</sup> As in Russia, oligarchs in Central Asia made their fortunes during the reckless privatization of the early 1990s, “when they were the managers of the main privatization funds; or later with the emergence of new economic and financial riches, such as in the banking sector.”<sup>89</sup> The oligarchs try to establish close connections and relationships with those in decision-making circles. Without favors from higher levels of authority, oligarchs are unable to function. Moreover, in addition to their own market-based competition, some of the oligarchs have adopted specific strategies of competition with the presidential family; others have formed partnerships with the patronage networks of the state.<sup>90</sup>

All these familial, regional, and oligarchic elites collaborate with the president to form a mutually dependent structure in which the president depends on elites for legitimacy and to implement decisions, while elites acquire favor from the president in the form of access to state resources and positions within the governance structure. Regarding this relationship, Hale provides a detailed description:

The patronal president has a decided advantage in that the elites must act collectively if they are to use the president's dependence on them to challenge that president. The presidency, by contrast, is an institutionalized focal point for collective elite action that can be directed against those elites who might stick their necks out in order to organize a collective challenge to the president. Officials in lower-level state positions of authority, for example, will be reluctant to use these positions to challenge the president for fear that

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<sup>87</sup> Laruelle, “Discussing Neopatrimonialism and Patronal Presidentialism in the Central Asian Context,” 317.

<sup>88</sup> Starr, *Clans, Authoritarian Rulers, and Parliaments in Central Asia*, 8.

<sup>89</sup> Sebastien Peyrouse, “The Kazakh Neopatrimonial Regime: Balancing Uncertainties among the ‘Family,’ Oligarchs and Technocrats,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 20, no. 4 (2012): 358-364.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

they could lose their jobs (or worse) if not enough other elites go along with them. Leaders in the business community also have incentives to use their financial or media assets to support (or at least not undermine) the president's political agenda so as to avoid the risk that presidential resources will be directed against their business interests in retaliation.<sup>91</sup>

### ***Diversity of the Neopatrimonialism in Central Asia***

Although the political transition and development in Central Asia generally has been characterized by neopatrimonialism, its practice has not been uniform. The intensity of the competition among elites and the ruler's ability to balance or control this competition vary across the states. The first type of neopatrimonialism involves a strong president whose family generally comprises the most powerful patrons who command the most extensive networks. In this model, the "clients" mostly comprise the strata of oligarchic or regional elites who fiercely compete for rent-seeking opportunities. Both Kazakhstan and Tajikistan are included in this type.

Since independence, Nazarbaev has constructed a political pyramid, on top of which is the president who controls the chains of political and economic dependence. While elite groups below have fought among themselves for power and favors, his role as mediator between groups has signified that he must maintain the equilibrium of the system. This balance was threatened by members of Nazarbaev's family who control the domestic media, energy sector, and housing market and who caused a crisis within the elite structure in 2001. The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK), which later became the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan Bright Path (*Ak Zhol*), was created by members of the government and the political and economic elites who were seriously concerned about Nazarbayev and his family's increasing control of the country's wealth.<sup>92</sup> Although the emergence of the counterelites compelled the presidential administration to embark on political reform, it also made the authorities aware that the growing economic power possessed by the oligarchs might encourage their political autonomy and ambition. This, in turn, could threaten both the president's power and his family's role as an economic actor.<sup>93</sup>

In response to the emergence of oppositional forces, Nazarbaev became committed to a process of political reform, but the political initiative was totally defined and shaped by Nazarbaev on his own terms. The president established the National Commission for Democratization and Civil Society

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<sup>91</sup> Henry Hale, "Regime Cycles, Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *World Politics*, no. 58 (2005): 138-139.

<sup>92</sup> Rico Isaacs, "Managing Dissent, Limiting Risk and Consolidating Power: The Processes and Results of Constitutional Reform in Kazakhstan," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 1 (2008): 17-18.

<sup>93</sup> Peyrouse, "The Kazakh Neopatrimonial Regime," 353.

in 2004 to continue the process of political reform. However, because the core of Kazakh politics is always represented by the president, presidential administration monopolizes the Commission. The dialog, therefore, was not meaningful, even though the opposition parties, such as DCK, *Ak Zhol*, and the Communist Party were invited. The opposition understood that participating in the Commission for “reform” was merely to “associate, and to be seen as being sympathetic and constructive with the president and implicit in supporting the direction of the president’s reforms.”<sup>94</sup> After contending with the DCK, the proregime party, *Nur Otan*, represented the interests of the president. The *Asar Party*, created under the leadership of the president’s daughter to assemble young, loyal elites, was merged with *Nur Otan*.<sup>95</sup> Because the authority of the president depends on his ability to distribute resources among different networks, *Nur Otan* has proved an effective mechanism for integrating state elites with citizens employed in the state apparatus, thereby providing support and stability for Nazarbayev’s regime.<sup>96</sup> *Nur Otan* acts as a formal institution to stabilize the unstable nature of competition among informal networks. The efforts of President Nazarbaev have resulted in Kazakhstan’s becoming an authoritarian one-party regime.

In contrast to Kazakhstan, which started under quite favorable conditions, Tajikistan has departed from communism under conditions of large-scale conflicts, which consequently brought about the civil war from 1992 to 1997. The war was ended by signing an armistice agreement under the auspices of the United Nations. Initially, Tajikistan was expected to develop the representative, multiparty democracy that was envisioned in the 1997 peace agreement. However, because the powers of Rahmon’s government have increased and new elites have emerged, the pressure from the government has constricted the political space for the development of oppositional forces.<sup>97</sup> In particular, in 2001 and 2002, the government began reversing United Tajik Opposition appointments, of which, according to the 1997 peace agreement, there is a 30 percent quota for levels of government.<sup>98</sup> While Rahmon suppressed rival political groups, he simultaneously held the power in his own grip and established patron—client networks consisting of his own family and officials from his home region of Danghara. Rahmon’s family holds several governmental posts of diverse political importance; owns businesses in transportation, construction materials, and food production; and controls

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<sup>94</sup> Isaacs, “Managing Dissent, Limiting Risk and Consolidating Power,” 19-20.

<sup>95</sup> Peyrouse, “The Kazakh Neopatrimonial Regime,” 353.

<sup>96</sup> Isaacs, “Nur Otan, Informal Networks and the Countering of Elite Instability in Kazakhstan,” 1074-1075.

<sup>97</sup> Sumie Nakaya, “Aid and Transition from a War Economy to an Oligarchy in Post-War Tajikistan,” *Central Asian Survey*, no. 3 (2009): 264-268.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 260, 262.



imports and exports. Meanwhile, poverty is widespread in the country, and many people have been forced to migrate to Russia to work as laborers for economic survival.<sup>99</sup>

Relying on his political advantage, Rahmon won elections in 1999 and 2006, and successfully amended the constitution in 1999 and 2003 to allow him to stay in power until 2020.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT) has been dominant in the national parliament. In the 2015 election, the PDPT gained fifty-one of sixty-three seats, whereas the Agrarian Party and the Party of Economic Reforms, respectively, won five seats and three seats, with one seat for the Socialist Party and two seats for the Communist Party of Tajikistan.<sup>101</sup> The dominance of the PDPT in parliament has been considered a rubber stamp for the Rahmon government, while the oppositional forces steadily have been neutralized in government.<sup>102</sup> They are either moderate and thus able to sustain small segments of power-sharing in parliament, such as the Agrarian Party and the Party of Economic Reforms, or completely excluded from parliament, such as the Islamic Renaissance Party and Social Democratic Party.

The second type of neopatrimonialism entails a strong president representing powerful patrons and commanding extensive networks, but with less transparent and intense internetwork competition than in the first type. The comparatively limited competition is due in part to greater concentration of wealth. Additionally, power is more highly concentrated and there is unrestrained personal rulership, both of which are inherited entirely from the Soviet era. This type of neopatrimonialism is exhibited in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Some scholars use "sultanistic neopatrimonialism" to describe regimes within the two countries, thus emphasizing the extreme degree of the ruler's personal power. Under the pervasive power of the ruler, opposition is not allowed to exist. Any individuals with power inside the state apparatus represent only the interests of the ruler.<sup>103</sup> However, this description has been unable to properly explain the development of these two countries. In Uzbekistan, the Karimov family is unlikely to win public support or succeed President Karimov; however, the security organs are increasingly taking control

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<sup>99</sup> Lewis, "Understanding the Authoritarian State," 117-118.

<sup>100</sup> Nakaya, "Aid and Transition from a War Economy to an Oligarchy in Post-War Tajikistan," 262.

<sup>101</sup> Avaz Yuldoshev, "Central Electoral Commission Releases the Final Parliamentary Election Results," *Media Group "ASIA-Plus"* (Dushanbe, Tajikistan), <http://news.tj/en/news/central-electoral-commission-releases-final-parliamentary-election-results> (accessed June 11, 2015).

<sup>102</sup> "Elections in Tajikistan 2015 Parliamentary Elections," International Foundation for Electoral Systems, [www.IFES.org](http://www.IFES.org) (accessed September 30, 2015).

<sup>103</sup> Sally Cummings and Michael Ochs, "Turkmenistan," in *Power and Change in Central Asia*, ed. Sally Cummings (London: Routledge, 2002), 116-117, and Fisun, "Rethinking Post-Soviet Politics from a Neopatrimonial Perspective," 94.

of the country.<sup>104</sup> In Turkmenistan, Berdymukhamedov's rule has moved away from the sultanism of the Niyazov era, with some changes to a neopatrimonial system similar to those of Turkmenistan's Central Asian neighbors.

The regional factions and their political representatives in Uzbekistan substantially influence the balance of power in the country. Karimov has denounced regionalism and refers to it as one of the most important threats to the country's security. Though he has not liquidated the regional factions, he has eliminated the influence of some of the powerful regional elites around him.<sup>105</sup> By playing factions against each other and concentrating financial capital in the hands of the central government under the president's personal control, Karimov has strengthened his power and considerably diminished the influence of regional factions. Moreover, to prevent elites from accumulating excessive power, Karimov frequently has used a policy of rotation and institutionalized direct appointment of regional governors (*khokims*).<sup>106</sup> Consequently, while interelite competition is less regionally based than previously, a new type of patronage network has emerged around key administrative departments in the central government.<sup>107</sup> It is also the tactic of Karimov to instill competition between these agencies as a means of balancing power. The fiercest competition has taken place between the Interior Ministry and the National Security Service, implying conflict between two politicians with their own regional support: Samarkand's Zakir Almatov and Tashkent's Rustam Inoyatov.<sup>108</sup>

Despite the Karimov family's having dominated Uzbek economic power since the 1990s, including the copper, construction, finance, catering, and entertainment industries, it does not have as strong a grasp on power networks as the Nazarbayev family in Kazakhstan. The president's eldest daughter, Gulnara Karimova, is quite active in striving for political influence and even the presidency after Karimov's departure. However, her violation of both national and European laws in domestic and foreign business transactions, as well other improper behaviors, have undermined Uzbekistan's image. This has led to familial conflict, as well as lost domestic support. Gulnara Karimova's failure highlights the role of Inoyatov, the National Security Service chief, who acts as both the protector of national security and the defender of the president's reputation and popularity. However, Inoyatov does not merely execute the president's orders; he has done his best to become completely indispensable to his patron, Karimov. His low profile and loyalty to Karimov

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<sup>104</sup> Inga Sikorskaya, "Uzbekistan's Feuding Family Elite," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/uzbekistans-feuding-family-elite> (accessed October 10, 2015).

<sup>105</sup> Alisher Ilkhamov, "Neopatrimonialism, Interest Groups and Patronage Networks: The Impasses of the Governance System in Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey*, no. 1 (2007): 76.

<sup>106</sup> Alexey Malashenko, *Exploring Uzbekistan's Potential Political Transition* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2014), 14.

<sup>107</sup> Ilkhamov, "Neopatrimonialism, Interest Groups and Patronage Networks," 77.

<sup>108</sup> Malashenko, *Exploring Uzbekistan's Potential Political Transition*, 14.

have earned him the president's trust, while obscuring his ambition to hold the presidential post.<sup>109</sup> The role of Inoyatov in the patron—client networks suggests that security organs likely will become a key player during the power transition in Uzbekistan.

In Turkmenistan, Niyazov was the first secretary under the Soviet Union. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the position was no longer constrained by the central government in Moscow. As Niyazov controlled key formal and informal factors of power, especially the Soviet repressive apparatus—which he used to eliminate other power centers that might challenge the regime—he created and consolidated an extreme dictatorship.<sup>110</sup> In contrast to other Central Asian presidents whose families are typically closely connected to particular regional or kinship networks, Niyazov built his rule mostly on the basis of personal loyalties or patronage linkages with the office of the president. This is due largely to the fact that, as an orphan, he had a less extensive kinship network, and, unlike the children of presidents in other states, Niyazov's children were uninterested in politics.<sup>111</sup> Because direct loyalty to the president appeared to be the main criterion for promotion up the hierarchy, a cult-like and sycophantic culture emerged among the political elites who competed with and fought against each other. Niyazov's power and position could thereby rise alone above all of these groups and become invincible.

In summary, patronage groups created on the basis of competing kinship and regional networks were not adequately strong enough to challenge the president's authority. In addition to some foreign figures who held powerful positions in Niyazov's inner circle, the top Turkmen elites comprising a narrow group of individuals close to the president mostly were members of key state security units; for example, the head of the presidential guard, General Akmurad Rejepov; Defense Minister Agageldy Mammetgeldyev; Minister of National Security Geldimuhamet Asyrmuhammedov; and Akmammet Rahmanov, the Minister of the Interior. Although Berdymukhamedov, who later became president, was not a major figure in this circle, he provided personal medical assistance to Niyazov as his personal dentist, indicating a close affiliation.<sup>112</sup>

Although Berdymukhamedov's policy and rule are distinct from those of Niyazov, Turkmenistan under Berdymukhamedov remains a highly personal-authoritarian regime. In contrast to Niyazov, Berdymukhamedov built his own regime on family and regional networks from the western Ahal region. In addition, Berdymukhamedov has increased development

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 5-7.

<sup>110</sup> Slavomír Horák, "The Elite in Post-Soviet and Post-Niyazov Turkmenistan: Does Political Culture Form a Leader?" *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 20, no. 4 (2012): 375.

<sup>111</sup> Malashenko, "Doomed to Eternity and Stagnation," 77.

<sup>112</sup> Horák, "The Elite in Post-Soviet and Post-Niyazov Turkmenistan," 376.

projects in peripheral areas and has implemented policies that facially appear decentralized. Such policies liberalize local governance that benefits local elites. For example, local councils are able to elect or impeach their municipal governors. Governors have longer tenure, and consequently have more time to build informal client networks. Therefore, Berdymukhamedov's policies have promoted neopatrimonialism throughout the country at all levels of government.<sup>113</sup> Although decentralization has occurred, the political system is still highly centralized, and President Berdumukhamedov remains the ultimate authority. As Berdumukhamedov's power becomes more substantial, stable, and consolidated, he may reverse his decentralization policies and reconstruct the highly centralized system of his predecessor.<sup>114</sup>

A third type of neopatrimonialism exists in Kyrgyzstan. There, the president is incapable of contending with substantial and fierce competition among political elites. The result has been the overthrow of regimes in 2005 and 2010. Subsequently, reform efforts have attempted to regulate competing forces. Since gaining independence in 1991, multiple networks based on political and economic interests and regional identity have caused fierce political competition in Kyrgyzstan. However, a loosely regulated market economy introduced by former president Akayev produced a group of powerful and ambitious oligarchs who simultaneously grasp for commercial and political advantages. These networks of elites include family members of both Akayev and his successor, Bakiyev. Uncontrolled oligarchs and family networks of the two presidents have drawn criticism that they "privatized the country."<sup>115</sup> Opponents of the regime thus fight for both political power and access to economic resources.

Political development in Kyrgyzstan demonstrates how political elites have mobilized through the patronage networks to bargain for the best deal, or to form a strong opposition to combat the ruling regime.<sup>116</sup> When the ruler cannot afford to coordinate, balance, or even suppress these competitive networks, he faces regime subversion. The regime changes in 2005 and 2010 were mainly instigated by oppositional elites who were seeking to protect their personal interests or vying for power and access to economic resources.<sup>117</sup>

The 2010 constitution officially changed the political system by altering the balance of power, such that parliament now has greater authority than the executive. Additionally, a proportional election system protects parliament from the emergence of a powerful propresidential party. A parliamentary election was held in October 2010. Five parties were elected to parliament,

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<sup>113</sup> Nicholas Kunysz, "From Sultanism to Neopatrimonialism? Regionalism within Turkmenistan," *Central Asian Survey*, no. 1 (2012): 4-7.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Malashenko, "Doomed to Eternity and Stagnation," 79.

<sup>116</sup> Marat, "Kyrgyzstan," 332.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

and a coalition government was subsequently formed by the SDPK, *Ar-Namys*, and *Ata-Meken*, while *Ata-Zhurt* and *Respublika* joined forces to become the opposition party.<sup>118</sup> The second parliamentary elections were held in Kyrgyzstan on October 4, 2015; six parties gained seats in parliament: SDPK won thirty-eight seats; *Respublika–Ata-Zhurt* won twenty-eight seats; Kyrgyzstan Party, eighteen seats; *Onuguu–Progress*, thirteen seats; *Bir Bol*, twelve seats; and the *Ata Meken Socialist Party*, eleven seats.<sup>119</sup>

Through the new constitution, formal institutions such as free elections and debate in parliament have transformed informal institutions. Additionally, the possibility of another violent regime subversion is reduced. However, the constitution also leads to the fragile and fragmented multiparty system in Kyrgyzstan. There are more than one hundred registered political parties, which are continually in the processes of transformation or reorganization, unification, or disintegration.<sup>120</sup> The fragmentation of parties follows political, social, regional, and economic cleavages.<sup>121</sup> Consequently, while formal rules have transformed and directed neopatrimonial politics, patronage networks have developed in Kyrgyz parliamentarianism. Through these patronage networks, parties attempt to acquire political resources.<sup>122</sup> As a result, real policy programs are a secondary priority. Additionally, oligarchs have taken a new form as party members and wield influence in various areas such as business, media, culture, and science, all of which are involved in the election process. Moreover, the presence of patronage networks is revealed in the funding of political parties.<sup>123</sup> Because the relevant statutory provisions regarding party “membership fees” are neither strict nor clear, it is likely that corruption and money politics within parties will arise.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> They were *Ata-Zhurt* (twenty-eight seats), the SDPK (twenty-six seats), *Ar-Namys* (twenty-five seats), the *Respublika Party of Kyrgyzstan* (twenty-three seats), and *Ata-Meken* (eighteen seats). *Zhogorku Kenesh Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki* [Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic], [http://www.kenesh.kg/RU/Articles/15411-Stanovlenie\\_kyrgyzskogo\\_parlamenta.aspx](http://www.kenesh.kg/RU/Articles/15411-Stanovlenie_kyrgyzskogo_parlamenta.aspx) (accessed June 9, 2015).

<sup>119</sup> “Monitors Praise Kyrgyz Elections Won By Social Democrats,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, <http://www.rferl.org/content/social-democrats-win-kyrgyzstans-parliamentary-elections/27288300.html> (accessed October 10, 2015).

<sup>120</sup> Bernmet Imanalieva, “Political Parties of the Kyrgyz Republic: Genesis, Basis, Prospects,” National Institute for Strategic Studies of the Kyrgyz Republic, <http://www.nisi.kg/en-analytics-777> (accessed September 30, 2015).

<sup>121</sup> Seyit Ali Avcu, “Fragmentation of Political Party System in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 2 (2013): 89-90.

<sup>122</sup> Imanalieva, “Political Parties of the Kyrgyz Republic,” <http://www.nisi.kg/en-analytics-777> (accessed September 30, 2015).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Jack Farchy, “Voters Celebrate Kyrgyzstan’s Democratic Experiment,” *Financial Times*, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/7b833598-6a82-11e5-aca9-d87542bf8673.html#axzz3o9vPQjgs> (accessed October 10, 2015).

## Conclusion

Compared with other post-Soviet countries, particularly those in Eastern Europe, political transition in Central Asian states has evinced the growing concerns about the collapse of democracy and resurgence of authoritarianism. Democratic development is below expectations. Political transition in Central Asia is a pattern of passive institutional design in which policymakers do not intend to reform institutional frameworks directly, but instead attempt to create or adapt institutions according to personal motivations. Because implementing desired institutional changes is easier if they are based on and supported by the existing institutional context, reforms have been affected greatly by the institutional legacies of both the prerevolutionary era and the Soviet regime.

The governance of tsarist colonial authority was indirect and did not interfere with societies or the influences of local factions; therefore, local identities persisted and many native institutions continued to function. The Bolshevik Revolution placed Central Asia under the regime of the Soviet Union, and the Central Committee of the Communist Party attempted to eliminate the traditional *rod* and *premya* system. However, the Soviet system failed to do so. The informality of kinship ties and networks rendered them difficult for the Soviet state to control and they became more durable through the practice of patronage. These institutional legacies of the traditional social structure and Soviet system had a continual impact on nation building and development after the Central Asian states gained independence. Politics in Central Asia are currently defined by the feature of neopatrimonialism, in which the authoritarian presidential office is a formal institution, with an underlying informal practice of patron—client relationship that acts as a dynamic of invisible politics.

Because most Central Asian ruling elites emerged during the Soviet era, the effect of a one-party dictatorship system was a source of inspiration. Therefore, a vertical structure of power influenced the post-independence political power structure. The president is the core of power, and the parliament, government, parties, and other organizations act in accordance with the implementation of the president's power. The presidential party and tendency toward incumbency continue to advance in strength and increasingly play a role in the consolidation of a president's power in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. Even in Kyrgyzstan, where the development of party politics is more active, the support of the SDPK by President Atambayev and the October 2015 election results have shown that Atambayev's role is substantial in the political and party spheres. Similar to other Central Asian leaders, Atambayev has managed to maintain the balance of interests among the main political actors.

Furthermore, the traditional model of paternalism, the ongoing existence of *rod* and *premya*, and the patron—clientelism of Soviet bureaucracy continue to affect state governance in Central Asia. Patronage has played a crucial role in the

relationship between the public and elites and between the central government and regions, as well as in interethnic relations. By creating and maintaining durable ties with key actors at various levels, political and economic advantages can be obtained through a network. The patron—clientelism network involves not only kinship ties and familial relationships, but also emphasizes loyalty based on the exchange of interests. In the process of gaining independence, Central Asian countries formed a president-centered governance structure dominated by familial influence. As a result, presidents' families have obtained substantial control over state economies and firmly consolidated the power of presidential family groups. In addition, political nepotism and corruption caused by patron—clientelism have substantially undermined the system of government and become a source of political instability.

It has been more than twenty years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and political transition from the Soviet system to the presidential system, or semi-presidential system, is still occurring in Central Asia. However, reforms favored in the development of democracy, such as a multiparty system, direct elections, and the separation of powers, have been merely superficial works in Central Asia. As such, from the perspective of democratic development or democratic consolidation, political transition is not yet complete.