

TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN POST-SOVIET KYRGYZSTAN:  
LEADERS, CITIZENS AND PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN POST-SOVIET KYRGYZSTAN: LEADERS, CITIZENS AND PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY**

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This dissertation analyzes the presidencies of Askar Akaev (1991-2005) and Kurmanbek Bakiev (2005-2010) in Kyrgyzstan by looking at the referendums as well as the parliamentary and presidential elections held in this country in the post-Soviet era, with specific emphasis on the legitimacy of these two leaders as perceived by the Kyrgyz people. Based on the field research conducted in Kyrgyzstan, the study aims to shed some light on how the Kyrgyz people perceive issues of democracy, democratic transition, political leadership and political legitimacy in the post-Soviet era. The dissertation further focuses on how and why even the minimal requirements of democracy such as elections and referendums have been used in this country in order to increase executive power, despite the rhetoric of democratization promoted by the political leaders.

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan, Transition to Democracy, Democratization, Leadership, Political Legitimacy

## ÖZ

### SOVYET SONRASI KIRGIZİSTAN'DA DEMOKRASİYE GEÇİŞ: LİDERLER, VATANDAŞLAR VE SİYASİ MEŞRUIYET ANLAYIŞI

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Bu tez, Kırgızistan'ın Sovyet sonrası dönemdeki iki devlet başkanının (Askar Akaev, 1991–2005 ve Kurmanbek Bakiev, 2005–2010) görev sürelerini, 1991'den bu yana gerçekleştirilen referandumlar ve parlamento ve başkanlık seçimleri ışığında siyasi meşruiyet kavramı ile ilişkilendirerek incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kırgızistan'da gerçekleştirilen alan araştırması sonucunda Kırgız halkının Sovyet sonrası dönemde demokrasi, demokrasiye geçiş, siyasi liderlik ve siyasal meşruiyet kavramlarını nasıl algılamakta olduğunu anlamak bu çalışmanın bir diğer amacıdır. Tez ayrıca, demokrasi söylemini ön planda tutan siyasi liderlerin seçimler ve referandumlar gibi demokrasinin asgari koşullarını bile nasıl yürütmenin gücünü artırmada kullanmakta olduklarına da odaklanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kırgızistan, Demokrasiye Geçiş, Demokratikleşme, Liderlik, Siyasal Meşruiyet

To My Family

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BGTS	Bishkek City Telephone Station
CEC	Central Election Commission
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
ENEMO	European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations
EU	European Union
ICG	International Crisis Group
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPP	Institute for Public Policy
MP	Member of Parliament
MSN	My Capital News, Kyrgyzstan's newspaper
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NORDEM	Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe
SNB	National Security Office
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WTO	World Trade Organization

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This dissertation analyzes the failure of post-Soviet democratization in Kyrgyzstan by taking a comparative look at the periods of Askar Akaev (1991–2005) and Kurmanbek Bakiev (2005–2010), with specific emphasis on the legitimacy of these two leaders as perceived by the Kyrgyz people. The complex and multifaceted process of establishing a legitimate political system with a properly functioning democratic order was the declared goal of all of the former Soviet republics in the early 1990s. However, the path towards a consolidated democracy was not an easy one, and there were several political, economic, social and historical challenges along the way. Among these challenges, establishing a legitimate political regime in the eyes of the general public was especially difficult, as the ex-communist leaders of the former Soviet republics now had to find ways of justifying their rule under dramatically different domestic and international conditions. This was perhaps an even steeper hill to climb for the Central Asian leaders who were most reluctant to accept the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The process of democratic transition of the five Central Asian republics in the post-Soviet era has been the subject of intensive analysis by scholars and policy-makers. These republics have started to follow different paths in their transition attempts. In Turkmenistan, which is considered the most authoritarian of all Central Asian republics, first president Saparmurat Niyazov “Turkmenbashi,” retained the main control mechanisms from the old system in order to stay in power. After his death on 21 December 2006, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov became the new president, and although there have been certain domestic changes towards more relaxed policies, Turkmenistan still has not taken the basic steps toward democratization. In Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov’s position within the power apparatus is very dominant and political opponents have been persecuted and systematically tortured

in prison. As for Tajikistan, political turmoil during the period immediately following independence led to the downfall of President Rakhmon Nabiev and to an eventual full-fledged civil war between 1992 and 1997. Imomali Rakhmon, who became the next president of the country in 1993, has remained in office ever since then. Even Kazakhstan, a country that is considered to be more democratic than Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, has in place a “president for life”<sup>1</sup> since June 2007. President Nursultan Nazarbaev was granted lifetime powers and privileges, immunity from criminal prosecution, and influence over domestic and foreign policy by the Kazakhstani Parliament.<sup>2</sup>

At least in the early post-Soviet era, Kyrgyzstan<sup>3</sup> stood apart from the other Central Asian countries, as President Askar Akaev’s popularity and his commitment to democratic reforms, even before the disintegration of the Soviet state, were seen as facilitating factors for establishing a legitimate and democratic regime in the country.<sup>4</sup> Kyrgyzstan was one of the first republics in Central Asia to adopt a democratic constitution and had made significant advances in building the foundations of democracy by the mid-1990s. The vibrant civil society that emerged earned the country the tag of Central Asia’s ‘island of democracy’.<sup>5</sup> The country was also able to restore a multi-party system<sup>6</sup> and political parties grew in numbers. However, as was the case with other Central Asian leaders, in time Akaev also started to resort to more and more authoritarian policies, resulting in a backslide in

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<sup>1</sup> Erica Marat, “Nazarbayev Prevails Over Political Competitors, Family Members”, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, 30.05.2007, available at <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4629>, (Accessed on 23.11.2009)

<sup>2</sup> See Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Briefing, July 5, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> For a general country profile of Kyrgyzstan see Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> Askar Akaev was born on 10 November 1944 in Kyzyl-Bairak, Kemin. He was trained as a physicist and graduated from the Leningrad Institute of Precision Mechanics and Optics in 1967 with an honors degree in mathematics, engineering and computer science. Askar Akaev gained a doctorate in 1981 from the Moscow Institute of Engineering and Physics, having written his dissertation on holographic systems of storage and transformation of information. In 1984, he became a member of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, in 1987 its vice president and in 1989 its president. Same year he was also elected as a deputy in the *Verhovnii Soviet* of the USSR.

<sup>5</sup> Leyla Saalaeva, “Kyrgyzstan’s Fading Romance with the West”, RCA Issue 296, 21.02.2005, available at <http://iwpr.net/tk/node/8526> (Accessed on 17.03.2008)

<sup>6</sup> Elvira Mamytova, “*Problemi Formirovaniya Politicheskoi Opposicii v Kirgistanе*” (The Problems of Forming a Political Opposition in Kyrgyzstan), *Central Asia and Caucasus Journal*, Number 10, 2000, available at <http://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-10-2000/05.mamit.shtml>, (Accessed on 12.10.2009)

democratic transition, which contributed to a sharp decline in his popularity, his eventual downfall in March 2005, and his succession by Kurmanbek Bakiev. However, it is possible to suggest that both leaders adopted similar types of policies in terms of establishing a “legitimate democratic regime” in Kyrgyzstan. Despite all hopes in the early 1990s, the country failed in its democratic transition.

In this dissertation, I will analyze the failed democratic experience in Kyrgyzstan and the issue of legitimacy by looking into elections and referendums, with consideration of the fact that these are the only routes to political participation in Kyrgyzstan for the majority of people. This is especially important in the context of legitimacy, as the general public can express their opinions regarding the leaders and the regime through elections and referendums.

In this general framework, there are three basic research questions of this dissertation: (1) How did Akaev and Bakiev sought to legitimize their regimes? (2) How were the Akaev and Bakiev eras were/are perceived by the citizens in terms of political legitimacy? (3) Which factors have been important in the citizens’ perceptions of legitimacy regarding these two leaders and their policies? These research questions are significant because political legitimacy is closely related to citizens’ perceptions of their government’s daily operations to be conducted under democratic principles. Regular, free and fair elections (as well as referendums in the Kyrgyz case) can be considered essential for political legitimacy, within the framework of procedural (minimalist) definition of democracy.<sup>7</sup> As such, in this dissertation, democratization in Kyrgyzstan will be analyzed according to the procedural definition by looking at parliamentary and presidential elections as well as referendums in Kyrgyzstan. Both Akaev and Bakiev attempted to claim political

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<sup>7</sup> There are two well known definitions of democracy: procedural (minimalist) and substantive (maximalist). Procedural definition, as put forward by Schumpeter, implies “polity that permits the choice between elites by citizens voting in regular and competitive elections.” (Terry Lynn Karl, “Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics*, October 1990, 23 (1), p. 1) According to this minimalist conception, citizens cannot and should not “rule” because, for example, on most issues and most of the time, they have no clear or well-founded views. (See Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. Harper Perennial 1950.) In procedural democracy the electoral process is at the core of the system that places authority in elected officials. As for substantive definition of democracy, wider range of political activities such as free speech, absence of discrimination against political parties, and freedom of association for all groups are implied. In other words, it is a form of democracy that functions in the interest of the governed.



legitimacy on the same ground, despite the fact that neither elections nor referendums in Kyrgyzstan could be called free and fair.

## **1.1 Literature Review**

In terms of the area of study and the time span, literature on democratization can be divided under three main headings: Southern Europe in the 1970s (Portugal, Spain, Greece); Latin America in the 1980s (Ecuador Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and others); and post-Communist countries at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, including East-European and post-Soviet countries.

### **1.1.1 Transition and Consolidation**

A glance at the vast literature on democratization reveals that, far from consensus, there are many significantly different ways of understanding and/or conceptualizing the term. One major point in the literature is the distinction between the transition to democracy and the consolidation of democracy. In this respect, democratization is a complex process that starts with transition and develops and matures into consolidation. So, in a way, the process of democratization begins with transition, the final goal of which is to achieve consolidated democracy.<sup>8</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan suggest that transition is the beginning of the building of democracy, during which politics is fluid and democracy is not assured; and consolidation is a stage in which democracy becomes “the only game in town.”<sup>9</sup> According to Laurence Whitehead democracy has to be viewed as a contextual variable, so democratization cannot be defined by some fixed and timeless objective criteria. The minimalist conception of democratization suggests that democratization begins with the exit of an authoritarian regime, and ends after competitive elections result in two successive

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<sup>8</sup> Although democratic transition and democratic consolidation are normally separate processes that follow each other, under some circumstances they can occur simultaneously. Linz and Stepan believe such simultaneity occurred in Portugal on August 12, 1982 when the military accepted the constitutional changes. ( Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 124)

<sup>9</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: South Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*, Ibid. p.5

peaceful transfers of government between contending parties. Whitehead's perspective of this is worthy of note:

Democratization is best understood as a complex, long-term, dynamic and open-ended process. It consists of progress toward a more rule-based, more consensual and more participatory type of politics ... It necessarily involves a combination of fact and value, and so contains internal tensions ... [D]emocratization need not be either a particularly complex, an excessively protracted, or an erratic process, and once it is over the outcome could be stable, predictable, and uniform. Such democratization might be envisioned as a clear, quick, rational construction, ending in consolidation.<sup>10</sup>

Samuel Huntington also makes a similar distinction. In his opinion, "the overall process of democratization... is usually complex and prolonged. It involves bringing about the end of the non-democratic regime, the inauguration of the democratic regime, and then the consolidation of the democratic system."<sup>11</sup> Therefore democratization, first and foremost is conceptualized as a multidimensional and complex process. Valerie Bunce offers five generalizations about democratization on which she believes most authors have agreed: The first concerns the relationship between economic development and democracy, the level of economic development has considerable impact on sustainability of democracy over time.<sup>12</sup> The second generalization is that political elites play a central role in democratization, and "political leaders are central to the founding and design of democracy and to its survival or collapse under conditions of crisis."<sup>13</sup> The third is the area of institutional design and the powerful effects of institutional choices on political development. For example, it is believed that parliamentary systems are a far better investment in the continuation of democratic governance than presidential systems.<sup>14</sup> The fourth generalization is that the settlement of the national and state questions is a crucial

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<sup>10</sup> Laurence Whitehead, *Democratization : Theory and Experience*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2002, pp.27-28

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Third Way: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1993, p. 9

<sup>12</sup> Valerie Bunce, "Comparative Democratization: Big and Bounded Generalizations," *Comparative Political Studies*, 33(6/7), August/September 2000, p. 706

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 715

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 710-711

investment in the quality and survival of democracy.<sup>15</sup> The importance of the state to the democratic project leads to a final generalization about rule of law. In democratizing countries there is a considerable gap between formal institutions that meet democratic standards and informal practices that do not; for instance the major impediment to full-scale democratization in the post-socialist world is the absence, or unevenness, of rule of law.<sup>16</sup>

Geoffrey Pridham also focuses on the complexity and multidimensional character of democratic transition, defining it as being linked to liberal democracy: “democratization is multi-dimensional, simply because the functioning of liberal democracies is multi-dimensional ... it involves not merely the creation of new rules and procedures (the formal dimension of transition), but also the societal level as well as intermediary linkages and interactions between different levels, especially elite-mass relations.”<sup>17</sup> He argues that the democratization process should be viewed in a historical perspective and in an integral fashion, where transition and consolidation are seen in conjunction whatever their differences in focus, because democratization is a multi-level or multi-dimensional process. Hence, the dynamics of the regime change need to be analyzed by observing the interactions between its different dimensions, as the nature and intensity of these interactions, and whether they develop in a positive or negative way, determines the outcome of the regime change.<sup>18</sup>

According to Pridham, democratization literature contains three schools of thought related to regime change: the functionalist (emphasizing socio-economic structural conditions); the transnational (emphasizing international influences and trends); and the genetic (emphasizing political elite strategy and decisions).<sup>19</sup> Functionalist theories focus on the necessary economic, social and cultural preconditions for

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 715

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 713

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *The Dynamics of Democratization. A Comparative Approach*, Continuum, London and New York 2000, p.17

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.4

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.5

democracy, placing emphasis on economic development and social mobilization.<sup>20</sup> It has been stated that some societies are not ready for democracy due to an inadequate level of socio-economic development.<sup>21</sup> Transnational theories also explain regime change through structural factors, such as socio-economic development, but with special emphasis on international trends that influence domestic change.<sup>22</sup> Genetic theories place specific focus on early regime change and in their emphasis on political choice and the actions of the elites.<sup>23</sup> Genetic ideas were developed after the transitions in the three Southern European countries of Spain, Greece and Portugal from the mid-1970s onwards. After that, these ideas have come to be applied to other areas of the world, particularly in Latin America, inspiring more empirical research.<sup>24</sup>

If therefore, one of the main themes discussed in the literature on democratization is the distinction between transition and consolidation, it is necessary to understand first how transition has been conceptualized in previous literature. Democratic transition starts when the previous authoritarian/totalitarian system begins to collapse, leading to a situation when, with the new constitution in place, the operation of the new political structures starts to become a matter of routine. During such transitions, the constitutional settlement is negotiated and the rules of procedure for political competition are settled; furthermore, authoritarian agencies are dismantled and laws deemed unsuitable for democratic life are abolished.<sup>25</sup> In this respect, transition has been defined in literature as “the interval between one political regime and another;”<sup>26</sup> in other words, it implies a movement from something old

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> See Seymour M. Lipset “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy,” *American Political Science Review*, March 1959, vol. 53, pp.69-105

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *The Dynamics of Democratization*, p. 8. Huntington also talks about transnational influences, for example, the recent wave of expansion in global communications and transportation gave way to democratization in many countries. (Huntington, *The Third Wave*, pp.101-102)

<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Pridham. *The Dynamics of Democratization. A Comparative Approach*. Ibid., p.9

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.10

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.19

<sup>26</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986, p.6

towards something new. It is assured that a country moving away from a dictatorship will end up in a democratic order. “For Southern European and Latin American countries, for example, the old order was authoritarian rule, although of a differing social base, configuration, longevity, severity, intent and success.”<sup>27</sup>

As was mentioned earlier, in Kyrgyzstan democratic transition started in early 1990s with Akaev’s coming to power and with the process of holding several elections (presidential and parliamentary). One of the main concerns of this thesis is to analyze this transitional period of 1991-2009 by looking at presidential and parliamentary elections and referendums, which served as bases of legitimacy for Askar Akaev and Kurmanbek Bakiev. Although the country made the initial transition to democracy, it is not possible to suggest that there have been solid, credible steps towards successful transition, let alone consolidation, two terms that are analyzed as closely related terms in the literature.

Therefore it is possible to observe that although transition and consolidation are functionally distinguishable, in reality are inseparable, all the more so since most formal requirements involve transitional tasks and substantive qualities emerge most of all with progress towards consolidation.<sup>28</sup> Thus, it is not possible to predict when the process of transition will end and democracy will become consolidated. According to Linz and Stepan, democratic transition is complete “when sufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government, when a government comes to power that is the direct result of a free and popular vote, when this government de facto has the authority to generate new policies, and when the executive, legislative and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies de jure.”<sup>29</sup>

Mainwaring, O’Donnell and Valenzuela identify two transitions: the first begins with “the initial stirrings of crisis under authoritarian rule that generate some form of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.65

<sup>28</sup> Geoffrey Pridham Ibid., p.320

<sup>29</sup> Juan J. Linz & Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, p. 3

political opening and greater respect for basic civil rights; and ends with the establishment of a government elected in an open contest, with universal adult franchise and effective guarantees for the respect of traditional democratic rights and liberties.”<sup>30</sup> The second transition begins with “the inauguration of a democratic government, and ends – if all goes well – with the establishment of a consolidated democratic regime.”<sup>31</sup> It is not easy to draw an exact line between these two transitions; and similarly it is not easy to determine when the second phase (that of democratic consolidation) will end. In addition, it is all but impossible to close the second phase with a specific event or formula (such as the second transfer of power from one elected government to another).<sup>32</sup> The authors believe that despite the cross-over between the first and second transition, the issues and problems of each phase differ:

Literature on the first transition focuses on the development of social and political oppositions to the authoritarian regime, the emergence of splits between hard-liners and soft-liners within the circles of power, the ultimately unsuccessful attempts by authoritarian rulers to legitimize their rule by liberalizing rather than democratizing, the formation of coalitions pressing for democratic change between different and sometimes formerly divided political and social forces, the reactivation of social and political life that results from the waning of the repressiveness of authoritarian rule, and so on. This literature stresses the difficulty and reversibility of democratization, but its main focus is on the process of termination of authoritarian rule.<sup>33</sup>

As for the second transition, there is a need to focus on the possible reverse of democratization, and the construction of democratic institutions that may offer the possibility to address successfully economic and social problems.<sup>34</sup> The authors conclude that:

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<sup>30</sup> S. Mainwaring, G. O'Donnell and J.S Valenzuela eds. *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, p.2

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Mainwaring, G. O'Donnell and J.S Valenzuela eds. *Issues in Democratic Consolidation*, p.3

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.4

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pp. 4-5

A major theme ... is that transitions may be arrested by the multiple political, economic and even social constraints under which they occur, and that the resulting “stunted” regimes are more prone to reversal. And yet the authors ... agree that, notwithstanding the constraints imposed by the past and by the nature of the transitions, choices matter. Future outcomes are not uniquely determined by past constraints.<sup>35</sup>

Jean Grugel also makes important observations about transition and consolidation. In her opinion:

... as democratization developed, it became evident that although some countries successfully made a transition to democracy, others collapsed and others remain in the category of problematic democracies. The result was a shift in academic interest toward identifying those factors that make new democracies endure, and those that conversely make for fragility or weakness. Consolidation of democracy became the principal focus for research in the 1990s. This represented a shift in democratization debate, from a primary interest in structure and agency and their respective roles in causation, towards a focus on how political culture, political economy and institutionalism shape outcomes.<sup>36</sup>

Valenzuela analyzes democratic consolidation in post-transitional settings first, by defining consolidation and then by identifying the requirements for consolidated democracy. He starts with the proposition that if something is “consolidated,” it has the quality of being seemingly immune to disintegration, so there is a tendency to associate “consolidated democracies” with stability. Furthermore this stability, through the passage of time (with no regime reversals and the absence of potentially destabilizing factors) becomes the basic criteria for democratic consolidation.<sup>37</sup> However, he notes that “stability cannot be equated with the process towards creating a fully democratic regime; as what enhances stability may detract from the democratic quality of regime.”<sup>38</sup> He links the notion of democratic consolidation to a minimalist conception of democracy, or the “procedural minimum” of democracies – namely “secret balloting, universal adult suffrage,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.11

<sup>36</sup> Jean Grugel, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillian, 2000, p. 4

<sup>37</sup> J. Samuel Valenzuela, 1992. “Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings” in S. Mainwaring, G. O’Donnell and J.S Valenzuela eds. *Issues in Democratic Consolidation*, pp.58-59

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p.59

regular elections, partisan competition, associational recognition and access, and executive accountability.”<sup>39</sup> Valenzuela focuses on the example of Chile, and suggests that once the first transition has been accomplished, the process of reaching democratic consolidation consists of eliminating the “reserved domains”<sup>40</sup> as well as “the institutions, procedures, and expectations that are incompatible with the minimal workings of a democratic regime, thereby permitting the beneficent ones that are created or recreated with the transition to a democratic government to develop further.”<sup>41</sup> In this respect, democratic consolidation is “impossible without undoing (by deliberate changes or by converting the offending items into dead letter) the formally established institutions that conflict with the minimal workings of a democracy.”<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, Huntington says that the process of democratization is closely related to a set of institutional changes, such as free, open, fair elections,<sup>43</sup> and provides definitions of the concepts of democracy and democratization. In his famous study *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, he defines democracy as a political system in which “most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes, and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, democracy implies the existence of civil and political freedom to express, publish, assemble and organize. Among the countries that meet these criteria, further empirical analysis is still necessary to detect the degree to which they

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<sup>39</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*, Ibid., p.8

<sup>40</sup> Placing the military under the authority of the elected government is a key facilitating condition for democratic consolidation. According to Valenzuela in Chile, “[d]emocratic government officials cannot determine the use of the military budgets, acquisitions of armaments, have limited say over officer promotions and appointments, even for foreign service assignments, and are barred from changing military doctrine and the curricula in the respective academies. (J.S. Valenzuela, p.66)

<sup>41</sup> J. Samuel Valenzuela, Ibid., p.70

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.p.71

<sup>43</sup> See Samuel Huntington *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel Huntington, Ibid., p. 7



have achieved the two main objectives of an ideal democracy - freedom and equality.<sup>45</sup> On the subject of democratization, Huntington argues that,

if the popular election of the top decision makers is the essence of democracy, then the critical point in the process of democratization is the replacement of a government that was not chosen this way by one that is selected in a free, open and fair election...<sup>46</sup>

Pridham also emphasizes link between new democratic system and actors in the society through political actors, linkages and interactions. For him, "...consolidation is rather less exclusive to the role of elites than transition, placing more attention on the evolving relationship between the new system and society."<sup>47</sup> Pridham further stresses the importance of the high level of acceptance of democracy, both by the elite and the general public:

Two conclusions may be drawn from the study of pro-democratic attitudes in Southern Europe. First, the presence of regime alternatives to democracy depends very much on perceptions of the authoritarian past. Historically based anti-authoritarian attitudes continued to delegitimize a possible return to non-democratic rule through transition and beyond. [S]econd, even when pro-authoritarian sympathies exist, these do not necessarily translate into consistent behavior.<sup>48</sup>

O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead too believe that the success of Southern European democracies in consolidating themselves has been due to the advanced state of political organizations and civil society.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Leonardo Morlino "'Good' and 'Bad' Democracies: How to Conduct Research into the Quality of Democracy" in *The Quality of Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, Derek S. Hitchenson & Elena A. Korosteleva (eds.) London; New York : Routledge, 2006, p.5

<sup>46</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, p. 9

<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *Transitions to Democracy: Comparative Perspectives from Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe*, Aldershot ; Brookfield, USA: Dartmouth, 1995, p.106

<sup>48</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *The Dynamics of Democratization. A Comparative Approach*, Ibid., p.226

<sup>49</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (eds.) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, Ibid., pp.7-8

It must also be emphasized that in previous literature on democratization there are some critical analyses about the assumptions of prominent scholars. In this context, the works of Carothers and Ghia Nodia are worth mentioning. Carothers, in his critical analysis, summarizes the five core assumptions of the transition paradigm. The first is that “any country moving away from dictatorial rule can be considered a country in transition toward democracy.”<sup>50</sup> The second assumption is that democratization tends to unfold in a set sequence of stages: opening, breakthrough and consolidation. The opening is “a period of democratic ferment and political liberalization in which cracks appear in the ruling dictatorial regime, with the most prominent fault line being that between hardliners and softliners.”<sup>51</sup> Breakthrough is the collapse of the regime and the rapid emergence of a new, democratic system, with the coming to power of a new government through national elections and the establishment of a democratic institutional structure, often through the promulgation of a new constitution.<sup>52</sup> Even deviations from this transition sequence are defined in terms of the path itself. The third assumption is the belief in the determinative importance of elections. By holding elections, new governments are bestowed with democratic legitimacy, but if this is not accompanied with democratic accountability to the general public, then there will be no value in such elections. The fourth assumption concerns “structural” features such as the economic level, political history, institutional legacies, ethnic make-up and socio-cultural traditions.<sup>53</sup> The fifth assumption is that for democratic transition there is a need for a functioning state, which implies that there will be some redesign of state institutions: the creation of new electoral institutions, parliamentary reform and judicial reform.<sup>54</sup> The author also criticizes the transition paradigm, accusing it of being inaccurate and misleading. First of all, it is inaccurate to apply the term “transitional democracy” to any country, and put it in a separate category; secondly, the sequence of stages should not be assumed as an ideal, as the political evolutions of some countries (Taiwan, Republic of Korea) did not follow that path; third, in many

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm, *Ibid.*, p.6

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8

transitional countries, regular elections are held, but political participation beyond voting remains shallow and governmental accountability is weak.<sup>55</sup> On the fourth assumption, related to structural preconditions to democracy, the author agrees that the specific institutional legacies from the predecessor regimes strongly affect the outcomes of attempted transitions.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the author suggests that it is no longer appropriate to believe the assumptions of the transition paradigm.

Nodia continues the discussion of “transition paradigm” started by Carothers, and questions what should be referred to as “transition” if it is no longer an appropriate metaphor for many countries that are moving from authoritarianism or communism to something else. Nodia argues that so-called countries in the “gray zone” do one of three things: 1) trying more or less sincerely to adopt a democratic model, but failing; 2) making a pretense of trying; or 3) engaging in a mixture of both good faith failure and mere “going through the motions.”<sup>57</sup> Further, the author questions the meaning of normality when exclusively attached to democracy in the modern world, which has two interpretations. The first is normative, that democracy is the best political regime among those that exist – democracy may have its problems, but is clearly better than any of the alternatives. The second meaning is that “normal” is being used as “natural.” In this sense, democracy is thought to correspond better than any other regime to human nature itself, or to the nature of human society. If this is true, then it is not democracy but rather the lack of it that must be explained.<sup>58</sup> However, the author states that the existence of “transitional” countries where there is no transition casts doubt on the idea that democracy is somehow “natural,” and therefore presumably easy to achieve.<sup>59</sup> The author calls the condition in which such countries found themselves as open-ended political change:

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Ibid.* p.15

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p.16

<sup>57</sup> Ghia Nodia, “The Democratic Path,” *Journal of Democracy*, 13(3), July 2002, p.14

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p.15

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

If a country is not yet democratic, we cannot be fully sure that it will become such; therefore it is not right to say it is “in transition to” democracy. If it has already become democratic, then of course it is no longer in transition. Therefore transitions can only be known ex post facto. Until we know the end result, it is safer to speak simply of open-ended political change.<sup>60</sup>

Nodia believes that the term “transition” makes sense “because the idea of the right kind of end result – namely democracy – is present in political discourse, and exerts a powerful influence on events.”<sup>61</sup> In a gray zone there are “many other countries where most people acknowledge the presence of deep structural impediments to democracy, but embrace it as a long-term goal nonetheless ... Their major characteristics today are uncertainty and a sense of failure ... both elites and the public agree that their regimes are unsteady, unfinished, and unconsolidated.”<sup>62</sup> Nodia agrees with Carothers that “[t]he focus of democratic theory – at least with regard to ‘gray zone’ countries – should not be on ‘how to defeat tyrants’ or ‘how to introduce good legislation,’ but rather on how to deal with structural weaknesses such as a failing state or the malign legacy of an undemocratic political culture.”<sup>63</sup>

### 1.1.2 Different Paths to Transition

Another facet of the literature on democratization is how scholars analyze the different methods or ways in this complex process of transition. In this context, it is possible to suggest that the initial studies into democratization in the 1970s and 1980s presumed that the concept was self-evident, i.e. it meant simply a transformation of the political system from a non-democracy towards an accountable and representative government. These studies adopted a process-oriented approach, concentrating on identifying the mechanisms or paths of democratization.<sup>64</sup> For example, Terry Lynn Karl distinguishes between possible “modes” of transition to democracy: *reform*, *revolution*, *imposition* and *pact*. *Reform* is a mode of transition

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.16

<sup>61</sup> Ghia Nodia, “The Democratic Path,” pp.16-17

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p.18

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Jean Grugel, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillian, 2000, p. 3

that comes from below, and is characterized by unrestricted contestation and participation. It is met with subversive opposition from unsuppressed traditional elites, as can be seen in the cases of Argentina (1946-1951) and Guatemala (1946).<sup>65</sup> *Revolutions* “generally produce a stable form of governance, but such forms have not yet evolved into democratic patterns of fair competition, unrestricted contestation, rotation in power and free associability.”<sup>66</sup> Karl argues that the most often occurring types of transition are transitions from above (such as imposition), in which “traditional rulers remain in control, even if pressured from below, and successfully use strategies of either compromise or force – or a combination of the two – to retain at least some of their power.”<sup>67</sup> This type of transition has most often resulted in a political democracy. *Imposition* is a type in which “the military uses its dominant position to establish unilaterally the rules for civilian governance.”<sup>68</sup> Examples of imposition can be seen in Brazil (1974) and Ecuador (1976). The last type of transition that is very popular in Latin America is *pact*. In this type, the influential actors are the elites and the strategy of transition is compromise. Examples can be found in Venezuela (1958) and Columbia (1958). In Uruguay there were “foundational pacts, that is, explicit (though not always public) agreements between contending actors, which define the rules of governance on the basis of mutual guarantees for the ‘vital interests’ of those involved.”<sup>69</sup> Finally Karl identifies types of democracies that, at least initially, are largely shaped by the mode of transition in Latin America.

[D]emocratization by imposition is likely to yield conservative democracies that cannot or will not address equity issues ... the result is likely to be some form of electoral authoritarian rule. Pacted transitions are likely to produce corporatist or consociational democracies in which party competition is regulated to varying degrees, determined, in part, by the nature of foundational bargains. Transition through reform is likely to bring about competitive democracies, whose political fragility paves the way for an

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<sup>65</sup> Terry Lynn Karl, “Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics*, October 1990, 23(1), p. 8

<sup>66</sup> Terry Lynn Karl, “Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America,” *Ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p.9

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

eventual return to authoritarianism. Finally, revolutionary transitions tend to result in one-party dominant democracies, where competition is also regulated. These types are characterized by different mixes and varying degrees of the chief dimensions of democracy: contestation, participation, accountability and civilian control over the military.<sup>70</sup>

Scott Mainwaring conceptualizes transitions in Latin America and Southern Europe through a threefold typology: transition through transaction, extrication and regime defeat.<sup>71</sup> In transition through transaction “the authoritarian government initiates the process of liberalization and remains a decisive actor throughout the transition. It chooses to promote measures that eventually lead to democratization.”<sup>72</sup> Basic examples of this have been seen in Brazil and Spain. In transition through extrication “an authoritarian government is weakened, but not as thoroughly as in a transition by defeat. It is able to negotiate crucial features of the transition, though in a position of less strength than in cases of transition through transaction.”<sup>73</sup> Lastly, transition through regime defeat takes place when a major defeat of an authoritarian regime leads to the collapse of authoritarianism and the inauguration of a democratic government.<sup>74</sup> Examples of this can be found in Argentina in 1982 - 83, Portugal in 1975 and Greece in 1974.

Another scholar who makes similar conceptualizations for democratic transition is J. Samuel Valenzuela, who differentiated three “modalities of transition to democracy from authoritarian rule”: *collapse, defeat or withdrawal, extrication* and *reform*. In transition by *collapse, defeat or withdrawal*, the rules of an authoritarian regime are violated, but the rulers cannot impose any conditions for leaving power. For Valenzuela, such transitions occurred in Czechoslovakia (1989), Argentina (1983), Colombia (1955), Greece (1974), Portugal (1975), Germany (1945) Japan (1945), Italy (1945) and Romania (1989). Transition by *extrication* occurs when the rules of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.15

<sup>71</sup> Scott Mainwaring, “Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues,” in S. Mainwaring, G. O’Donnell and J. S. Valenzuela. (eds.) *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, p.304

<sup>72</sup> Scott Mainwaring, p.322

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

the authoritarian regime are abandoned, but the rulers negotiate conditions for leaving power.<sup>75</sup> Examples can be seen in Peru (1980), Venezuela (1958) and Argentina (1973). Transition by *reform* occurs without breaking the rules of the old regime. The capacity of the outgoing regime to stipulate their departing conditions is maximal,<sup>76</sup> examples are Spain (1975-76), Hungary (1989), Poland (1989), Brazil (1980s) and Chile (1990).

### 1.1.3 Liberalization and Democratization

Another important point relating to transition is the conceptual differentiation between “liberalization” and “democratization.” Liberalization is often seen as the first condition along the path to democratization, as “the process of redefining and extending rights ... it is indicative of the beginning of the transition.”<sup>77</sup> It is also argued that the difference between democratization and liberalization is the emphasis on citizenship.<sup>78</sup> As democracy’s guiding principle is that of citizenship, democratization refers to the rules and procedures of citizenship “either applied to political institutions previously governed by other principles (e.g. coercive control, social tradition, expert judgment, or administrative practice), or expanded to include persons not previously enjoying such rights and obligations (e.g. non-taxpayers, illiterates, women, youth, ethnic minorities and foreign residents).”<sup>79</sup> Adam Przeworski suggests an approach in which transition begins with liberalization, and is realized through a mutual interaction between schisms within the authoritarian regime and the organization of opposition.<sup>80</sup> For Przeworski liberalization is inherently unstable, because once it is started, either the opposition conquers growing space, leading ultimately to the demise of authoritarianism; or the regime must

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<sup>75</sup> J. Samuel Valenzuela, 1992. “Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings” in S. Mainwaring, G. O’Donnell and J.S Valenzuela eds. *Issues in Democratic Consolidation*, p.77

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.74

<sup>77</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, Ibid., p.7

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>80</sup> See Adam Przeworski “The Game of Transition” in S. Mainwaring, G. O’Donnell and J.S Valenzuela eds. *Issues in Democratic Consolidation*, pp.105-153

repress, leading to the marginalization of the regime factions that initially proposed liberalization.

Linz and Stepan also argue that democratization entails liberalization, but is a wider and more specifically political concept, believing that “democratization requires open contestation over the right to win control of the government, and this in turn requires free competitive elections, the results of which determine who governs.”<sup>81</sup> This way there can be liberalization without democratization. It is worthy to quote Linz and Stepan on this account:

There’s a further political and intellectual advantage to being clear about what is required before a transition can be considered complete. Non-democratic power-holders frequently argue that certain liberalizing changes they have introduced are sufficient in themselves for democracy. Introducing a clear standard of what is actually necessary for a completed transition makes it easier for the democratic opposition to point out (their national and international allies as well as to the non-democratic regime) what additional, if any, indispensable changes remain to be done.<sup>82</sup>

Guillermo O’Donnell and Phillippe Schmitter argue that both liberalization and democratization can be high or low. Accordingly there are regime configurations called Dictablanda (liberalized autocracy), Dictadura (autocracy), Democradura (limited political democracy) and plebiscitary democracy, none of which, however, can be considered sufficient for a well-functioning democracy. If we have very high liberalization (high formal rights and obligations) and very high democratization (good public institutions and governmental process) the result is a political democracy. This conceptualization also includes transitional paths, such as defeat in war, revolution from below or outside or negotiation through successive pacts.<sup>83</sup>

In relation to this discussion, it can be said that liberalization began in Kyrgyzstan in early 1990s with the introduction of freedom of speech, newly emerged independent

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<sup>81</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, p. 3

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. , p. 5

<sup>83</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, Ibid. pp.13-14



mass media, more possibilities for political participation and competitive elections. Thus, in this period, Kyrgyzstan was most liberal state in Central Asia. However, as it is discussed in the literature, political liberalization may occur without democratization. That was also the case in Kyrgyzstan, where initial liberalization did not bring further democratization.

#### **1.1.4 Role of Elites**

Transition to democracy is a process in which there is elite domination, and as such elite preferences, their unity and power, as well as their mechanisms for domination over people become critical and determinative. In discussing authoritarian regimes, O'Donnell and Schmitter analyze the division of, and relations between, hard-liners and soft-liners: hard-liners are those who “believe that the perpetuation of authoritarian rule is possible and desirable,”<sup>84</sup> while soft-liners have “awareness that the regime they helped to implant, and in which they usually occupy important positions, will have to make use to some degree or in some form of electoral legitimation.”<sup>85</sup> The authors assert that “there is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence – direct or indirect – of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself, principally along the fluctuating cleavage between hard-liners and soft-liners. Brazil and Spain are cases in which such a direct causality can be seen.”<sup>86</sup> According to Carothers, the “crack” between hardliners and soft-liners determines the beginning of process of transition to democracy.<sup>87</sup> Valenzuela also argues that soft-liners may be influential in democratic consolidation too. Democratic consolidation can be successful if the last ruling elites of the authoritarian regime favor democratization:

Such situations occur after the triumph within the authoritarian regime of ... soft-liners versus hard-liners..., as the super-soft-liners, i.e., those who not only favor the liberalization of authoritarian regime rule, but are committed to

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.16

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.19

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Carothers, “The End of Transition Paradigm,” p.7

democratization. Moreover, transitions led by such super-soft-liners that occur in addition, through reform, are more likely to permit the same political leaders who carry out the transition to retain leading positions in the new democratic context.<sup>88</sup>

Valenzuela further emphasizes the importance of the attitudes of the last main authoritarian regime elites towards democracy.<sup>89</sup> For example, some favor full democratization, as in the case in Spain by King Juan Carlos and Adolfo Suarez, while others may prefer a more liberalized authoritarian regime but will eventually accept democratization, as was the case in Brazil and in Poland. Still others may be opposed to democratization, like Augusto Pinochet in Chile, who repeatedly rejected democracy.<sup>90</sup>

Role of elites was vital in Kyrgyz transition. It will not be wrong to argue that the whole transition process in Kyrgyzstan is to some extent the result of choices and preferences made by political elites. For example in the 1990s the divisions inside Kyrgyzstan Communist Party resulted in election of Askar Akaev as Kyrgyzstan's first president. After the collapse of the Soviet Union there emerged an ideological division among the Kyrgyz communists into hard-liners, who wanted to preserve everything as it was under the strict rule of the Communist Party; and soft-liners, who opted for political reforms.<sup>91</sup> The pattern of division among the political elites suggests that they are not cohesive and change their priorities, ideologies, political alignments and loyalties depending on the conditions. As put forward by a scholar:

There is no political elite *per se*, only people engaged in politics and political maneuvering. Unfortunately, the business elite which began forming during Akaev's presidency was practically liquidated by the same power. Some

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<sup>88</sup> J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings" in S. Mainwaring, G. O'Donnell and J.S Valenzuela eds. *Issues in Democratic Consolidation* p.76

<sup>89</sup> It must be emphasized, however, that even though the role of elites in the process of transition to democracy is highly stressed, mass support to this process is also important. According to G. O'Donnell, and P. Schmitter, "The dynamics of the transition from authoritarian rule are not just a matter of elite dispositions, calculations and pacts....a generalized mobilization is likely to occur, which we choose to describe as the "resurrection of civil society."( G. O'Donnell, and P. Schmitter, 1986, p.48)

<sup>90</sup> J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings" in S. Mainwaring, G. O'Donnell and J.S Valenzuela eds. *Issues in Democratic Consolidation*, p.75

<sup>91</sup> Later these people started calling themselves democrats.

segments are left, but they are greatly politicized. They do not represent a clearly established business system. Regrettably, there is no intellectual elite either. So called well-educated people do not represent an intellectual elite yet, because the difference between them firstly consists in the fact that an intellectual elite is a bearer of certain ideas which it wants to incorporate not in the practice of life, but in the minds of people.<sup>92</sup>

The next section looks at relationship between democratization and political legitimacy.

### 1.1.5 Democratization and Political Legitimacy

Previous literature has also emphasized the relationship between the attempts of the elite to move toward democracy and provide regime legitimacy. For example, as raised by O'Donnell and Schmitter, authoritarian regimes may promise democracy and freedom *in the future*; and in this way they try to justify their rule “in political terms only as transitional powers, while attempting to shift attention to their immediate substantive accomplishments – typically, the achievement of ‘social peace’ or economic development.”<sup>93</sup> As such, they try to find ways of legitimizing their prolonged authoritarian rule; however in the long term such a strategy may actually backfire and result in the eventual collapse of the regime. As Mainwaring notes:

[D]eclining legitimacy increases the costs of staying in power. In the post-World War era, Western authoritarian regimes have lacked a stable legitimizing formula. It is common for authoritarian regimes to justify their actions in the name of furthering some democratic cause. This justification may be plausible to some sectors of the nation, and it may help legitimacy for a limited period of time. But appealing to safeguarding democracy is a two-edged sword for authoritarian governments, for their appeals eventually calls attention to the hiatus between their discourse and their practice.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Muratbek Imanaliev, “Specifics and Tendencies of Political Struggle in Kyrgyzstan”, Institute for Public Policy, available at <http://www.ipp.kg/en/analysis/255/> (Accessed on 12.02.2010)

<sup>93</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, 1986. p.15

<sup>94</sup> Scott Mainwaring, “Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation. Theoretical and Comparative Issues,” in S. Mainwaring, G. O'Donnell and J. S. Valenzuela, eds. *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, pp.324-325

Schmitter questions how legitimacy is produced and then reproduced in the transitional state. He argues that legitimation is a function of the passage of time, but the likelihood of legitimation increases if the preceding regime has left a legacy of incompetence, corruption and violence, and if other democracies in the area are seen to cope with similar problems successfully.<sup>95</sup> Success of legitimation is dependent on perceptions of effectiveness, efficiency and fairness of political institutions in relation to specific “authoritarian allocations”.<sup>96</sup>

Mainwaring also argues that declining legitimacy can help induce authoritarian governments to leave office,<sup>97</sup> however “rational actors would join a conspiracy against democracy or ... against authoritarianism only if there were a reasonable chance of success. Otherwise, the costs of action would drastically outweigh the costs of acquiescence.”<sup>98</sup> That is why the notion of legitimacy is vital for understanding regime change, as when authoritarian systems enjoy popular support, it is difficult to mobilize against them.

Legitimacy is also discussed in literature as one of the main conditions necessary for successful democratic transition and consolidation. Pridham, for example, mentions not only new-regime legitimation but also the inculcation of democratic values at both elite and mass levels. According to him, “Elite consensus across parties on new democratic rules forms part of this change, and this may have influential effects on public level.”<sup>99</sup> New-regime legitimation, however, is admittedly a difficult area of investigation because of the intrinsic problems in measuring it empirically, as well as

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<sup>95</sup> Philippe C. Schmitter, “The Consolidation of Political Democracies: Processes, Rhythms, Sequences and Types” in Geoffrey Pridham (ed.) *Transitions to Democracy: Comparative Perspectives from Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe*, Aldershot ; Brookfield, USA, 1995, pp.547-548

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p. 547

<sup>97</sup> Scott Mainwaring, “Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues,” in S. Mainwaring, G. O’Donnell and J. S. Valenzuela. eds. *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, p.304

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.306

<sup>99</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *The Dynamics of Democratization. A Comparative Approach*, Ibid., p.221

its broad and multi-dimensional focus.<sup>100</sup> In other words, “Ruling elites may further the credibility of a new regime by demonstrating that democratic governance can actually work.”<sup>101</sup> Altogether, therefore, there is some room for influence by elites, but only in conjunction with other determinants of legitimation,<sup>102</sup> but the key issue is effective performance. Thus, legitimacy:

...is primarily dependent on the normative preferences and attachments of the citizens of a country with respect to the regime in place. In transition, it is not normal to expect the widespread presence of democratic attitudes, particularly if authoritarian rule has been of long duration. Vaguely pro-democratic orientations may be discerned from previous political experience, but these cannot yet be focused on a particular democratic regime, for this has to be established. However, the strength and location of these orientations – namely, in influential circles – clearly affects the prospects for eventual democratic consolidation; and, as we have seen, anti-authoritarian attitudes provide a negative stimulus to this process. For while it is true that regime legitimacy is basically autonomous – once established, it remains more or less independent of the short-term vagaries of politics – the process of legitimation is nevertheless open to influences from above.<sup>103</sup>

Therefore, in order to foster democratic traditions there is a need for the democratic legitimation of a new regime, which requires support and acceptance of it. As such, the process of democratic legitimation forms a very central part of democratic consolidation; and may draw comparisons between the authoritarian past and present-day democracy. “Thus, memories of and reactions to the past interact with responses to the present; and this may set up a dynamic whereby institutional impacts may occur. This process involves support for a new regime both in the abstract (democracy as a type of regime) and the particular (the actual democracy installed after authoritarian collapse).”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> M. Stephen Weatherford, “Measuring Political Legitimacy,” *American Political Science Review*, 86(1), 1992, pp. 149-66

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p.227

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *The Dynamics of Democratization. A Comparative Approach*, pp.227-28

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.248

Legitimacy has also been analyzed in literature on democratization in terms of its role in consolidation and political stability. For example, Mainwaring says "... legitimacy cannot be reduced to self-interest or to some other explanation ... [and] regime stability cannot always be explained on the basis of legitimacy."<sup>105</sup> The notion of legitimacy helps to provide an understanding of why the costs of attempting to undermine democracy are so high in consolidated democracies. When actors believe in the system, they make concessions to be abided by the rules of the game. Similarly, as mentioned above, when authoritarian regimes enjoy considerable support, it is more difficult to mobilize against them. In another words, "[w]here self-interest is the rationale for obedience, the stability of the political system rests heavily on payoffs, especially of a material nature."<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, "[l]egitimacy is every bit as much the root of democratic stability as objective payoffs, and it is less dependent on economic pay-offs."<sup>107</sup> As many Latin American cases show, where elites and popular organizations subscribe to democracy primarily out of self-interest, the resulting democratic stability is precarious. Democracy's fundamental claim to legitimacy is not substantive (greater efficiency, equity, or growth), but rather procedural: guarantees of human rights, protection of minorities, government accountability and the opportunities to get rid of rulers who lose popular support. For this reason, democratic regimes can retain legitimacy even when they do not perform well economically.<sup>108</sup> Mainwaring concludes:

[T]he theme of legitimacy remains fundamental to understanding democratic politics. Legitimacy does not need to be universal in the beginning stages if democracy is to succeed, but if a commitment to democracy does not emerge over time, democracy is in trouble.<sup>109</sup>

Linz and Stepan call legitimate governments the least evil of the forms of government, because democratic legitimacy is based on the belief that in a particular

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<sup>105</sup> Scott Mainwaring, "Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues," p.306

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> See Scott Mainwaring, Ibid., p. 306

<sup>109</sup>Ibid. p.307

country no other type of regime could assure a more successful pursuit of collective goals.<sup>110</sup> Democracy and legitimacy are linked as such: "... democracy without legitimacy tends to be unstable, for all political systems experience periods when payoffs are low. This means that over the medium term, it is important to induce most actors to believe in democratic rules ... Conversely, where popular leaders are committed to democracy and enjoy broad legitimacy in their organizations and movements, prospects for democracy are better."<sup>111</sup> The way regime legitimizes itself may be different. For example, Latin American regimes needed to legitimize themselves by addressing the serious social and economic problems facing their societies.<sup>112</sup> It is believed that intense popular legitimation is necessary to fortify a democratic regime threatened by anti-democratic elites.

The discussion on legitimacy in literature is also closely related to the distinction between democratic transition and consolidation. As mentioned above, consolidation is seen as the expected outcome of transition in the long run. According to Pridham democratic consolidation is:

... invariably lengthier than democratic transition, but also a stage with wider and possibly deeper effects, involving mass attitudes and requiring legitimation of the new regime. It requires first of all the gradual removal of the uncertainties that usually surround transition and the full institutionalization of a new democracy, the internationalization of its rules and the dissemination of democratic values.<sup>113</sup>

The next section looks at democratization literature in a regional context.

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<sup>110</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, p.18

<sup>111</sup> Scott Mainwaring, pp. 309-310

<sup>112</sup> Cited by Timothy Power and Nancy Powers, "Issues in the Consolidation of Democracy in Latin America and Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective", Working paper No.113, 1988

<sup>113</sup> Geoffrey Pridham *Ibid.*, p.20

### 1.1.6 Democratization in a Regional Context

Depending on the region in which democratization is taking place, scholars have used different methods, made different types of comparisons and emphasized unique conditions of these regions. For example, many scholars who have comparatively analyzed democratization in Southern Europe and Latin America have pointed out that there are important differences between these two regions. It is suggested, for instance, that the international context played a major positive role for Southern Europe. It is well known that democratization in all three South European countries was aided by a highly supportive external environment. Democratization in Southern Europe and Latin America did not take place in the same political, economic or social context. For Southern Europe, regional organizations such as the European Union had a sizeable positive impact. It is also possible to suggest that in the cases of democratization in Central and East European too, geographic proximity to Western Europe has played a vital role. Jacques Rupnik stresses the importance of “democratic conditionality” for Central and East European countries to join the “club” of Western democracies.<sup>114</sup> Indeed the idea of the “return to Europe” has been the single most important ideological orientation shaping Central and Eastern European politics since the collapse of communism, affecting the behavior of elites in practically every part of the political spectrum in these countries – including not only liberals, but nationalists and ex-communists as well.<sup>115</sup>

Democratization in Latin America however has been conceptualized through the role of the military in politics. As such, it has been suggested that in order to engage the military in the democratic process, it is necessary to emphasize the consensus (agreement on fundamentals) which forms the basis for the new democratic regime. Militaries in Latin America, which dominated politics for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, eventually gave way to more democratic rule. According to Peter Smith:

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<sup>114</sup> See Jaques Rupnik “The International Context?” in Larry Diamond and Mac Plattner’s (eds.) *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Stephen E. Hanson “Defining Democratic Consolidation” in Richard D. Anderson et al., *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 145



Democracy has become more widespread (and to some extent more durable) throughout Latin America because it has been tamed. From the 1940s to the 1970s, democracy was seen as “dangerous.” It amounted to a social provocation. From the 1980s to the end of the century, that was no longer the case.<sup>116</sup>

Formal institutions are another factor of different democratizations, and those representing class, and sectoral and professional interests in Southern Europe were studied by Schmitter in 1985. He concluded that such design was more appropriate for Southern Europe, where the diversity of configurations for democratic institutions are greater than in Latin America, where organized class, sectoral and professional representation would not play a significant role in the consolidation process.<sup>117</sup>

A more comprehensive analysis on how the processes of democratization differ between Latin America and Southern Europe are made by Claus Offe and Bunce. For Central and East European democratizations, Offe suggests that the revolutions taking place in the former socialist countries are fundamentally different from those in Southern Europe or Latin America, in two respects. First, in Southern Europe and Latin America “the territorial integrity and organization of each country were largely preserved, and the process of democratization did not occasion any large-scale population migrations.”<sup>118</sup> The states retained their population, and the populations retained their states. On the other hand, Central and Eastern Europe were dominated by territorial disputes, migrations, ethnic disputes and secessionist longings.<sup>119</sup> Secondly, in Southern Europe and Latin America the transitions were modernization processes of a strictly political and constitutional nature, with the capital remaining in the hands of its owners; whereas in Central and Eastern Europe the task of reforming the economy, and transferring the state-owned assets, thus creating a new class of entrepreneurs and owners, was tough, as it was done politically, and the whole

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<sup>116</sup> Peter H. Smith, *Democracy in Latin America: Political Change in Comparative Perspective*, Oxford University Press, 2005. p. 313

<sup>117</sup> Cited by Power and Nancy Powers, *Issues in the Consolidation of Democracy in Latin America and Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective*, p. 26

<sup>118</sup> Claus Offe, *Varieties of Transitions: the East European and East German Experience*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1996, p. 32

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

economic order was reversed. Claus Offe argues that this was a “task [that] none of the previous transitions had to accomplish.”<sup>120</sup>

A deeper look at the democratization experience of the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics in the 1980s and 1990s respectively, makes it possible to suggest that there is a huge variety of post-communist regimes, indicating the absence of a single regional pattern (even more so than in either Latin America or Southern Europe). In this context, it is also necessary to talk about the distinctions between the democratization experiences of the Central and Eastern European countries on the one hand; and the post-Soviet countries on the other, both of which had to go through similar challenges. Bunce, for example, offers his conclusions about transitions from a dictatorship to a democracy in this context. First, transitions to democracy seem to vary considerably due to the uncertainty surrounding the process. However, this uncertainty was less for some countries in the region due to the fact that the military was eliminated from the transition; and that there was a powerful opposition that gained strength from the popular mobilization against the regime, as was seen in the Baltics, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Poland. Because uncertainty was lower the transition in all of these cases featured a sharp break from the past.<sup>121</sup> Secondly, Bunce argues that “while the most successful transitions in the South involved bridging, the most successful transitions in the East involved breakage.”<sup>122</sup> The third conclusion is that “mass mobilization can play a very positive role in transition, as it did, for example, in the Baltic, Polish, Czech and Slovenian cases. This is largely because mass mobilization can reduce uncertainty, thereby influencing the preferences of the communists, as well as the division of power between them and the opposition.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Valerie Bunce, “Rethinking Recent Democratization: Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience,” *World Politics*, 55(2), January 2003, p. 188

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. p.189

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

Jacques Rupnik calls the new Central Europe (the so-called Visegrad group<sup>124</sup>, the Baltic countries and Slovenia), “a clear success story;”<sup>125</sup> while Leszek Balcerowicz argues that, “the specific nature of the transition from communism in Central and Eastern Europe becomes clear when we compare it with other major shifts from one stable state of society to another potentially stable state.”<sup>126</sup> Balcerowicz distinguishes the post-communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe as a separate type that bears several distinguishing features. The first feature is about “the large scope,” which implies that both political and economic systems are affected and that changes in these systems in turn interact with changes in the social structure. In other types of transition there is either a focus on the political system while the economic system remains basically unchanged (as in classical and neo-classical transitions), or a focus on the economy while the political regime (usually non-democratic) is unaffected.<sup>127</sup> The second feature is that there are no simultaneous transitions. Although the changes in the political and economic systems start at about the same time, it would be misleading to speak of “simultaneous transitions” in post-communist Europe. It takes more time to privatize the bulk of the state-dominated economy than to organize free elections. “This asymmetry in speed produces a historically new sequence: mass democracy first and market capitalism later.”<sup>128</sup> The third feature is the lack of violence: “Eastern and Central Europe have undergone a peaceful revolution, with massive changes in political and economic institutions that have resulted from negotiations between the outgoing communist elite and the leaders of the opposition ... These negotiated changes were not based on any explicit

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<sup>124</sup> The Visegrad Group (also known as the “Visegrad Four” or simply “V4”) reflects the efforts of the countries of the Central European region to work together in a number of fields of common interest within the all-European integration. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have always been part of a single civilization, sharing cultural and intellectual values and common roots in diverse religious traditions, which they wish to preserve and further strengthen. (<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=858>)

<sup>125</sup> See Jaques Rupnik “The International Context” in Larry Diamond and Mac Plattner (eds.) *Democracy after Communism*. The John Hopkins University Press, 2002, pp.132-147

<sup>126</sup> Leszek Balcerowicz “Understanding Postcommunist Transitions” in Larry Diamond and Mac Plattner (eds.) *Democracy after Communism*, the John Hopkins University Press, 2002, p.63

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64

<sup>128</sup> See Claus Offe, “Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe”, *Social Research*, 58(4), Winter 1991, pp. 865-902 quoted in Leszek Balcerowicz. *Ibid.*

political pact and contained a large element of surprise for all the main actors.”<sup>129</sup> However this would not happen if the members of old elite had felt physically threatened, or if they had not believed that they would be free to seek favorable positions in the new system; and thus it was a tacit political pact.<sup>130</sup>

However although these theories may be applicable to post-communist democratization process in some regions, they may not be very helpful in the analysis of the Kyrgyz case. It is possible to suggest that conceptualization of Latin American, Southern European and even partly Eastern European cases is not suitable for Kyrgyzstan, as the country is very different in terms of its social structure, and past experiences.

### **1.1.7 Post-Soviet States**

The Soviet successor states seem to bear significant differences to the previously discussed regions in terms of democratization, as they represent extreme cases of the most favorable conditions for the survival of authoritarian regimes – particularly when compared to the other countries of the world.<sup>131</sup> The emergence and survival of democracy under such inhospitable circumstances as the post-communist societies and economies of the former Soviet Union is one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s most remarkable developments; however it also poses something of a puzzle in social sciences, as prevailing theories of democratization seem to be unable to explain this pattern.<sup>132</sup>

It is necessary to point out that these cases of post-Soviet transitions to democracy cannot be explained by the democratization theories developed for South European,

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<sup>129</sup> Leszek Balcerowicz “Understanding Postcommunist Transitions” Ibid., p.65

<sup>130</sup> These features can be found in an analysis of the democratization of Kyrgyzstan. However, in Kyrgyzstan the old elite, while seeking favorable position, blocked democratization. Top politicians and bureaucrats acted with Soviet-minded logic which impeded democratization.

<sup>131</sup> Philip G. Roeder “The Rejection of Authoritarianism” in Richard D. Anderson et al. p. 12

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.49. Bunce calls post-Soviet states “hybrid regimes,” as they combine authoritarian elements with democratic elements, and the uncertain results of democracy with the uncertain procedures of authoritarianism. They have deregulated politics but have not regularized the rules of the game. In general, scholars agree on the high level of success of the European countries (as compared to the post-Soviet republics) in their democratization experiences.

Latin American and Central and Eastern European cases. As such, scholars dealing with the ex-Soviet countries have felt the need to specifically focus on the post-Soviet democratization process.

The post-Soviet transitions differed from those in South Europe or Latin America in that there was no sequence of stages (opening, breakthrough, consolidation), but rather a complicated, confused process with no clear direction. Reforms aimed at democracy ebbed and flowed, but with a drift towards the ultimate consolidation of authoritarian rule.<sup>133</sup>

What was seen in the post-Soviet cases, especially in Central Eurasia, were the personalized rules of authoritarian presidents empowered with several informal practices to prolong their tenures. Even those “great democratic heroes” like Kyrgyzstan’s Askar Akayev and Russia’s Boris Yeltsin turned out to be authoritarian rulers. It is striking that in the ex-Soviet transitions, not a single ruler chose to hand over his power to anyone likely to rule in a more democratic manner.<sup>134</sup>

As post-Soviet states had to go through difficult period of transition not only in political sense but also in terms of change from centralized economy to market economy, this theme of multiple transition is underlined in the literature. Democratization in the post-Soviet context “involves three seemingly irreconcilable tasks: breaking with the authoritarian past, building democratic institutions, and yet at the same time finding ways to attach the political losers in the transition to the new order.”<sup>135</sup> Understanding democratization also requires adding the legacies of a socialist past, which is forced to face several transitions at the same time: from socialism to capitalism, from dictatorship to democracy, from one nation state to the

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<sup>133</sup> Charles H. Fairbanks, “Revolution Reconsidered,” *Journal of Democracy*, 18(1), January 2007, p. 51

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Valerie Bunce, “The Return of the Left and the Future of Democracy in Eastern and Central Europe,” in Birol Yesilada, (ed.) *Political Parties: Essays in Honor of Samuel Eldersveld*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999, pp. 151-176

“spatial consolidation of political authority.”<sup>136</sup> These three separate processes – democratization, transition to capitalism and state building are called “uncombinable.”<sup>137</sup>

The new regimes that appeared after the dissolution of the Soviet Union are discussed in literature as “hybrid regimes.” One such regime is competitive authoritarianism, a regime in which

formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. Incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent, however, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy.<sup>138</sup>

Competitive authoritarianism is different from both democracy and full-scale authoritarianism, as the democratic criteria are violated, but “elections are regularly held and are generally free of massive fraud, incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters, and in some cases manipulate electoral results.”<sup>139</sup> Incumbents do not openly violate democratic rules (for example, by banning or repressing the opposition and the media), as they are more likely to use bribery, co-optation, and more subtle forms of persecution, such as the use of tax authorities, compliant judiciaries, and other state agencies to “legally” harass, persecute, or extort cooperative behavior from critics.<sup>140</sup> There are four arenas of democratic contestation through which opposition forces may periodically challenge, weaken and occasionally even defeat autocratic incumbents. The first is the electoral arena, where elections are often bitterly fought. Elections are regularly held, are competitive and are generally free of massive fraud, generating uncertainty that compels the incumbent to take them

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<sup>136</sup> Valerie Bunce, “Comparative Democratization: Lessons from the Post-Socialist Experience” in *After Communism : Perspectives on Democracy*, Donald R. Kelley (ed.), Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003, p.33

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), April 2002, p.52

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.53

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

seriously.<sup>141</sup> The second is the legislative arena, where legislature is weak, but occasionally goes against the incumbent. “This is particularly likely in cases in which incumbents lack strong majority parties. In both Ukraine and Russia in the 1990s, for example, presidents were faced with recalcitrant parliaments dominated by former communist and other left-wing parties.”<sup>142</sup> The third is the judicial arena, where sometimes the combination of formal judicial independence and incomplete control by the executive can give individualist judges an opening. The fourth arena is the media, which is independent and not only legal, but often quite influential, and journalists – though frequently threatened and periodically attacked – often emerge as important figures of opposition.<sup>143</sup> Executives in competitive authoritarian regimes often actively seek to suppress the independent media, using such mechanisms of repression as bribery, the selective allocation of state advertising, the manipulation of debts and taxes owed by media outlets, the fomentation of conflicts among stockholders, and restrictive press laws that facilitate the prosecution of independent and opposition journalists.<sup>144</sup> Although the authors talk about the opportunities of competitive authoritarian regimes to democratize, they say that among the former Soviet republics only Moldova, a competitive authoritarian regime, democratized in the 1990s, with proximity to the West helping competitive authoritarian regimes in their efforts to democratize. In this respect, the authors offer two key structural explanations for the vulnerability of the post-communist authoritarian regimes: The first is the strength of a country’s ties to the West; and the second is the strength of the incumbent regime’s autocratic party or state.<sup>145</sup> Kyrgyzstan can be called as example of competitive authoritarianism, as elections are regularly held, though their results are not accurate and there are several falsifications.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.55

<sup>142</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” p.56

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p.57

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. , p.58

<sup>145</sup> See Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” p.58

The majority of post-communist states are dictatorships or unconsolidated transitional regimes to a certain extent;<sup>146</sup> while agreeing with other scholars that post-communist transitions did not follow the pacted path, and that unequal distributions of power produced the quickest and most stable transitions from communist rule.<sup>147</sup> Asymmetrical balances of power and the ideological orientation of the more powerful party largely determined the type of regime. For example, the first type of transition is when opponents of the previous communist regime are in the majority, and this has produced democracy. In other cases:

[When] dictators maintained a decisive power advantage, a dictatorship emerged. In between these two extremes lie countries in which the distribution of power between the old regime and its challengers was relatively equal. Rather than producing a stalemate, compromise and pacted transitions to democracy, such situations in the post-communist world resulted in protracted confrontation, yielding unconsolidated, unstable partial democracies and autocracies.<sup>148</sup>

Explaining post-communist transitions, McFaul argues that the causal pathways of the third wave do not produce the “right” outcomes in the fourth-wave transitions from communist rule. Imposed transitions from above in the former communist world produced not partial democracies, but dictatorships.<sup>149</sup> Another feature is that “the distribution of benefits has been highly skewed in favor of one side or the other. Even battles over political institutions resulted in skewed distributional benefits to the winners and did not produce compromise, or benefit-sharing arrangements.”<sup>150</sup> As such, not all transitions from communism resulted in democracy. A second mode of transition is when the distribution of power favors the rulers of the ancien régime, a configuration that results in autocracy.<sup>151</sup> The third mode of transition, when the

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<sup>146</sup> Michael McFaul, “The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World,” *World Politics*, 54(2), January 2002, p.212

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Michael McFaul, “The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World,” p.214

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p.221

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p.222

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p.223



distribution of power was more equally divided, produces a wide outcome of regimes. These produced pacted transitions (such as in Mongolia and Moldova), leading to partial democracy; or protracted violent confrontations, leading either to partial unstable democracy or partial dictatorship (such as Russia and Tajikistan).<sup>152</sup> McFaul underlines the importance of leaders' beliefs in democratic principles. If the leader believes in democratic principles, then they impose democratic institutions; while if they believe in autocratic principles, then they impose autocratic institutions.<sup>153</sup>

Post-communist regimes fall into three categories: dictatorships, democracies and partial democracies<sup>154</sup> in which three types of balance of power exist: balance of power for the ancien regime, a balance of power that is even or uncertain, and a balance of power for challengers.<sup>155</sup> McFaul treats the balance of power as an independent variable, and is convinced that "the balance of power and ideologies at the time of transition had path-dependent consequences for the subsequent regime emergence."<sup>156</sup> The types of transition he offers are: imposition from below, imposition from above and stalemate transitions. Impositions from below mostly took place in East-Central Europe; impositions from above occurred in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus; while stalemate transitions produced electoral democracies in Moldova and Mongolia, fragile and partial democracies in Russia and Ukraine, and civil war followed by autocracy in Tajikistan. Finally McFaul suggests that as post - communist transitions challenge

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p.223

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p.224

<sup>154</sup> Typology of democracies McFaul has adapted from Freedom House. Adrian Karanymy, ed., *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 2000–2001* (New York: Freedom House and Transaction Books, 2001).

<sup>155</sup> Balance of power typology is based on the legislative elections that determined the composition of a republic's legislature for an immediate transition period. If elections produced a clear communist victory for the old ruling communist party (victory is defined more than 60 percent of the vote) then the case is a balance of power in favor of the ancien regime. This is the same for the other cases. (Michael McFaul, *The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World*, pp.226-228)

<sup>156</sup> Michael McFaul, "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World," p.243

many principal assumptions of third-wave democratization, there is a need for a different theory and a separate label – “the fourth wave of regime change.”<sup>157</sup>

Relationship between democratization and liberalization in the post-communist world, including the post-Soviet states had been analyzed in the literature. It was suggested that economic liberalization advances rather than undermines democratization.<sup>158</sup> According to Fish and Choudhry, there are two approaches in the literature regarding the relationships between democratization and economic liberalization: the Washington Consensus and the Social-Democratic Consensus. According to the Washington Consensus, “economic liberalization pluralizes power, creating a financial basis for opposition and spurring the growth of a middle class ... [and] frees people from a psychology of dependence, making them more politically assertive.”<sup>159</sup> These are the intervening variables that link the liberalization of the economy to the democratization of the polity. The Social-Democratic Consensus is emphasized by Przeworski, who suggested that fast market-oriented reforms are worse than a more gradual economic liberalization for socio-economic welfare and inequality.<sup>160</sup> In their attempt to carry out reforms, politicians “undermine representative institutions,” and as a result, democracy is weakened and “technocracy hurls itself against democracy.”<sup>161</sup> Neo-liberal reforms are also worse for public welfare when compared with gradualism, and encounter resistance from the people. As a result of this resistance, policy makers looking to realize market reforms must undermine representative institutions.<sup>162</sup> Fish and Choudhry conclude that although economic liberalization has no discernible impact on democratization in the short term; in the long term economic liberalization contributes to democratization

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p.242

<sup>158</sup> Steven Fish and Omar Choudhry, “Democratization and Economic Liberalization in the Postcommunist World,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(3), March 2007, 254-282

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 272

<sup>160</sup> Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 183 cited in Steven Fish and Omar Choudhry, “Democratization and Economic Liberalization in the Postcommunist World”

<sup>161</sup> Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 186-187 cited in Steven Fish and Omar Choudhry, “Democratization and Economic Liberalization in the Postcommunist World”

<sup>162</sup> Steven Fish and Omar Choudhry, “Democratization and Economic Liberalization in the Postcommunist World” p. 259

substantially. It is sometimes claimed that economic liberalization does not advance, democratization, but that “the empirical evidence shows that economic liberalization, far from impeding popular rule, may be its ally.”<sup>163</sup>

Graham Smith, in his analysis of post-Soviet transitions, notes that they should not be regarded as preordained, as there is inevitability about the future form states will take. Also, a communist past cannot be ignored; and the break with the past may not be sudden because simply labeling states “in transition” obscures the exact nature of the phenomenon being studied.<sup>164</sup>

Neil Robinson, who also analyzed post-Soviet transitions, believes that democracy is present when political power is not possessed by any individual or group, and as such the denial of personalized power is a must for democracy.<sup>165</sup> He believes that post-Soviet countries failed to ensure that political and economic power was not personalized; and pointed out that practices such as corruption, clientelism and patronage in post-communist countries make formal systems of governance and redistribution meaningless. “[I]nformal politico-economic relations were inherited from the communist system; these were highly personalized and often more effective at delivering benefits to their participants than weak post-communist state administrations.”<sup>166</sup> Also, when the communist system collapsed, the former communist leaders did not want to surrender personal power or political capital, and there were few strong social and economic interests capable of preventing the capture of power in political struggles.<sup>167</sup> Poverty, corruption and authoritarianism were also significant factors in the context of post-Soviet countries. The post-Soviet leaders’ “success,” in so far as addressing the traumas of post-Soviet transition and ensuring short-term stability, was often dependent upon their well being and

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid. p. 278

<sup>164</sup> Graham Smith, *The Post-Soviet States: Mapping the Politics of Transition*, London: Arnold; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.3

<sup>165</sup> Neil Robinson, “The Political is Personal: Corruption, Clientelism, Patronage, Informal Practices and the Dynamics of Post-Communism”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 59(7), November 2007, p. 1217

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p.1218

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

individual strength, which is not an adequate basis to ensure long-term stability.<sup>168</sup> In fact, some of Central Asia's authoritarian regimes, seen as helpful for regional stability, may actually have concealed fundamental problems, allowing the seeds of future conflicts to grow.<sup>169</sup> He mentions the redistribution of wealth within societies as another potential source of conflict, as rapid changes and economic pressures have already led to a marked increase in personal corruption, and consequently a negative impact on regional stability. As such, corruption is one of the largest obstacles to long-term stability and a major factor in distorting a fair and equitable distribution of wealth.<sup>170</sup>

Another aspect highlighted in the literature is about the categorization of post-Soviet regimes as democracies, democratizers, backsliders and autocracies.<sup>171</sup> Institutional and the legal arrangements were stressed as important and necessary for the democratization of post-Soviet states.<sup>172</sup> These include factors such as the separation of power and constraints on executive power, specifically the president. Fish argues that a "syndrome of factors, the most important of which is a political system that concentrates power in the chief executive, is the best predictor of backsliding [toward authoritarianism]. Superpresidentialism<sup>173</sup>, or a constitution that invests formidable power in the presidency, turns out to be the greatest antagonist of the consolidation of democratic gains. The president's own preferences also matter, though the constraints the president faces are more important than the president's traits."<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Mustafa Aydin, *New Geopolitics of Central Asia and the Caucasus Causes of Instability and Predicament*, Center for Strategic Research, Ankara 2000, p. 15

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. pp.26-27

<sup>171</sup> See detailed information in Steven Fish, "The Dynamics of Democratic Erosion" in Richard D. Anderson et al, p.55-56

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> This form of regime has a large apparatus of presidential power that exceeds other agencies in size and in resources; the president legislates by decree; presidents de facto or de jure control the power of the purse; legislature that cannot repeal presidential decrees; provisions that make impeachment of president very difficult or virtually impossible; a judiciary that is controlled wholly by a president and cannot check presidential prerogatives or even abuse of power. (Steven Fish "The Dynamics of Democratic Erosion" in Richard D. Anderson et al p.69)

<sup>174</sup> Steven Fish, "The Dynamic of Democratic Erosion" in Richard D. Anderson, et al., *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy*, Chapter 3, p. 54

According to Fish it is also striking how chief executives in the post-communist region are inclined to authoritarian reversion, and how institutions that grant executive freedom of action undermine democratization. He suggests that the problem for democratization in post-communist countries is the concentration of power, specifically in the hands of the executive at the national level. “Unchecked or weakly controlled executives ... consistently undermine ... the key to democratic consolidation – namely, the perpetuation of formal institutional rules.”<sup>175</sup>

Hybrid regimes were further analyzed, with an emphasis on specific features and patterns of elite interaction in these regimes. Hale states that these institutions demonstrate “cycles of movement, both toward and away from ideal types of democracy or autocracy,”<sup>176</sup> and talks about patronal presidentialism with reference to the post-Soviet states. In patronal presidentialism:

Such institutions tend to generate cyclical phases of elite contestation and consolidation that are defined by elite expectations about the future, in particular, a “lame-duck syndrome” that precipitates elite defection from the incumbent president’s team when elites believe the incumbent may leave office.<sup>177</sup>

Patronal presidentialism first of all features a directly elected presidency which is invested with great formal powers relative to other state organs. Secondly the president wields a high degree of informal power based on widespread patron-client relationships. The term “patronal” thus refers to the exercise of political authority, primarily through the selective transfers of resources rather than formalized institutional practices, idea-based politics, or generalized exchange, as enforced through the established rule of law.<sup>178</sup> In such a system what is important is the relationship between the president and the key elites, due to their dependence upon each other, “The president depends on the elites for implementing decisions and

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p.83

<sup>176</sup> Henry Hale, “Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia,” *World Politics*, 58(1), October 2005, p. 134

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p.135

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p.138

delivering votes; while the elites depend on the president for resources and/or the continuation in their posts.”<sup>179</sup> Therefore, in order to challenge the president, the elites must be united and act collectively. “The patronal president, then, is in an excellent position to divide and rule the elites, and thereby dry up the political opportunities and resources available to his opponents.”<sup>180</sup>

Another important analysis is about the three patterns of patronal presidential behavior.<sup>181</sup> The first pattern is successful succession, in which incumbent presidents entered lame-duck periods, but where their teams successfully installed hand-picked successors. Examples of this can be seen in Russia and Azerbaijan. In the second pattern, unsuccessful successions, incumbent presidents experience the lame-duck syndrome, and their teams were ousted in the process. Examples of this can be found in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. The third pattern, no succession, includes those states (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) “that appear not to have demonstrated any competitive phase since the establishment of superpresidential institutions.”<sup>182</sup> Thus, Hale concludes that the patterns of regime change observed in post-Soviet Eurasia in the 1990s and 2000s oscillated between democracy and autocracy, while others appeared to be consistently authoritarian. The change taking place is not simply random “instability,” but is part of a reasonably predictable regime cycle produced by a particular institutional framework, that is patronal presidentialism. The countries in which the colored revolutions occurred entered elite contestation phases at a time when their incumbent presidents and any designated heirs were significantly unpopular, while the non-revolutionary countries did not. For example, Kyrgyzstan was already entering a phase of contestation with an unpopular incumbent successor.

Hale in fact believes that the reason why “revolutions” occurred in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, and not in Armenia, Russia or Uzbekistan between 2003 and 2005 is

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p.138,

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p.139

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p.138

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p.144

that the two groups of countries were in different phases of a cyclical process of elite contestation and consolidation, as defined by the expectations as to when the incumbent would leave office.<sup>183</sup> Because the author believes that political change is cyclic, he chooses to look at the levels of contestation and participation involved in political decision making, and so defines regime cycles as cyclic increases and decreases in a country's level of contestation and/or participation.<sup>184</sup>

In previous literature, another main reason behind the general failure of post-Soviet democratization has been due to the weakness of some states. Vladimir Gel'man suggests that the conventional models of transitions to democracy are incomplete and insufficient for an analysis of the regime changes in post-Soviet societies, due to one distinctive feature –“weak states.” There are two specific dimensions to this: the first dimension is related to constraints on the capacity of states due to competition between state and non-state actors (some of whom claim to operate on behalf of the state).<sup>185</sup> The second dimension is related to the inability of states to guarantee or enforce the rule of law.<sup>186</sup> According to Gel'man, the inability of a weak state to provide the rule of law is a point of departure for analysis of post-Soviet transitions. He defines rule of law as

a dominance of formal institutions, that is universal rules and norms which serve as significant constraints on major actors and their strategies within the given polity ... the non-existence of rule of law ... [is] the dominance of informal institutions such as those based on particularistic rules and norms such as clientelism and/or corruption.<sup>187</sup>

Leslie Holmes also talks about weakness of post-Soviet states. The state is weakened

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p.135

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p.136

<sup>185</sup> Vladimir Gel'man “Post-Soviet Transition and Democratization: Toward Theory Building”, *Democratization*, 10(2), Summer 2003, p. 91

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. pp. 91-92

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. p. 92

because of corruption, and because formal politics are less effective.<sup>188</sup> There is a danger that post-Soviet states will face difficulties in moving reform forward due to the functionality of corruption.<sup>189</sup> Holmes argues that the very nature of post-communism encourages the spread of corruption, or is highly conducive to it because of the communist legacy that is characterized by a “fuzziness of boundaries between state institutions, and between the state and society; an ideology in which ends are often more important than means; and a near-absence conceptually and in practice of the rule of law.”<sup>190</sup> The spread of corruption leads to yet another problem – a loss of legitimacy among the authorities. Mistrust is a thus major dimension of legitimacy.<sup>191</sup>

Another important factor in previous literature on post-Soviet democratization is the existence of informal institutions in these states. The distinction between types of predominant institutions (formal or informal) “marks a watershed between ‘transition to democracy’ (where the ‘rule of law’ is assumed almost by default) and ‘post-Soviet transitions’ to some different regimes.”<sup>192</sup> Gel’man also suggests that among the post-Soviet regimes there are some “competitive regimes, but with the dominance of informal institutions, such as in Russia and in Ukraine”; and non-competitive regimes with the dominance of informal institutions, such as in Belarus or in Kazakhstan.<sup>193</sup> Gel’man criticizes democratization theories for assuming the existence of rule of law either by default or by inheritance from the previous regime, or through external influence on the transition process. The Soviet legacy has been inherited by new states in the form of a dominance of informal institutions in politics. Thus, Gel’man concludes that formal institutions can become dominant

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<sup>188</sup> See Leslie Holmes, *Rotten States? Corruption, Post-Communism and Neoliberalism*, Duke University Press, London, 2006.

<sup>189</sup> Leslie Holmes, *Ibid.* p.280

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288

<sup>192</sup> Vladimir Gel’man *Ibid.* pp.92-93. According to author “dichotomy of dominance of formal and informal institutions is related to Max Weber’s ideal types of legitimacy. The dominance of formal institutions is associate with rational-legal legitimacy, while that of informal institutions is a feature of charismatic and/or traditional rule. (Vladimir Gel’man *Ibid.* p. 92)

<sup>193</sup> Vladimir Gel’man *Ibid.*, p. 93



in the post-Soviet era in three possible ways: the step-by-step acceptance of formal institutions as a by-product of the consolidation of political contestation (even in its current stage); return to a non-competitive political regime followed by the re-installation of new formal institutions through the forced centralization of monopolized violence as a way of reestablishing state capacity; and the undermining or the political regimes implanted by the new “imposition” by an escalation of political conflicts, especially in circumstances that involve political outsiders and mass participation.<sup>194</sup>

One of the main reasons why we see such a personalistic rule by authoritarian presidents is the lack of a strong opposition in these countries, mostly due to the repressive attitudes of the leaders. An important feature of post-Soviet transitions is that they are very different from those “pacted” transitions emphasized in the democratization literature related to South Europe and Latin America.<sup>195</sup> The breakdown of communist rule and the breakdown of the Soviet Union itself could be qualified as “impositions.” Also, the post-Soviet “pact” has different meanings in post-Soviet transitions, i.e. “cartels of incumbents against contenders, cartels that restrict competition, bar access and distribute the benefits of political power among the insiders.”<sup>196</sup> These pacts, rather than enforcing democratization, have blocked it.

According to Fish, the opposition to the chief executive plays an important role in democratic reversion. In all of the backsliders “political-societal opposition to presidents was mostly poorly organized and inarticulate.”<sup>197</sup> The weakness of the opposition is in their inability to communicate with the general public and mobilize people and resources. For example until 2005, in Kyrgyzstan Akaev’s opponents proved to be scarcely more imaginative or effective.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid. p.99

<sup>195</sup> Vladimir Gel'man Ibid. p. 93

<sup>196</sup> Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market, Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*, Ibid., p.90

<sup>197</sup> Steven Fish “The Dynamics of Democratic Erosion” in Richard D. Anderson et al., p.72

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p.73

Another aspect discussed in literature is about political technology in the post-Soviet states. Political technologists, hired by both the government and other politicians, produced creative methods to beat political enemies, invent pro-government parties and personalities, and even create, manipulate and control the so-called opposition.<sup>199</sup> Under political technology, the author implies there are “the means of policing external sovereignty (keeping foreigners out) and imposing internal sovereignty (maintaining the power of state elites).”<sup>200</sup> In other words, democracy is faked in the former Soviet republics. Although Wilson is also aware of presence of political technologies in the West, he suggests that the role of the state is considerably different in the West. For example in the United States, this industry is in private hands, however in post-Soviet republics such as Russia, it has become increasingly nationalized.<sup>201</sup> Wilson also discusses the world of virtual politics and suggests that a transition to democratic politics has never occurred in post-Soviet states because political technologists create an illusion of normal electoral politics in which the main contenders in elections are political actors and not political parties.<sup>202</sup>

It is further possible to argue in this context that in the case of post-Soviet countries, especially in Central Asia, there seems to be a general pattern of continuity with the Soviet past. Pauline Jones Luong who analyzes the institutional design in three former Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) argues that institutions designed under transitional circumstances “are products of the interaction between the preceding historical and institutional setting and the dynamic uncertainty that surrounds them.”<sup>203</sup> She particularly analyzes Central Asia’s electoral systems, as she believes that these are the first institutions that political actors in new states

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<sup>199</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: in the Post-Soviet World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

<sup>200</sup> Andrew Wilson, “After the Orange Revolution: the Nature of Post-Soviet Democracy in Ukraine and Russia” Fifth Annual Stasiuk-Cambridge Lecture, University of Cambridge, 23 February 2007 available at <http://ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2007/03/09/after-the-orange-revolution-an-article-by-andrew-wilson/> (Accessed on 16.02.2009)

<sup>201</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: in the Post-Soviet World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

<sup>202</sup> Michael McFaul. Reviewed work(s): *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* by Andrew Wilson, *Slavic Review*, 66(1), Spring, 2007, pp. 167-168

<sup>203</sup> Pauline Jones Luong, “After the Break-up: Institutional Design in Transitional States,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 33(5), June 2000, p. 563

seek to design in order to gain recognition and legitimacy.<sup>204</sup> According to Pauline Jones Luong, the electoral systems in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan bear elements of the Soviet system, though producing different outcomes. They differ in four ways: (a) structure of parliament, (b) nomination of candidates, (c) supervision of elections, and (d) determination of seats.<sup>205</sup> As a result, she suggests that the electoral system in Kazakhstan is dualistic, in Kyrgyzstan it is populist, and in Uzbekistan it is centralist. She concludes that institutions (such as electoral systems), are designed “under transitional circumstances [that] are products of both the individuals’ preceding historical and institutional setting (i.e. structural-historical context) and the dynamic uncertainty that surrounds them (i.e. transitional context).”<sup>206</sup> According to Loung:

This provides a sense of stability in the face of potentially destabilizing conditions ... thus we can expect ... continuity in the process by which institutions originate and change, even if it produces distinct outcomes ... The adoption of new institutions during a transition does not necessarily indicate either a fundamental break with the past or its continuation, but rather a change through continuity.<sup>207</sup>

Therefore, most scholars argue that in the Soviet successor states there are several conditions affecting the survival of authoritarian regimes. According to Philip Roeder, authoritarianism is “an institutional arrangement in which (1) minorities can remove the governors and the popular majority is powerless to prevent this, and (2) the popular majority is unable to remove the governors.”<sup>208</sup> However sometimes this may include some arrangements in which the ruler is accountable to someone other than the entire adult population.<sup>209</sup> Thus, Roeder distinguishes post-communist regimes in the nature of a selectorate, a group that can pose a credible threat of removing a ruler. As such, governors can be accountable either to a selectorate inside

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 564

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 566

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 589

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 589

<sup>208</sup> Philip G. Roeder in Richard D. Anderson et al, p.13

<sup>209</sup> See Philip G. Roeder, “Varieties of post-Soviet Authoritarian Regimes,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 10(1) January-March, 1994: 61-101

the state apparatus, or to a selectorate in society, which may constitute either a narrow or a broad segment of the state or society.<sup>210</sup> By these two dimensions, Roeder distinguishes four types of constitutions: autocracies, oligarchies, exclusive republics and democracies.<sup>211</sup>

In this general context Roeder also looks at how, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, in several successor states the authoritarian regimes of the Soviet period either survived virtually unchanged, or transformed themselves into new types of non-democracies. As such, the extent to which society is included into selectorate, i.e. the ability of popular majorities to change those in control of either the legislature or presidency becomes an important factor. For example, there can be a consistent exclusion of society from the selectorate (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), inconsistent inclusion of society in the selectorate (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan) or a broad inclusion of society in the selectorate (Lithuania, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine). Similarly, there emerge two dilemmas for constitutional designers – the dilemma of authority and the dilemma of accountability.<sup>212</sup> The dilemma of authority is related to how best to design decision-making organs of the regime and the constitution in terms of representation and whether they take into account all the selectorate interests, or only some. The dilemma of accountability implies that any constitution must have a method of removing current leaders and choosing their successors. Each authoritarian leader aims to create a selectorate of supporters and followers. “The choice of institutions to make such promises credible represents a dilemma because measures to prevent the expansion of the selectorate can create a power that is able to abridge the selectorate.”<sup>213</sup>

Within the general context of democratization literature, ex-Soviet Central Asian countries occupy a unique place of their own. Although these countries in general,

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<sup>210</sup> Philip G. Roeder in Richard D. Anderson et al., p.14

<sup>211</sup> For detailed information see Philip G. Roeder in Richard D. Anderson et al., p.16

<sup>212</sup> Philip G. Roeder, Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p.26

and Kyrgyzstan in particular, share some similarities in terms of their transitions from a communist to post-communist regimes, there are certain characteristics that make the Central Asian experience significantly different to that of other post-Soviet states. Some authors, such as Andrea Berg and Anna Kreikemeyer, believe that the current regimes in post-Soviet Central Asia should not be conceptualized by comparing them to consolidated liberal democracies, because such a conceptualization will conclude the failure of democratization in the region. According to Berg and Kreikemeyer, “Doubt should be cast on whether we are actually getting closer to understanding political change in Central Asia, or to creating solutions to political problems by talking about ‘failed democratization’ ... what we should investigate ... is not the ‘failure’ of democracy or democratization, but rather the ‘success’ of authoritarianism.”<sup>214</sup> However the abandonment of this ideological bias and the recognition of political realities in the region is often lacking.<sup>215</sup>

According to Oliver Roy, the unique characteristics of the political development in Central Asia mean that the transition models derived from East and Central European democratizations cannot be applied.<sup>216</sup> Therefore, instead of creating a Western-style civil society, it is better to foster an indigenous civil society. Roy further suggests that Central Asian states are Soviet creations, as the Soviet regime created national identities, myths and local solidarity groupings based on the reconstitution of traditional groupings.<sup>217</sup>

As for literature on democratization in Kyrgyzstan, the main topic of this dissertation, it is clear that most authors have touched upon the dynamics of democratization in the country by focusing on the more general problems of post-independence democratization, democratic consolidation, realities of transformation, and the successful and unsuccessful democratic experiences of the country.

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<sup>214</sup> Andrea Berg and Anna Kreikemeyer (eds.) *Realities of Transformation*, Nomos, Germany 2006, p.10

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Oliver Roy, *The New Central Asia: Creation of Nations*, London: IB Tauris, 2000.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

One basic theme of the experience of the democratic transition in Kyrgyzstan is related to the earlier expectations of potential success in the country; and some scholars have emphasized its uniqueness in the context of Central Asia. For example, John Anderson called Kyrgyzstan an “island of democracy” because Kyrgyzstan, in comparison with other neighboring Central Asian countries, looked capable of pursuing deeper liberal economic reforms and completing the political transition to democracy; and the country was promoted by the international community as a model for economic and political reform in Central Asia. In general, Anderson was hopeful that achievements in terms of social pluralism would “lay the basis for the creation of a more open polity, capable of meeting the political and economic aspirations of the mass of the population.”<sup>218</sup>

However, in time it became clear that the transition to democracy was not going to be a successful process in Kyrgyzstan either,<sup>219</sup> and literature offers different interpretations of the country’s failure in this respect. One explanation was the basic concern of President Askar Akaev on political stability. Talaibek Koichumanov, Joomart Otorbayev, and S. Frederick Starr refer to the conditions that are necessary for political stability and damage that can result from political instability. They argue that “political and economical instability creates social instability. Ordinary people hesitate to set long-term personal goals. Uncertainty about the future grows along with social pessimism.”<sup>220</sup> This was also the case where “[e]ach politician assumes his or her opponent’s every action is antagonistic, and will subsequently take steps that increase instability ... An atmosphere of collective mistrust complicates any government effort to administer policy that requires resources and support from an entire nation.”<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia’s Island of Democracy*, Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, 1999, p.62

<sup>219</sup> See for example, John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy of Central Asia*, Houndmills; New York: Palgrave, 1999, p.148; Philip G. Roeder p. 16, Steven Fish, *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> Talaibek Koichumanov et al. *Kyrgyzstan: The Path Forward*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program –A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, Washington D.C., 2005, p.14

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

The factors which threatened Kyrgyzstan's political stability were analyzed under three headings: international conditions, economic transformation and socio-cultural concerns.<sup>222</sup> Economic problems are considered to be threats to political stability as well as socio-cultural concerns, which include radical Islam, tribalism and minorities. The Akaev regime's stance was that political stability was important for holding the country together, and that democratization must be realized gradually. The importance of political stability was also stressed as a necessary condition for attracting foreign investment; and Western governments did not overemphasize human rights abuses and violations, and as such also prefer political stability to democratization.<sup>223</sup> In Kyrgyzstan during Akaev's era, the relationship between democratization and political stability was complex, multi-dimensional and fragile, and in many cases they turn out to be mutually exclusive.<sup>224</sup> According to Akçalı:

This basic priority given to political stability in Kyrgyzstan results in a paradoxical situation: democratic formations and movements are repressed for the sake of realizing the long-term goal of democratic consolidation. In other words, democratic demands and movements, which are perceived to be potential threats to political stability, are repressed during the transition period and such an attitude provides only a distorted picture of democratic demands, and may eventually backfire, bringing more instability to the region than ever before.<sup>225</sup>

Hooman Peimani holds a similar view, suggesting that the "government of Kyrgyzstan has resorted to a high-handed policy toward their population. With a limited degree of tolerance for political freedom and political activities they may resort to outright violence against political opposition if government stability is endangered."<sup>226</sup> "Instability may begin in the form of peaceful expression of economic or political demands taking the shape of activities such as demonstrations and strikes, only to escalate to widespread anti-government activities, including

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<sup>222</sup> See Pınar Akçalı "Democracy and Political Stability in Kyrgyzstan" in *Prospects For Democracy in Central Asia*, Birgit N. Schlyter (ed.), Sweden: Alfa print AB, 2005

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p. 55

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 41

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 56

<sup>226</sup> Hooman Peimani. *Failed Transition, Bleak Future? War and Instability in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Praeger, London, 2002, p. 89

violent ones.”<sup>227</sup> Peimani argues that “abuse of political activists, including their arrest and trial, under different pretexts, including the weakening of presidency, defamation of leaders, or assassination attempts”<sup>228</sup> have become common practice in Kyrgyzstan. For example, in 2000, Topchubek Turgunaliyev, the leader of the Kyrgyz opposition *Erkindik* Party, was imprisoned on reportedly false charges of masterminding an assassination plot against President Askar Akaev.<sup>229</sup>

Another reason of the failed democratization in Kyrgyzstan was the personalized and monopolized rule of President Akaev, which weakened his legitimacy. Peimani argues that there were certain factors that damaged Akaev government’s legitimacy, the most important being on the one hand, the gradual monopolization of political and economic power within the hands of the president and his closed circle of allies and, on the other, the expanding corruption within the ruling elite, the government and the civil service. The growing authoritarianism in what was once one of the most democratic Central Asian countries and the increasing restrictions on the activities of political parties and individual freedoms and rights paved the way for a future eruption of popular dissatisfaction.<sup>230</sup>

Another major aspect in Kyrgyzstan’s failure at democratization was related to the legal/constitutional framework, which created a specific type of executive branch that was dominant over others. Elvira Mamytova evaluates further the unsuccessful democratic experiences in Kyrgyzstan, stating that the general framework of power distribution among the three branches of power showed the inadequacy of the constitutional status of the president as head of state and the guarantor of the Constitution, as well as his factual powers as the head of the Executive Branch, i.e. the head of government. Indeed this contradicts the legitimacy of the national government, because the general public is unaware of who actually bears political responsibility for political decisions. The powers of the Parliament were considerably

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid. pp. 88-89

<sup>228</sup> Hooman Peimani. Ibid. p.63

<sup>229</sup> “Newslines,”RFE/RL, 4 September 2000.

<sup>230</sup> Hooman Peimani. Ibid., p. 49



curtailed through referendums in 1996, 1998, and it became the exclusive power of the *Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie* (Lower Branch of Kyrgyz Parliament) to control the executive, thus further reducing the legislative ability to keep the executive in check.<sup>231</sup>

In this general context, Fish argues that Kyrgyzstan, although initially experiencing substantial openings, subsequently reverted to despotism. Fish puts Kyrgyzstan in the category of “backsliders,” mostly because of the concentration of power ended up in the hands of president. According to Fish, during the 1990s what emerged in Kyrgyzstan was “superpresidentialism,” which is characterized by “a very large apparatus of presidential power that greatly exceeds other state agencies in size and in the resources it consumes; a president who enjoys power to legislate by decree; a president who de jure or de facto controls most of the powers of the purse; a relatively emasculated legislature that cannot readily repeal presidential decrees and that has little authority and/or meager resources for overseeing the executive branch; provisions that make impeachment of the president extremely difficult or even virtually impossible; and a judiciary that is controlled wholly or largely by the president and that cannot in practice check presidential prerogatives or even abuse of power.”<sup>232</sup>

Fish establishes a link between the strength of the legislature and its consequences for the advance of democracy. He concludes that the presence of a powerful legislature is an “unmixed blessing for democratization.”<sup>233</sup> In an effort to measure the powers of legislature, he uses the Parliamentary Powers Index (PPI) which is based on 32 items that cover the parliament’s ability to monitor the president and bureaucracy, parliament’s freedom from presidential control, parliament’s authority in specific areas, and the resources that it brings to its work.<sup>234</sup> Fish argues that in places such as Kyrgyzstan, where “authoritarian regimes have broken down and new

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<sup>231</sup> Elvira Mamytova, *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> Steven Fish “The Dynamics of Democratic Erosion” *Ibid.*, p.69

<sup>233</sup> Steven Fish, “Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies,” *Journal of Democracy*, 17(1), January 2006, p. 5

<sup>234</sup> See Steven Fish, “Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies,” *Ibid.*, p.8

regimes are taking their place, the temptation to concentrate power in the executive is great. People often confuse concentrated power with effective power, and the president is usually the beneficiary.”<sup>235</sup> Fish also explains how a weak legislature inhibits democratization. First, it undermines horizontal accountability, because if the legislature is weak, presidential abuses of power ensue, even under presidents who take office with reputations as democrats.<sup>236</sup> Weak legislatures also inhibit democratization by undermining the development of political parties.

O’Donnell talks about the importance of weak institutionalization that may lead to a breakdown and political instability. He says that delegative democracy (as seen in Latin America and many post-communist countries) rather than being a liberal and representative form of democracy, it strongly majoritarian. This is also the case in Kyrgyzstan, where there is a “myth of legitimate delegation,”<sup>237</sup> as there are elections in which the majority groups win. In fact, however, in delegative democracies there is weak or even no accountability. For Kyrgyzstan, as the president is above all other branches, there is weak institutionalization, and so the principle of checks and balances does not work. O’Donnell establishes a link between institutional weakness and a delegative democracy in a way that “delegative democracies are not consolidated (i.e., institutionalized).”<sup>238</sup> O’Donnell specifically talks about democratic institutions, which are “political institutions ... [which] have a recognizable, direct relationship with the main themes of politics: the making of decisions that are mandatory within a given territory, the channels of access to decision-making roles, and the shaping of the interest and identities that claim such access.”<sup>239</sup> As such, “democratic institutions achieve not only a reasonable scope and strength, but also a high density of multiple and stabilized interrelationships ... [t]his makes these institutions an important point of decision in the overall political

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p. 12

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 13

<sup>237</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell, “Delegative Democracy”, *Journal of Democracy*, 5 (1) January 1994, pp.59-60

<sup>238</sup> Ibid. p. 56

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. p. 57

process, and a consolidated, institutionalized democracy thus emerges.”<sup>240</sup> “A non-institutionalized democracy is characterized by the restricted scope, the weakness and the low density of whatever political institutions exist. The place of well-functioning institutions is taken by other non-formalized but strongly operative practices – clientalism, patrimonialism, and corruption.”<sup>241</sup> In this way, weak institutionalization contributes to the emergence of a delegative democracy.

A more recent area of study on the Kyrgyz experience has focused on the so-called “Tulip Revolution” of 2005 that ended Akaev’s presidency. Attempts have been made by scholars to explain the reasons behind this event, with one viewpoint being related to the idea of diffusion influenced by prior or precedent cases in other post-socialist countries. Bunce and Wolchik suggest that the diffusion of the electoral model is most likely to be a decisive factor in the start of a revolution. Electoral revolutions bear the following characteristics: 1) the conscious deployment of an electoral model of democratization; 2) an upsurge in mass participation, not just in elections, but also in the streets, before and sometimes after elections; 3) a major turnover in governments, sometimes to the point of regime change; and 4) significant improvements in democratic performance after the election.<sup>242</sup> The effects of diffusion were seen in earlier examples, which showed that the electoral model could work; also the successful actors in the earlier such events provided direct assistance to the activists in other post-communist countries. According to Bunce and Wolchik, three things were crucial in the regional support for diffusion dynamics: (1) a pattern of declining violence on the part of elites facing popular protests; (2) growth during the communist period of both the cross-national diffusion of ideas and techniques, and the establishment of cross-national contacts among dissident groups; (3) the realization by challengers to the existing order that they could learn a great deal from

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid. p. 59

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, “Favorable Conditions and Electoral Revolutions,” *Journal of Democracy*, 17(4) October 2006, p. 5. For more information see Bermet Tursunkulova, “The power of Precedent?” *Central Asian Survey*, 27(3-4), (September-December 2008):349-362; Azamat Temirkulov, “Informal Actors and Institutions in Mobilization: the Periphery in the Tulip Revolution”, *Central Asian Survey*, 27(3-4), (September-December 2008):317-335.

events in other countries ruled by communist regimes.<sup>243</sup> A similar idea is put forward by Way:

[I]t is entirely possible that the postcommunist opposition movements chose to use elections and protests – as opposed to armed rebellion – to overthrow dictators less because they had recently witnessed the use of such tactics in nearby countries, and more because elections and protests have arguably been the easiest, most effective, and most internationally acceptable mechanisms for bringing down incumbents. Indeed, in many of these cases, the opposition’s only realistic alternative to the use of elections and protest would have been the admission of defeat.<sup>244</sup>

Mark R. Bessinger also talked about diffusion in explaining the Tulip Revolution. He claimed that what happened in Kyrgyzstan can be explained by the spread of similar collective actions in the post-communist region.<sup>245</sup> According to Bessinger, in this region it is possible to see an enormous exchange of ideas, as well as similar conditions, such as long-term presidencies and fraudulent elections.

Another point of discussion about the Tulip Revolution is related to its real nature, in other words whether it was a real revolution or not. Martin Henningsson, in his article “The ‘Tulip Revolution’ in Kyrgyzstan – Revolution or Coup d’état?” questions whether the so-called Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan should be understood as a revolution or whether it was in fact a coup d’état? He concludes that “[d]espite the fact that the so called ‘Tulip Revolution,’ in a relatively rapid and violent way, led to a change of the political leadership and to a large increase in political participation by a large percentage of the population, it would still be inappropriate to classify this event as a revolution. The reason for this statement is that no fundamental changes in the dominant values, political institutions, social

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<sup>243</sup> Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, *Ibid.* pp.10-11

<sup>244</sup> Lucan Way, “The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions,” *Journal of Democracy*, 19(3), July 2008, p.57

<sup>245</sup> Mark R. Beissinger “ Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions,” Princeton University *Perspectives on Politics* (2007), 5(2), p. 259

structures or government policies can be seen so far.”<sup>246</sup> The author argues that the events of 24 March 2005 could more correctly be classified as a coup d’etat.

Other scholars agree, saying that the Tulip Revolution was not a real revolution as it did not change much in Kyrgyzstan, but was rather just a change in leadership under elite competition. Hale believes that the popular uprising observed in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 represents a popular intervention that was made possible by the elite competition that emerged in response to anticipated changes in who would occupy the presidency – an anticipation that was frequently related to formal presidential term limits.<sup>247</sup> Askar Akaev, an unpopular authoritarian president, after declaring he would not attempt to amend the Constitution so as to make it possible for him to seek a third term in the anticipated October 2005 presidential contest; attempted to engineer a large victory for himself in the February 2005 parliamentary elections. “In the throes of this lame-duck syndrome, Akaev was unable to stem the mass elite defection that began in the part of Kyrgyzstan where his own ties were weakest (the South) after international and other observers branded the parliamentary vote unfair.”<sup>248</sup> Thus Hale sees the Tulip Revolution not as a “democratic breakthrough” but rather as a contestation phase in a regime cycle where the opposition wins.<sup>249</sup>

Charles Fairbanks also questions whether the colored revolutions resulted in enduring regime changes, concluding that “new leaders are officials who split from the former governments”...they including Akaev in Kyrgyzstan, “all appeared at one time to have accomplished a shift to democratic rule, only to yield to authoritarian temptations.”<sup>250</sup> The author also voices his skepticism of the emergence of a consolidated democracy in Kyrgyzstan, as the Tulip Revolution only replaced one former communist apparatchik with a less sophisticated one, and the northern

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<sup>246</sup> Martin Henningsson, Stockholm University, Department of Political Science, Individual Research Work, Kyrgyzstan, 2006 available at <http://www.forumsyd.org/upload/tmp/uppsats/TheTulipRevolution.pdf> (Accessed on 12.01.2009)

<sup>247</sup> Henry Hale, “Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia,” *World Politics*, 58(1), October 2005, p.157

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p.157

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161

<sup>250</sup> Charles Fairbanks, “Revolution Reconsidered,” p.55

elite with the more parochial southern elite. Most importantly, even after the colored revolutions such important features of democracy as the genuine rule of law have been almost completely disregarded.<sup>251</sup>

Other scholars correlate the electoral processes and how they are perceived by Central Asian people on the one hand, and the colored revolution on the other. For example, Bunce and Wolchik refer to the colored revolutions as electoral revolutions. “Electoral outcomes determine political outcomes in the post-communist area far more than in many other regions.”<sup>252</sup> There is also a link between the election process and legitimacy, post-Soviet countries having a long experience with elections in general and fraudulent elections in particular. The election process as a whole taught people to link regime legitimacy with the act of voting, and encouraged them to use elections not just to assess the quality of regime performance with respect to service delivery, but also to make demands for specific changes in public policy.<sup>253</sup>

Martha Brill Olcott’s “Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution” also discusses flawed parliamentary elections, arguing that “the Tulip Revolution could prove to be the most remarkable of all, causing positive reverberations throughout a region that many had written off as lost from the point of view of building democratic societies. If the revolution is unsuccessful, it will not be because the masses in Central Asia failed to make the grade, but because the ruling elite in Kyrgyzstan managed to sabotage the process of political change.”<sup>254</sup>

One final point regarding the Tulip Revolution is related to its possible outcomes. In this context, Mark N. Katz’s analysis, which offers three possible scenarios for the future of the region, is worth mentioning. According to Katz it is continued authoritarian rule, democratic revolution or Islamic revolution that will shape the

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, “Favorable Conditions and Electoral Revolutions,” *Journal of Democracy*, 17(4), October 2006, p.8

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., pp.8-9

<sup>254</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, “Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip revolution”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 28 March, 2005 available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=16710> (Accessed on 20.04.2009)

future of the region; suggesting that if the Kyrgyz public eventually judges the Tulip Revolution as a failure, either authoritarian rule or Islamic revolution may follow.<sup>255</sup>

## **1.2 Research Questions and Theoretical Framework**

This dissertation aims to contribute to existing literature in two ways. First, it will compare the Akaev and Bakiev eras and analyze how these two leaders attempted to build a legitimate political regime in Kyrgyzstan, basically through elections (both presidential and parliamentary) and referendums. In other words, they legitimized their undemocratic rule through holding regular elections. Both of these leaders held regular elections and consulted the people through referendums on various occasions before deciding about issues such as constitutional amendments, presidential and/or parliamentary powers and elections.

In general, however, it seems as if their attempts failed, as the Tulip Revolution and April 2010 coup clearly indicated. In particular, Akaev used elections and referendums as a means of increasing presidential powers and consolidating authoritarianism in the country. In other words, certain excuses, such as possibility of political instability, were used (or abused) as reasons not to democratize the system. As such, although elections and referendums may be the *sine quo non* conditions of establishing a legitimate political regime, in the case of Kyrgyzstan they failed to do so. In the specific case of Kyrgyzstan, elites failed in their attempts to realize a successful transition to democracy and provide a legitimate regime basically via elections and referendums. What took place instead was democratic reversion and backsliding, characterized by competitive authoritarianism, superpresidentialism, elite contestation and consolidation and weakness of formal institutions.

This dissertation also aims to look into the attitudes and thoughts of the ordinary Kyrgyz people about both the process of democratization in their country, and the leaders' attempts to look legitimate. No political system can be evaluated correctly without knowing what the people living under that system really believe in or think.

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<sup>255</sup> Mark N. Katz's "Revolutionary Change in Central Asia", *World Affairs*, 168(4), Spring 2006, pp. 157- 171

So it is important to look at people's attitudes because "something becomes legitimate when one approves of it." Therefore why people seem to approve a regime that is undemocratic will be studied. As such, to analyze the perceptions, evaluations and beliefs of the Kyrgyz people about their system and leaders becomes critical. Kyrgyzstan is the only Central Asian country in which people could realize a leadership change and ousted two presidents from power in the post-Soviet era.

As was mentioned earlier, in this general framework, this dissertation will attempt to answer the following research questions: How did Akaev and Bakiev use some of the most basic formal/legal aspects of democracy (elections and referendums) to legitimize their rule? Why were these aspects, although necessary, not sufficient in establishing a legitimate regime in Kyrgyzstan? How do the Kyrgyz people view issues of democracy and legitimacy? What are their perceptions about Akaev and Bakiev?

In order to answer these questions, some of the approaches in the literature described above will be used. First and foremost, the transition literature will help us to analyze the democratization process in Kyrgyzstan that began with the collapse of the communist system. However, although the authoritarian rule of the communist era had ended, the transition process is still uncompleted. In order to understand the situation of "being stuck" along the way and ways of securing free, fair and transparent elections in Kyrgyzstan other equally relevant approaches to the Kyrgyz case need to be used as well. Among them, those that are related to the role of elites in the process of transition to democracy (the elite-led democratization approaches) especially seem to be useful. In this context, it is possible to suggest that Kyrgyz leaders portrayed themselves as the main actors in post-Soviet democratization process. Role of elites was important in Kyrgyz transition because both leaders Akaev and Bakiev were the main figures who shaped democratization process. Particularly in Kyrgyzstan these two leaders shaped the process of transition to democracy by using or referring to political legitimacy in order to make their regimes acceptable for the people. In rhetoric they claim that they support democratization



and they use certain methods (such as regular parliamentary and presidential elections as well as referendums) to legitimize their rule.

For the purposes of the dissertation, data on elections and referendums will be collected from various legitimate books and journals, as well as from the reports of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (National Human Development Reports) and the Central Election Commission of Kyrgyzstan. Additionally, legal documents such as the Kyrgyz Constitution and the Election Code of the Kyrgyz Republic will be used. Data on the Tulip Revolution is available in the official reports of the OSCE, the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO), the Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights (NORDEM), the International Crisis Group and the Election Commission of Kyrgyzstan. Official statements, speeches, interviews as well as presidential decrees and ordinances will also be studied.

To analyze the evaluations of the Kyrgyz people, in-depth interviews using open-ended questions have been conducted in seven selected villages in the seven provinces of the country and two cities (Bishkek and Osh).<sup>256</sup> The target group included randomly selected adults (an equal number of men and women) from various educational, professional and age groups. The target group includes ordinary people from Bishkek and Osh as well as from rural area of seven *oblasts*. The reason why people from rural area are included is related to the demographic conditions of Kyrgyzstan – approximately 65% of the Kyrgyz people reside in villages, with the remaining 35% living in towns and cities.<sup>257</sup> Furthermore, people from provinces can represent a particular *oblast* better, as towns may be home to people from several *oblasts*, and so learning what the people of a *particular* *oblast* think may be impossible. The interviews will be qualitatively analyzed.

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<sup>256</sup> Kyrgyzstan is divided into seven provinces (singular *oblast* (область), plural *oblasttar* (областтар))

<sup>257</sup> Kirigistan v Tsifrah 2007 [*Kyrgyzstan in Numbers 2007*] (book in Russian), Kyrgyz Statistical Committee, Bishkek 2007, p. 39

The dissertation has five chapters. After the Introduction, in Chapter I, first, general literature on democratization and transition is described and discussed, then democratization approaches in post-Soviet states and particularly in Kyrgyzstan are focused on. Research questions and theoretical framework are also presented. In Chapter II the Akaev era is investigated by looking at the presidential and parliamentary elections and referendums. Here the emphasis is on how Akaev used these methods to legitimize his rule while at the same time increasing his powers. In Chapter III Bakiev's era is analyzed with the same criteria of Chapter II. Chapter IV is devoted to the interviews conducted in Kyrgyzstan and their qualitative analysis. The Conclusion, which is Chapter V, contains a summary of the dissertation, and includes a discussion of the results within the perspective of the theoretical framework outlined above.

## CHAPTER II

### ASKAR AKAEV'S ERA: 1991-2005

In this chapter the presidency of Askar Akaev (1991-2005) will be analyzed by looking into the referendums<sup>258</sup>, parliamentary elections and presidential elections held during this period. As was mentioned in the Introduction, referendums and elections are among the necessary (albeit not sufficient) conditions of a formal or minimalist democracy on the one hand and first steps of democratic transition that would initiate a process of development of democracy ending in consolidation. However, as will be elaborated in this chapter, in the case of Kyrgyzstan neither referendums, nor parliamentary and presidential elections did serve as real mechanism of democratic development. Instead of being the first steps of democratic transition resulting in consolidation of democracy, they mostly served as tools of increasing presidential powers, curtailing the scope of parliamentary action and contributing to a shift toward authoritarian rule. In that sense this chapter will basically give a descriptive account of referendums and elections by briefly commenting on their general common characteristics and by placing them within the general theoretical framework of the dissertation. First, a brief description of developments that led to the adoption of the 1993 Constitution as well as the basic characteristics of this constitution will be described. Second, several referendums that introduced a variety of changes to this constitution will be described. In the final part of the chapter, parliamentary and presidential elections held in this era will be analyzed.

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<sup>258</sup> A referendum is a direct vote in which the electorate can pronounce to either accept or reject a particular proposal. This may result in the adoption of a new constitution, a constitutional amendment, a law, the recall of an elected official or simply a specific government policy. The referendum is a device of direct democracy ideally favoring the majority (Vernon Bogdanor, (ed.) *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Institutions*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). According to Article 1 of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, the people of Kyrgyzstan are the holders of sovereignty and are the single source of state power in the Kyrgyz Republic. This implies that constitutional warrants of state power (legislative, executive and judicial) come from the people of Kyrgyzstan, through expression of their free will. The direct method of expressing their free will is through a method called referendum. (Article 1, the Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, 2009)

John Anderson referred to constitutions as “power maps” and “official blueprints” which set out the framework within which public power is exercised. Indeed, “constitutions define the territorial distribution of power within a state, set out a more or less detailed framework of governmental institutions and define the relationships between these institutions and the citizenry.”<sup>259</sup>

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, as will be briefly analyzed below, in its original version, the 1993 Constitution introduced a system of separation of powers and checks and balances among the legislative, executive and judiciary organs that would have served as the major legal framework of a democratic order. However, between 1991 and 2005 there were several different attempts on the part of Akaev to change the constitution, most of which were realized by referendums, that were justified as moves toward a more democratic and legitimate political rule. However neither these referendums nor presidential elections would result in a democratic legitimate rule. In order to track the shift toward authoritarian rule in Kyrgyzstan, first it is necessary to analyze the 1993 Constitution and the amendments introduced to it via various referendums.

One of the basic developments that led to adoption of the 1993 Constitution took place in 1990, when a new decisive movement that saw the sovereignty of the republic as the main condition of the very existence of its Kyrgyz statehood emerged. As such, the only possessor of sovereignty of the republic was believed to be the people.<sup>260</sup> On 27 October 1990 the *Verhovnii Soviet* (Supreme Council, highest legislative body of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic) took the decision to form a commission responsible for development of the draft of a new constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic. This is also the same day in which the first president of the republic, Askar Akaev was elected by the members of parliament.<sup>261</sup> Indeed that time

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<sup>259</sup> John, Anderson, “Constitutional Development in Central Asia” *Central Asian Survey*, 16(3), (1997) p. 301

<sup>260</sup> *Etapi razvitiya Konstitucii KR. Oficialnii sait Prezidenta Kirgizski Respubliki* (The stages of Development of Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic) Official web-site of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic) available at <http://www.president.kg/ru/constitution/etaps/1993/> (Accessed on 13 November 2008)

<sup>261</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev, *Kirgizsyian do i posle Tulpanovoi Revolucii* [Kyrgyzstan before and after Tulip Revolution] Stratagem available at <http://www.igpi.ru/info/people/kynev/1128082583.html> (Accessed on 02.09.2009)

*Verhovnii Soviet* possessed real power to affect internal and external policies of the country as well as to control the government. As for Akaev political views, when he first came to power Akaev seemed to be very much committed to economic reforms and democratization. His major goals were “the development of private interest, private life and private property based upon a strong civil society, guarantees of civil and political rights, ethnic harmony, and social protection for those likely to find transition period difficult.”<sup>262</sup> He supported a multi-party system and kept the channels of communication open with the newly emerging social groups by meeting with their representatives.<sup>263</sup>

One major development that took place during the first months of Akaev’s presidency was the adoption of “The Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan” on 15 December 1990 at the third session of *Verhovnii Soviet*. It was stressed in the document that “state sovereignty” means the legitimacy of state power over the territory of the republic as well as independence in external relationships. It was underlined in the declaration that the republic can form its tax system, price system, financial and banking system, form the state budget and if necessary introduce its own currency. The main feature of the declaration was that it laid the principles of rule of law, separation of powers and plurality. Hence, the official aim of the state was no longer to build communism.<sup>264</sup> Different from the working constitution of 1978, the declaration also focused on the right of ratification of the laws of the Soviet Union by the Kyrgyz Parliament. This would have been one of the major milestones toward national law-making on the part of *Verhovnii Soviet*, one of the major requirements of an independent nation-state.

Soon after this development, on 31 August 1991, the Declaration of Independence of Kyrgyzstan was adopted, which started a new period for the Kyrgyz people. On 12 October 1991 Akaev has acknowledged his powers at general elections (in fact a

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<sup>262</sup> *Slovo Kirgizstana* [Kyrgyzstan’s Word], (local newspaper in Russian), 12 December 1991, cited in John Anderson *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia’s Island of Democracy*, p.24

<sup>263</sup> However, as will be explained in detail in this chapter, Askar Akaev would be transformed from “a democratic reformer to a weak authoritarian” during the processes of referendums and elections held in his era.

<sup>264</sup> *Etapi Razvitiya Konstitucii KR. Oficialnii sait Prezidenta Kirgizski Respubliki* (The Stages of Development of Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic) Ibid.

referendum – because his candidature was presented by *Verhovnii Soviet*). He has secured 95.3 percent of votes.<sup>265</sup> Akaev would evaluate the importance of this development in one of his speeches in 1994 that indicated his supportive attitude towards establishing a democratic nation-state in the country:

State independence – is an opportunity to preserve yourself as a nation for centuries, to preserve your unique attributes and qualities, thus increasing your contribution to the world's culture. National statehood is a significant historical responsibility of Kyrgyz people not only for their own benefit but also for the benefit of the representatives of all the ethnic minorities who along with Kyrgyz people constitute the people of Kyrgyzstan... State independence of Kyrgyzstan must provide same opportunities to all ethnic groups as it does to Kyrgyz people. These include: freedom of deciding their own destiny, opportunities to develop their own culture and to enjoy Kyrgyz national culture and language, openness to the world's civilizations.<sup>266</sup>

Any constitution can be seen as a concrete historical result of certain socio-political developments in a country. There are several such developments that led to the adoption of a new constitution in the Kyrgyz Republic as well. First, on 31 August 1991 Kyrgyzstan declared independence and on 8 December same year the Soviet Union disintegrated. It was necessary to legally establish a new status and a new basis of legitimacy for the post-Soviet Kyrgyz state.

In May 1991, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Justice, headed by Usup Mukambaev took the initiative of drafting the new constitution. By the presidium of *Verhovnii Soviet's* decree issued on 15 May 1991, the working group responsible for drafting of the constitution was established. Its members consisted of jurist-scientists from the Academy of Science, from the Department of Law of the Kyrgyz State University and leading experts of the Ministry of Justice and other ministries.<sup>267</sup> On 1 November 1991 the final version of the draft was submitted by the group to *Verhovnii Soviet*.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Central Election Commission release in *Slovo Kirgizistana*, 16 October 1991

<sup>266</sup> Cited in *Etapi razvitiya Konstitucii KR. Oficialnii sait Prezidenta Kirgizski Respubliki* (The Stages of Development of Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic) Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> *Etapi razvitiya Konstitucii KR. Oficialnii sait Prezidenta Kirgizski Respubliki* (The Stages of Development of Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic) Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

After several months of discussion on 6 March 1992 it was decided by the *Verhovnii Soviet* deputies that the draft constitution had to be opened up for public discussion. Finally, as a result of discussions, debates and revisions, on 5 May 1993 the document was eventually approved. It took two years to develop the document. Thus the first stage of constitutional development was now completed. However, the document would be subjected to various amendments through referendums held in 1994, 1996, 1998, 2003 and 2007. In order to understand the nature of the changes brought to the original version of the 1993 Constitution, as a result of which some of the most important democratic principles would be altered, it is necessary to give the general framework of this document.

## **2.1 General Framework of the 1993 Constitution**

According to the 1993 Constitution, the people of Kyrgyzstan are the holders of sovereignty and are the single source of state power in the republic. They exercise their power directly and through a system of state bodies and local self-governance bodies on the basis of the constitution and laws of the Kyrgyz Republic. Only the president of the Kyrgyz Republic and the *Jogorku Kenesh* (former *Verhovnii Soviet*, the Kyrgyz Parliament) of the country, elected by the people of the Kyrgyz Republic, have the right to act on behalf of the people of the Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>269</sup>

The 1993 Constitution has provided the basis for balanced relations among the legislative, executive and judicial bodies based on the principle of separation of powers. According to Article 7(2):

State power in the Kyrgyz Republic shall be vested in and exercised by: The Legislative Power - by the *Jogorku Kenesh*; The Executive Power - by the Government and local state administration; The Judicial Power - by the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, the Supreme Economic Court, courts and judges of the system of justice. Bodies of Legislative, Executive and Judicial Power shall function independently and in cooperation with each

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<sup>269</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic Article 1, 1993 (English version of the Constitution is available at (<http://www.uta.edu/cpsees/KYRGCON.htm>))

other. They shall have no right to exceed their powers established by the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>270</sup>

The detailed description of articles on the powers of the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary branches is provided in Appendix B.

The Constitution introduced a semi-presidential executive in which the president was given a special status as ‘the head of the state’, ‘the guarantor of the constitution and laws, the rights and freedoms of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic’ and he was to provide for the coordinated functioning and interaction of national bodies.<sup>271</sup> The president was elected directly by the people with two-ballot elections. If no candidate would get an absolute majority of votes in the first ballot, a second ballot would be held between the top two candidates who secured the highest amount of votes in the first ballot. Both the first and the second ballots could be considered valid only if more than fifty percent of all electors have taken part in it (Article 44). According to Article 43 of the constitution, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic was elected for a term of five years, would not serve more than two terms; had to be a citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic, not younger than 35 years of age and not older than 65 years of age, had to have good command of the Kyrgyz language and had been a resident of the republic for not less than 15 years before the nomination of his candidature to the office of president. The President of the Kyrgyz Republic could not be a deputy of the *Jogorku Kenesh*, could not hold other posts and engage in free enterprise activity.<sup>272</sup> The Constitution has given the president substantial powers (which are fully listed in Appendix B) in both appointments of Cabinet members and high officials (with the consent of the *Jogorku Kenesh*) such as the Procurator-General, the Chairman of the Board of the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic, heads of diplomatic missions of the Kyrgyz Republic in foreign countries and international organizations; Chairman, Deputy Chairmen and judges of regional courts, the court

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<sup>270</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic Article 7 (2), 1993

<sup>271</sup> See the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 42, 1993

<sup>272</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 43, 1993



of the city of Bishkek, district and city courts, regional economic courts as well as military tribunals.<sup>273</sup>

In the area of legislative activity the president was also given broad powers, he could on his own initiative submit bills to the *Jogorku Kenesh*; sign legislation in two weeks after their adoption by the *Jogorku Kenesh* or refer them to the *Jogorku Kenesh* with his remarks for a second consideration. If the *Jogorku Kenesh* confirmed the previously taken decision by a majority of 2/3rds from the total number of deputies, the president had to sign the law; if the president did not express his opinion about the legislation in two weeks and did not ask for revision, he was obliged to sign it.

As for the legislative branch, the 1993 Constitution gave the *Jogorku Kenesh* the legislative power and functions of executive control. The *Jogorku Kenesh* consisted of 105 Deputies, elected for a term of five years from electoral districts on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot. A voter from every electoral district shall have one vote. Voters shall take part in the election directly and on equal grounds. The legislative functions of the *Jogorku Kenesh* were described in Articles 64 - 68 of the 1993 Constitution. (See Appendix B) According to these articles, the right to initiate legislation was vested in the deputies of the *Jogorku Kenesh*, the President, the Government, the Supreme Court, the Supreme Economic Court and to the people – if 30,000 electors take an initiative to that end. According to the constitution, a bill submitted to the *Jogorku Kenesh* shall be discussed in the committees after which it shall be referred to the Presidium which shall send it for consideration to the floor of the *Jogorku Kenesh*. In case of amending or changing the constitution, not less than 2/3rds of votes from the total number of deputies of the *Jogorku Kenesh* shall be required. Amending the constitution shall be prohibited during a state of emergency and martial law. A law shall become effective since the moment of its publication, if not indicated otherwise in the law itself or in the resolution of the *Jogorku Kenesh*, on the procedure of its implementation. A

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<sup>273</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic 1993, Article 46, paragraph 1(2)

referendum shall be held by the proposal of not less than 300,000 of electors of 1/3rd of the total number of deputies of the *Jogorku Kenesh*.<sup>274</sup>

The executive branch was presented by the government headed by the prime minister, vice-prime ministers, ministers and chairmen of state committees of the Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>275</sup> As it was mentioned earlier, the structure of the government was to be determined by the president upon presentation of the prime minister and shall be approved by the *Jogorku Kenesh*. According to the 1993 Constitution, the prime minister presents to the president the candidatures for the ministers; forms and abolishes administrative departments of the Kyrgyz Republic; appoints heads of administrative departments; presents to the president the candidatures for the office of heads of regional state administrations and state administration of the city of Bishkek; appoints with the consent of local *keneshes*, heads of district and town state administrations upon presentation by heads of state administrations of regions and the city of Bishkek and remove them from office. The decisions by the prime minister concerning these appointments and removals become effective after they have been approved by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>276</sup> The government decides all matters of state governing except the administrative and supervisory powers vested in the president and the *Jogorku Kenesh* by the constitution. The government issues decrees and ordinances binding throughout the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic for all bodies, organizations, officials and citizens and organizes, supervises and secures their fulfillment.

Finally, according to the 1993 Constitution, the judicial branch is represented by the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, the Supreme Economic Court and local courts (courts of the city of Bishkek, district and municipal courts, regional economic

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<sup>274</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Articles 64-68, 1993

<sup>275</sup> The Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic does not include the President into the Executive branch. "The Executive Power in the Kyrgyz Republic shall be vested in the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, accountable to it ministries, state committees, administrative departments, and local state administration." (Article 69)

<sup>276</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Articles 71, 1993

courts, military tribunals as well as courts of elders and courts of arbitration).<sup>277</sup> The powers of Judicial branch are described in Appendix B.

## **2.2 Akaev Era: Referendums**<sup>278</sup>

As can be seen, the 1993 Constitution did not initially concentrate all power at the hands of the president, although it provided for a strong executive. However, the constitution also incorporated various mechanisms with which the legislative and the judicial branches would check and balance the presidential powers. However, as will be analyzed in detail in this section, the 1993 Constitution would be changed by a series of referendums, which eventually resulted in curtailing the powers and prerogatives of the legislative branch while at the same time enhancing presidential powers.

### **2.2.1 January 1994 Referendum**

After the adoption of the 1993 Constitution, relations between President Akaev and the parliament started to become tense. According to Akaev, the parliament had started to adopt “an increasingly obstructive attitude at time when the country needed firm government if it was to find a way out of economic crisis.”<sup>279</sup> The first referendum in this era was held on 30 January 1994. It aimed to legalize the powers of Akaev according to the new constitution. President Akaev asked the people to confirm through the referendum their desire that he should complete his term. In his speech given on 27 January 1994, he stated that “the most important [thing] is peace and mutual understanding that will allow us to overcome any sort of difficulties... Some preconditions for improvement of economic situation have been already

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<sup>277</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Articles 79, 1993

<sup>278</sup> Legal basis for organization and conduct of referendums in Kyrgyzstan is provided by the Constitution, the Law on Referendums and the Law on the Central Election Commission and other legal documents. The Law on Referendums adopted on 28 June 1991 (No 533- XII) defined the order of appointment, organization and conduct of referendums. Particularly, according to Article 5 of the Law on the Central Election Commission (CEC), CEC is responsible for preparation and conduct of referendums, formation and administration of territorial election commissions accordingly.

<sup>279</sup> John Anderson, *Constitutional Development in Central Asia*, p. 313

achieved.”<sup>280</sup> Furthermore Akaev explained to the people that he was elected in 1991 when the Soviet Union still existed; now in independent Kyrgyzstan it was necessary to legalize changes in terms of presidential powers.<sup>281</sup> He argued that “in order to implement reforms, to behave bravely and decisively he need[ed] people’s support.”<sup>282</sup>

As a result of this referendum, Akaev was allowed to complete his term in office until 1996. According to CEC, turnout was 95.94 percent and 96.34 percent of the voters had cast ballots in favor of the president.<sup>283</sup>

### **2.2.2 October 1994 Referendum**

In 1994 there emerged several confrontations between the governmental and oppositional groups in the parliament on the matters of producing and selling gold, corruption and secret mismanagement of state assets by certain governmental officials, and on the form of government in Kyrgyzstan – presidential or parliamentary. In August the president asserted that the communists had caused a political crisis by preventing the legislature from fulfilling its role. Many observers suggested, however, that the government was motivated by a desire to squelch corruption investigations and create a more malleable parliament.<sup>284</sup> By fall 1994 it was clear that the confrontation between the oppositional groups in the parliament and the president reached its peak and supporters of Akaev declared their refusal to participate in the session of the *Jogorku Kenesh*. These deputies boycotted the last scheduled parliamentary session and prevented a quorum, thus making it impossible for the parliament to conduct any legislative business before its term expires on 15 February 1995. Other members of the *Jogorku Kenesh* proceeded the session even

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<sup>280</sup> “*Protses Reform Neobhodim Potomu chto ih Podderjit Narod*” [The Process of Reforms is Necessary because People will Support It], *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 28 January 1994, p.1

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Central Election Commission release available in *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 1 February, 1994

<sup>284</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev. Ibid.

though the quorum could not be secured.<sup>285</sup> 105 of the 323 deputies, many of them government officials, regional and local leaders appointed by the president “signed a letter accusing parliamentary leaders of sabotaging reform and called for a referendum on the creation of a new two chamber parliament.”<sup>286</sup> The cabinet resigned and Akaev dismissed the parliament. Immediately after this development, he declared his decision to hold another referendum to amend the constitution, as was already mentioned in the letter signed by the loyal deputies of the *Jogorku Kenesh*. Akaev justified this referendum as a means “to secure equitable balance of three branches of power and strengthen executive branch.”<sup>287</sup> As a result of this confrontation, the country was faced with a political crisis. On 21 September 1994 President Akaev issued a decree to hold a referendum. The justification for calling on the referendum was claimed to be “inability of Jogorku Kenesh to perform its main function - legislative activity.”<sup>288</sup>

The referendum was held on 22 October 1994 and it proposed two main amendments to the constitution. One was about the future constitutional amendments, paving the way for these changes to be realized by referendums (the constitution at that time did not allow this). The second amendment provided for the establishment of a bicameral parliament, in which one house would have 35 permanently sitting members, the “lawmaking” house, while the other would have 70 members convened periodically to approve the budget and confirm presidential appointees. Apparently this second house was created to represent the interests of regions and would consist of “elites of regions.”<sup>289</sup> Akaev himself justified the creation of the second chamber as follows: “if in parliament there will be no representatives of regions, all the parliament activity will be chatting, or worse – politization of parliament.”<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev. Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy*, p.28

<sup>287</sup> “*Logika vlasti*” [Logic of Power], *ResPublica*, local oppositional newspaper in Russian, 13 December, 1994, p.1

<sup>288</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Interview with Askar Akaev, *Moskovskie Novosti* [Moscow News], newspaper, 28 August - 4 September, 1994

<sup>290</sup> *ResPublica*, 10 August, 1994, p.1

As a result of the October 1994 referendum, the public approved the proposed constitutional amendments that allowed the constitution to be amended by future referendums and the formation of a new 105-member bicameral parliament.<sup>291</sup> First issue was approved by 85.23 percent; the second by 84.43 percent. The Central Election Commission reported an 86 percent voter turnout.<sup>292</sup> In fact, amendments substantially weakened the powers and structure of the legislature.<sup>293</sup>

### 2.2.3 1996 Referendum

After being reelected as the president on 24 December 1995, Akaev called for further extension of his powers. On 28 December 1995, the governmental newspaper *Slovo Kirgizstana* released an interview with Akaev in which he was asked whether he needed more presidential powers. He answered the question in the following way:

Yes undoubtedly. Today I have no more powers than the Queen of England. I have got people's support at the presidential elections and now I will demand Jogorku Kenesh to broaden my powers because the public holds me accountable. I have to ask ministers to do something and wait for the Parliament's response for months. How this is going to work? I am certain now that the presidents of Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan were right saying that during transition period the priority must be given to executive power branch... I believe that existence of multi-holders of power creates anarchy.<sup>294</sup>

Askar Akaev wanted to realize a series constitutional changes, justified on the grounds that deputies had persistently failed to get on with the task of creating the legislative basis for the creation of a market economy; instead they preferred to pass

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<sup>291</sup> 1994 Human Rights Report: Kyrgyz Republic, US Department of State, Feb. 1995 ([http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1994\\_hrp\\_report/94hrp\\_report\\_eur/KyrgyzRepublic.html](http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1994_hrp_report/94hrp_report_eur/KyrgyzRepublic.html))

<sup>292</sup> Central Election Commission release available in *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 28 October 1994

<sup>293</sup> Eric W. Sievers, *The Post-Soviet Decline of Central Asia: Sustainable Development and Comprehensive Capital*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003, p. 79

<sup>294</sup> Press-Conference of Askar Akaev on 27 December 1995, available in *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 28,29 December, 1995, p.2

laws extending their own privileges.<sup>295</sup> At this time, Kyrgyzstan was faced with another crisis: the legislative body was the one that was created by the 1993 Constitution adopted by the Soviet era parliament, however a two chamber parliament was adopted by the October 1994 referendum.<sup>296</sup> The two chambers of the parliament were in dispute over their respective responsibilities, thus preventing most legislative work. According to one report, this forced the president to call for the referendum to settle the issue.<sup>297</sup>

On 10 February 1996 the referendum was held. The turnout was 96.53 percent and 94.5 percent of the participants voted in favor of constitutional amendments proposed by Akaev vastly expanding the powers of the president.<sup>298</sup> Such high participation in referendum was explained by Central Election Commission Chairman Mambetjunus Abylov as follows:

The referendum was called on by the will of the people who asked for a long time “When the stabilization of the economic and political life will begin?” People hoped that with adoption of the new proposed changes the order will be restored in the country.<sup>299</sup>

This view shows that pro-Akaev high officials as well as pro-government newspapers were preoccupied with showing that referendum was the wish of the people. In his speech just after the announcement of referendum results, Askar Akaev said that this referendum was “for the purpose of reforms and in the name of democracy.”<sup>300</sup> However, this referendum served to further strengthen the hand of the president.<sup>301</sup> Akaev got the power to personally formulate domestic and foreign

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<sup>295</sup> John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy*, p.54

<sup>296</sup> Asyl A. Imanalieva, Kyrgyz Republic Embassy press release No: 1, 13.02.1996 available at <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/53/028.html> (Accessed on 11 September 2009)

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Central Election Commission release available in *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 13 February 1996

<sup>299</sup> Cited in *ResPublica*, 13 February 1996, p.1

<sup>300</sup> *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 13 February 1996, pp. 1-2

<sup>301</sup> “Referendum on Constitution in Kyrgyzstan”, *Labyrinth*, 3/2 quoted in Glenn, John. *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, p. 148

policy, coordinate the functioning of the branches of government, and directly appoint and dismiss cabinet ministers, ambassadors, and judges without consulting the Kyrgyz Parliament. The president could now also dissolve the parliament if it fails three times to approve a presidential nominee. The parliament, however, retained the right to approve the president's choice of prime minister, Supreme Court justices, judges of the Constitutional and Supreme Arbitrage Courts, the Prosecutor General, and the Chairman of the National Bank.

With the new changes, the president alone now approved the structure of the government and appointed its members without consent of the parliament, upon only “consultation” with prime-minister; only the president designated referendum on amendments and supplements to the constitution, the laws, and other important matters of state life on his own initiative;<sup>302</sup> and the president has acquired power to appoint heads of local administrations. According to one newspaper, “This referendum cut powers of two-chamber parliament such as power to determine structure of government and appoint its members and some controlling functions.”<sup>303</sup>

The change brought by referendum made the *Jogorku Kenesh* two-chambered: *Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie* (Legislative Assembly) composed of full-time legislators responsible for the day-to-day workload, and the *Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei* (Assembly of People’s Representatives) - non-professional legislators convening several times a year to deliberate on budget, tax, administrative, and appointment issues. Both chambers were popularly elected and served at the will of the people. The chambers had separate powers and functions.<sup>304</sup> According to Article 58 of the constitution the *Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie* now performed the following functions: introduction of amendments and supplements to the constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic in the procedure established by the constitution; adoption of laws of the Kyrgyz Republic; official interpretation of the constitution and of laws adopted by it;

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<sup>302</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, 1996, Article 46

<sup>303</sup> *ResPublica*, 22-29 September 1998, p.3

<sup>304</sup> These changes came into existence as a result of the Bill of Kyrgyz Republic “About the Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic” passed on 6 February 1996. In the present constitution as of 2009, the functions of the *Jogorku Kenesh* are not divided due to the re-unification of two chambers in 2003.



alteration of the borders of the Kyrgyz Republic; approval of the laws passed by the *Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei*; election and dismissal, upon nomination by the president, of the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, his deputy, and judges of the Constitutional Court; election of one-third of the members of the Central Election Commission; appointment of one-third of the auditors of the Accounting Chamber; ratification and denunciation of international treaties, except for the cases envisaged in Article 48 of this constitution; introduction of states of emergency, authorization or annulment of decrees of the president concerning this issue; deciding matters of war and peace; introducing the state of war; and authorization or annulment of decrees of the president about these issues; deciding matters about the possibility of using the Armed Forces beyond its borders when necessary to fulfill international treaty obligations in support of peace and security; establishing of military ranks, diplomatic ranks, class categories and other special titles of the Kyrgyz Republic; establishment of state awards and honorary titles of the Kyrgyz Republic; issuing acts of amnesty; hearing annual reports of the prime minister, General Prosecutor, Chair of the National Bank, Chair of the Accounting Chamber; dismissal of the president from office.<sup>305</sup>

As for the other chamber, *Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei*, it now would perform the following functions: introduction of amendments and supplements to the constitution in the procedure established by the constitution; approval of laws passed by the *Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie*; official interpretation of the constitution and of laws adopted by it; approval of the republican budget and the report on its implementation; deciding matters of administrative and territorial structure of the Kyrgyz Republic; appointment of elections for Presidency; giving consent to the appointment of the prime minister; giving consent to appointment of the General Prosecutor; giving consent to appointment of the Chairman of the National Bank; election, upon nomination by the president, of the Chairman of the Supreme Court, his deputies and judges of the Supreme Court; election upon nomination by the president, of the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, his deputy, and judges of the Constitutional Court; election of one-third of the members of the Central Electoral

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<sup>305</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic. 1996, Bishkek, Article 58(1)

Commission for elections and referenda; deciding the dismissing of judges in order prescribed in the constitution; appointment of one-third of the auditors of the Accounting Chamber; dismissal of the president from office; hearing annual reports of Prime-Minister and nominated or appointed by the *Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei* officials in accordance with provisions of the constitution about the independence of these structures; expression of the vote of no confidence to the Prime-Minister; hearing addresses and statements by the General Prosecutor and the Chairman of the National Bank.<sup>306</sup>

As it is seen, only one chamber - *Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei* had the power to give consent to the appointment of the prime minister. Looking at the functions of two chambers it is obvious that some functions are performed by both chambers and even repeated. For example, both chambers can introduce amendments and supplements to the constitution; both have power to officially interpret the constitution and the laws of Kyrgyz Republic; both elect upon nomination by the president, of the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, his deputy, and judges of the Constitutional Court; both elect one-third of the members of the Central Election Commission; both appoint one-third of the auditors of the Accounting Chamber. Moreover the legislative process was made longer and more complicated, apparently to avoid hasty laws because both chambers need to approve each other's bills. For example, *Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie* had to approve the bill passed by *Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei* and vice versa, and only after the bill is approved by both chambers, it goes to the president for final approval to become a law. The chambers would have to reach consensus first, and only after that they would be in a position to oppose the president, a difficult, if not impossible task to achieve.

The *Jogorku Kenesh* lost its power to request reports of accountability from the government in general or from one of its ministers. According to Article 57, "A deputy of the Legislative Assembly and the Assembly of People's Representatives has the right of inquiry to organs of executive power and their officials, who are

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<sup>306</sup>The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 58(3)

obliged to answer the inquiry within 10 days.”<sup>307</sup> However in practice this article implies only “inquiry” and bears no legitimate force to dismiss a minister or even an official since this power lies with president. Furthermore, the president now got the power to dismiss the government any time as a personal prerogative.<sup>308</sup>

President Akaev announced that the new structure will expedite political and economic reforms and eliminate redundancy in government.<sup>309</sup> From that point on, whenever the authorities wanted to make any changes to the Kyrgyz Constitution and laws of the republic as well as other important decisions affecting the country’s life, a referendum would be held.<sup>310</sup>

The results of referendum reflected the general tendency in Kyrgyzstan, just as the other post-Soviet republics “to subordinate parliaments to presidents in the name of stability, and to stress the matter of governing, as opposed to real, or alleged, parliamentary politicking.”<sup>311</sup>

#### **2.2.4 1998 Referendum**

One major condition that resulted in the 1998 referendum was the desire of Askar Akaev to make changes in certain areas where he could not gain the support of the parliament, such as the land reform that was deemed to be essential in a “free economy”. To that end, Akaev wanted to change Article 4 of the 1993 Constitution so as to permit private land ownership.<sup>312</sup> In 1998 he started to accuse and attack the parliament through pro-governmental media sources, because majority of its deputies

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<sup>307</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 57, 1996

<sup>308</sup> Aleksandr Kinev. Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Asyl A. Imanalieva, Kyrgyz Republic Embassy press release No: 1, 13.02.1996 available at <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/53/028.html> (Accessed on 01.02.2008)

<sup>310</sup> BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), SU/2110, G2, 26 September, 1994 quoted in Niazaliev Ouran. “Failed Democratic Experience in Kyrgyzstan: 1990-2000”, Ankara: METU, 2004, p.98

<sup>311</sup> “The Parliamentary Election in Kyrgyzstan February 5, 1995”, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1995, p.2

<sup>312</sup> John, Anderson, *Constitutional Development in Central Asia*, p. 314

did not support the idea of another referendum to realize the land reform.<sup>313</sup> The deputies were accused of plotting against the Akaev regime.<sup>314</sup> Akaev would eventually bypass these deputies and called for yet another referendum. On 20 October 1998 he stated the following about the referendum:

The referendum will decide the destiny of not only reforms but also the destiny of the president... [T]hrough land reform we will strengthen the middle class, will give freedom to free entrepreneurs in order to eradicate poverty. The referendum in Kyrgyzstan will make democratic transformation irreversible and will give it a new push.<sup>315</sup>

The 1998 referendum asked people whether they supported four other amendments to the constitution in addition to allowing private land ownership: restructuring of seats in Kyrgyzstan's bicameral parliament, change in the government's fiscal decision-making abilities, greater freedom for the media, and limiting the immunity of deputies in parliament.<sup>316</sup> On 17 October 1998 the referendum was held and approved by 90.92 percent; turnout was reported as 96.26 percent.<sup>317</sup> The main results of the referendum can be described as follows:

1. The number of deputies changed. The referendum resulted in redistribution of the seats in the bicameral parliament. The number of seats in *Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie* was increased from 35 to 60; the number of seats in the *Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei* was decreased from 70 to 45. Furthermore, 25 percent of Legislative Assembly deputies now would be elected by party lists.
2. Immunity of deputies was decreased and the qualification of permanent residence from which the deputy was elected to the *Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei* was introduced.

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<sup>313</sup> *ResPublica*, 28 December 1998, p.3

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> Akaev's interview after casting a vote on 17 October 1998 available in *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 20 October 1998, p.1

<sup>316</sup> See "*IFES Election guide*", available at <http://www.electionguide.org/election.php?ID=903>, 02.02.2006, (Accessed on 3.09.2008)

<sup>317</sup> Central Election Commission release available in *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 20 October 1998

3. The deputies lost the right to alter the national budget without the government's approval. The parliament could now pass laws on decreased or increased state expenditures only "with the president's consent".
4. The institution of "private property on land" was introduced.
5. Freedom of Kyrgyzstan's independent media was increased. Adoption of laws restricting freedom of speech and mass media were prohibited.

Although several positive changes were proposed in this referendum, the way in which the referendum questions were asked was problematic. According to Article 65 Clause 6 of the constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic:

Drafts of laws on introducing amendments and supplements to the Constitution, of Constitutional laws, of laws on altering the borders of the Kyrgyz Republic, and on interpretation of the Constitution and constitutional laws, shall be considered adopted after no fewer than two readings if no fewer than two thirds of the total number of deputies of each house of the *Jogorku Kenesh* has voted for them.<sup>318</sup>

However, this constitutional requirement was not met; the questions were directly presented to the voters on referendum day without "two readings" and without "two thirds of the total number of deputies of each house of the *Jogorku Kenesh* voted for them". In other words, although Article 65 underlined the priority of the parliament to introduce "amendments and supplements" to the constitution, Akaev preferred to use his constitutional right of calling a referendum on his own initiative as specified in Article 46 of the constitution. Thus, he preferred to go directly to the people for legalization of the proposed amendments and ignore the *Jogorku Kenesh* because he feared that it might not approve those amendments. As such, it may be possible to argue that the 1998 referendum was a project imposed "from the top."<sup>319</sup>

As a result of the changes introduced by this referendum, the form of government in Kyrgyzstan turned into something reminiscent of a semi-presidential or a presidential form of government. The president secured considerable power of controlling the

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<sup>318</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 65(6), Bishkek, 1998.

<sup>319</sup> *ResPublica*, 22-29 September 1998, p.1

formation of government and its activities.<sup>320</sup> Furthermore, the powers of the parliament were considerably curtailed. Deputies were deprived of their power to alter the national budget without the government's approval. Any change of legislation aimed to increase or decrease the income of the national budget had to be approved by the government first.<sup>321</sup> Thus further legislature ability to check the executive was reduced. Also the president got the final word on laws on decreased or increased state expenditures, passed by the parliament. Finally, depriving the deputies of their immunity made them more vulnerable to and dependent on the executive branch as they were now subject to "criminal prosecution by executive bodies [such as General Prosecutor office] under false pretence."<sup>322</sup>

### 2.2.5 2003 Referendum

In 2002, the opposition groups in the country had already begun to be united and to pose a growing threat to Akaev's regime, calling for his abdication.<sup>323</sup> Moreover, parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition (including the critics of Akaev who could not enter the parliament in the 2000 parliamentary elections, such as Felix Kulov) demanded a revision of the constitution and enhancement of powers of the parliament.<sup>324</sup> These demands were supported by demonstrations and protests activities. As a result, Akaev and his political team in July 2002 had arranged a National Round Table, to which all opposition groups were invited. In September 2002 another initiative to reform the Kyrgyz Constitution was launched by President Akaev as he called for the establishment of a Constitutional Council to prepare draft amendments. The Council was composed of people from both pro-governmental groups, members of the opposition, heads of Supreme and Constitutional Courts and

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<sup>320</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Elvira Mamytova, Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> "Ukazi Prezidenta KR ot 1 Sentyabra 1998 goda nezakonni"[Presidential Decrees of 1 September 1998 are not legal], *ResPublica*, 28 December 1994, p.3

<sup>323</sup> Judith Beyer "Rhetoric of Transformation The Case of the Kyrgyz Constitutional Reform" in Andrea Berg, Anna Kreikemeyer (eds.) *Realities of Transformation*, Nomos, 2006, p.51-52

<sup>324</sup> Eric McGlinchey, "A Survey of Democratic Governance. Kyrgyzstan" in Repucci S. and Walker, Christopher (eds.). *Countries at the Crossroads 2004. Survey of Democratic Governance*, Freedom House, New York, 2004, p.238

representatives of civil society.<sup>325</sup> The draft, upon which the members of Constitutional Council had agreed, was presented for public discussion on 17 October 2002. Later, an “expert group” appointed by the president, rewrote the draft of a new constitution to be presented at the new referendum.

At the beginning of 2003, mostly due to the tensions after the Aksy events<sup>326</sup>, Kyrgyzstan was in turmoil. These events had caused a major political crisis and had resulted in the resignation of the government. Alarmed by mass reaction, Akaev wanted to guarantee his stay in power until 2005, although the 1993 Constitution limited the tenure of the president to two consecutive terms. He however, felt the need to make some concessions to improve the social situation by dismissing some of his unpopular high-ranking officials, inviting the opposition leaders to join in the new government and, most importantly, promising to give up some of his powers and share authority with parliament and the government.<sup>327</sup> In order to realize these changes, Akaev decided to declare a new referendum. By a presidential decree issued on 13 January 2003, the new referendum was scheduled to be held on 2 February 2003.

The referendum was scheduled to be held on extremely short notice and there was a general lack of information made available to the public about its exact content as well as the procedures surrounding the voting process itself.<sup>328</sup> The official call for the referendum was issued only two weeks prior to the poll.<sup>329</sup> Voters were presented

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<sup>325</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, “Kyrgyz Republic Constitutional Referendum, 2 February 2003, Political Assessment Report”, 20 March 2003, p.1

<sup>326</sup> On 14 March 2002, the supporters of Azimbek Beknazarov, one of the most influential opposition figures from the Aksy *Rayon* blocked some roads connecting Kerben, Jangi-Jol, Kara-Suu and Sary-Chelek villages to each other with stones in order to protest the government. The situation aggravated and on 17 March 2002, the police opened fired on protestors from the Kyzil-Tuu village, who were on their way to the center of Aksy *Rayon* of Kerben Village. According to official data, the disorder resulted in the death of 5 people and 80 injured. (Kiniev Aleksandr. Ibid.)

<sup>327</sup> Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen “Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan”, DEMSTAR Research Report No. 16, Sep 2003, p. 31

<sup>328</sup> “NDI statement following the February 2, 2003 Constitutional referendum in Kyrgyzstan”, Washington, DC, February 4, 2003, p.1

<sup>329</sup> International organizations, including the OSCE, declined the Central Election Commission’s invitation to send observers. The OSCE/ODIHR said that announcing the referendum only two weeks prior to the poll not only gave it insufficient time to prepare the monitoring properly but also was inadequate for the consideration of the

with two separate ballots containing two questions: first, should the new version of the constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic be adopted? Second, should Askar Akaev remain the President of the Kyrgyz Republic until December 2005 (that is until the end of his constitutional term) in order to implement constitutional amendments?<sup>330</sup> The first question, although seemingly a very simple one, had a major implication: a whole bunch of amendments were covered within that same question. The second question also had its own implications as the Constitutional Court had ruled back in 1998 that Akaev could stand in the 2000 presidential elections, because “his first term under the old Soviet-era constitution, did not count as part of the two-term limitation.”<sup>331</sup> Given that Askar Akaev’s mandate did not legally end until 2005, the second question led to speculations that he was actually seeking a stronger rule after the Aksy incident.

The referendum was held on 2 February 2003. The turnout was 86.68 percent, and 76.61 percent of these voters supported the first question and 78.74 percent supported the second question.<sup>332</sup> The main amendments introduced by the referendum can be summarized as follows:

The *Jogorku Kenesh* once again became a one-chamber parliament. The number of deputies was decreased to 75 and they had to be elected only from single-member districts. Article 54(2) stated that: “The Jogorku Kenesh shall consist of 75 deputies elected for the term of five years from single member constituencies.” This change from a bi-cameral parliamentary structure back to a unicameral one, with a decrease in the total number of MPs, from 105 (60 in the Legislative Assembly and 45 in the People’s Representative Assembly) to 75 would further weaken the party system as well. In the previous system, there was a provision for Legislative Assembly elections: 45 of its members were elected in single-member constituencies and the

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draft amendments by the public. (OSCE/ODIHR, Kyrgyz Republic, Constitutional Referendum, 2 February 2003, Political Assessment Report, 20 March 2003, at [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/03/1381\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/03/1381_en.pdf).)

<sup>330</sup> Presidential Decree “On Referendum”, 13 January 2003 VII N 8, Kyrgyz Government, Bishkek.

<sup>331</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, Kyrgyz Republic, Constitutional Referendum, 2 February 2003, Political Assessment Report, 20 March 2003, p.6

<sup>332</sup> Central Election Commission release, 6 February 2003, Bishkek



remaining 15 were elected from national party lists. This system stimulated and supported the development of political parties.<sup>333</sup> However, the amendment on the abolition of party-list voting would prevent the parties to become more effective in the elections.

It must also be pointed out that with the new changes the *Jogorku Kenesh* was given back its essential powers – to approve each member of cabinet and to give a vote of no confidence to the government on the result of annual report of prime minister. However the president kept his “exclusive” power to declare a referendum; power to dismiss government; power to issue decrees with the strength and importance equal to that of a law, including those that can dismiss the parliament. Another important change was the addition of a paragraph to Article 66 of the constitution: “If, the law, indicated in Article 65 paragraph 6 of the present constitution, upon re-examination, made not earlier than after one year will be approved in its previously adopted version by a majority vote of no less than four-fifths of the total number of deputies, the law in question shall be signed by the president within a month.”<sup>334</sup> Reaching such a high number of oppositional deputies is not possible. As such, the *Jogorku Kenesh* became more powerless, because now it could not pass law without the president’s or government’s consent.<sup>335</sup>

In addition to the changes about the *Jogorku Kenesh*, there were certain amendments regarding presidential powers. It was now easier for the president to veto legislation and to make changes to draft laws approved by the parliament. He could also make changes to draft laws (which were approved by parliament), and sign them without consulting the parliament. Additionally, the re-organization of the Prosecutor’s Office was no longer on the agenda, apparently because its reform would have diminished the president’s influence on its operation. The government became

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, 2003, Article 66(5)

<sup>335</sup> Other amendments concerned courts and local administration. System of arbitrary courts was liquidated and its functions were taken by local courts. Supreme Court took powers of Highest Arbitrary Court. Also some changes were brought about in the judicial system. The Arbitration courts within Kyrgyzstan’s judicial system was merged with and concentrating power in the Supreme Court. The Constitutional court gained the power of assessing the constitutionality of activities of political parties, social and religious organizations. Local administration (self-governance) bodies became elected.

accountable to the president and as was put forward by an expert, “the President’s keeping aloof and the government’s being a whipping boy.”<sup>336</sup> Moreover just like it was before, all the appointments come vertically from the president: *akims* (head of districts), governors, cabinet of ministers (government) headed by prime minister, judges, prosecutors make a team which “will not betray their chief.”<sup>337</sup>

There was also another important clause added to Article 53 of the constitution: “Ex-President shall enjoy the right of immunity; cannot be criminally or administratively prosecuted also arrested, searched, interrogated or personally inspected for activity or inactivity during presidential term.”<sup>338</sup> The same article would also state: “Provision, maintenance and protection of an ex-president of the Kyrgyz Republic, his spouse, children under 18 years old and other members of his family, dependent on his support, shall be made at a state expense by a procedure established by law.”<sup>339</sup>

Another noteworthy change would come with Article 63, which gave the president excessive powers with regard to the *Jogorku Kenesh*: “The Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic may be dissolved early by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic: if so decided by a referendum; in the event of three [subsequent] refusals by the [parliament] to accept a nominee to the office of prime minister; or in the event of another crisis caused by an insurmountable disagreement between the [parliament] and other branches of the state power.”<sup>340</sup> Article 71 restates one of the conditions of dissolving the parliament: “After the [parliament] may have thrice (three times)

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<sup>336</sup> Tamerlan Ibraimov, “Referendum Results in Kyrgyzstan”, the Center for Political and Legal Studies, Bishkek available at <http://eurasianhome.org/xml/t/expert.xml?lang=en&nic=expert&pid=1298> (Accessed on 15 October 2009)

<sup>337</sup> *ResPublica*, 21 January 2003, p.4

<sup>338</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, 2003, Article 53(2). This amendment on immunity of the president upon his retirement is questionable because “one might question why a president, preparing to leave office, might need an immunity law for himself and his entire family”. (Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen “Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan”, p. 31)

<sup>339</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, 2003, Article 53(2). This provision was removed as a result of 2007 referendum.

<sup>340</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 63 (2), Bishkek, 2003.

rejected candidates for the office of prime minister, the president shall appoint the prime minister and shall dissolve the [parliament].”<sup>341</sup>

Finally, the 2003 referendum extended presidential powers in terms of issuing presidential decrees: “The [parliament] may delegate its legislative powers to the president for a period of up to one year”<sup>342</sup> following its dissolution. There are no specific restrictions or conditions on the president’s right to discharge legislative powers in the new version of the constitution, increasing further the president’s executive powers.

### **2.2.6 Referendums in Perspective**

When the referendums conducted during the Akaev era are analyzed, it is possible to suggest that in most cases they were used as means of enhancing presidential power. Kyrgyzstan, a country that has “little tradition of either constitutionalism or democratic politics”<sup>343</sup> had adopted a French type semi-presidential system with the 1993 Constitution, which combined a popularly elected strong president with a government responsible to the legislature. As Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen argued:

There is no question that the 1993 Constitution was more liberal and provided better conditions for the formation of a democratic society than did its Soviet predecessor. It divided the government into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. It created some checks and balances on presidential power and emphasized basic human rights. At the same time, the Constitution gave the president broad political powers which created the conditions for domination of the political system by the executive.<sup>344</sup>

However the 1993 Constitution had certain articles that can be seen as undemocratic in nature. For example, the president was granted powers allowing him to “remove” the authorities and officials (Article 46(2)) without the consent of other bodies,

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<sup>341</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 71(4), Bishkek, 2003.

<sup>342</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 68, Bishkek, 2003.

<sup>343</sup> John Anderson. “Constitutional Development in Central Asia” *Central Asian Survey*, 16(3), (1997) p. 301

<sup>344</sup> Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen “Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan”, p.30

including courts. The president was also given the power to abolish or suspend the acts of the government, ministries, state committees and administrative departments, as well as heads of local state administration in case they contravene the constitution and laws of the Kyrgyz Republic (Article 46(4)). This last article vests in the president certain powers, which generally fall within the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court.<sup>345</sup> At the same time, the president (Article 48) was entitled to enact binding decrees the scope of which is unclear. Presidential decrees mentioned in Article 48 do not specify whether such decrees have to be issued with or without the participation of the government. According to an expert, this could result in a situation in which the president could “regulate a very broad area [on his own].”<sup>346</sup> Another important issue that is worth mentioning is about constitutional amendments. While the government did not have the right to propose such amendments, the president was given this right. Article 46(5) states that the president could dissolve the *Jogorku Kenesh* “before the date on which its Powers expire in accordance with the results of a public referendum.”<sup>347</sup>

Even in its original form that gave the president significant powers, the 1993 Constitution was subject to several referendums that were discussed above, increasing the presidential powers even further. When these referendums are analyzed, it becomes clearer that they served to disrupt the balance of power between the president and the parliament in favor of the former. Furthermore, in all referendums both the voter turnout and the approval rates were very high so much so that this would shed some doubt on the validity of the percentages. For the January 1994 referendum for example, it was stated that these percentages were an indication of “overzealousness on the part of the president's circle of advisers and local officials, most of whom employed Soviet-style methods to get out the vote and to

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<sup>345</sup> Giorgio Malinverni “Comments on the Draft Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic”, Council of Europe, February 1993

<sup>346</sup> Ergun Özbudun, “Comments on the Draft Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic”, Council of Europe, February 1993, p.26

<sup>347</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 46 (5), Bishkek, 1993.

make sure it was overwhelmingly positive.”<sup>348</sup> Similar arguments were made in a statement prepared by the opposition party *Erkin Kyrgyzstan* (Free Kyrgyzstan), about the “undemocratic [and] illegal” manner in which this referendum was conducted: the whole process was conducted by the old Election Commission of the communist era that used “old methods.”<sup>349</sup> Furthermore, international and independent observers as well as representatives of political parties were not invited as observers; another factor that would make makes the results of the referendum unreliable.<sup>350</sup>

Another common feature is related to the way in which the referendums were justified by the president. In most cases, the general reason given to the people by Akaev for the referendums was that the reform process was being impeded by various articles of the constitution and the president lacked sufficient power to push through reforms against the “resisting of elements of the old order.”<sup>351</sup> These “elements” accused by Akaev were the deputies of the “old” parliament who would oppose him on many issues. He would eventually dissolve this parliament. On 1 February 1994 he argued that “Jogorku Kenesh became an arena for political struggle, and the legislative function [making laws] has become as of secondary importance...People supported president [at the January referendum] and by using [my] constitutional right [I] will dissolve the parliament.”<sup>352</sup>

Akaev would also justify the need to have strong presidential powers via the referendums that would serve as mechanisms of building a democratic regime. According to him, in the transition period, a strong leadership was a necessary step in realizing the shift to democracy. In December 1994 for example, he suggested that “Central Asia could not hope to build full parliamentary systems along Western lines

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<sup>348</sup> 1994 Human Rights Report: Kyrgyz Republic, US Department of State, Feb. 1995 ([http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1994\\_hrp\\_report/94hrp\\_report\\_eur/KyrgyzRepublic.html](http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1994_hrp_report/94hrp_report_eur/KyrgyzRepublic.html))

<sup>349</sup> Statement of *Erkin Kyrgyzstan* party members available in *ResPublica*, 18 February 1994, p.1

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> John Anderson. *Constitutional Development in Central Asia*, p. 312

<sup>352</sup> Cited in *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 1 February 1994, p.2

in the near future because it lacked socioeconomic stability, a clearly defined social structure and a developed civil society.”<sup>353</sup> This meant that Kyrgyzstan was likely to witness a period of proto-democracy in which the democratization of every sphere of life would take time to develop. Rejecting the claims of his opponents that he was acquiring more powers, he pointed to the various checks on his position set out in the constitution.<sup>354</sup> Additionally Akaev argued that centralizing presidential power was necessary to speed economic, political and legal reforms and to reduce the influence of regional political centers.<sup>355</sup>

In general, it can be suggested that participation of citizens in elections was a positive feature in terms of democratization, as “the greater the electoral activity of a country’s citizens, the greater its participation in the overall political life of the country.”<sup>356</sup> However in Kyrgyzstan the high voter turnouts in the referendums did not bring democratization. This was much more clearly observed in the 1996 referendum as a result of which presidential powers were expanded and separation of powers principle became vague. In this referendum, there were 52 proposed amendments into 97 clauses of the constitution that would result in the consolidation of power in the hands of the president as well as weakening of the parliament. Although Akaev was using a “democratic” method, and was presenting himself as “a symbol of unity of the people and state power,”<sup>357</sup> in practice he would become less accountable and more powerful. On the October 1998 referendum the *ResPublica* newspaper would comment that it was “nothing but snatching more power from

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<sup>353</sup> John Anderson, *Constitutional Development in Central Asia*, p. 314

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Glenn E. Curtis “Introduction” in Lydia M. Buyers (ed.), *Central Asia in Focus: Political and Economic Issues*, Nova Science Publishers, Inc. NY, 2003, p.xviii. Within this framework, one thing that he would do was to use his power of appointing and dismissing the prime ministers. During the period of 1998-2000 five prime-ministers (Apas Djumagulov, Kubanychbek Jumaliev, Boris Silayev, Jumabek Ibraimov, Amangeldy Muraliev) were changed by either dismissing them from office or enforcing them to resign. According to an expert, these people were seen as “personal rivalries” of the President. (Aleksandr Kiniev, Ibid.) Their successors were people who did not have any administrative experience or capacity to be prime ministers but they were personally loyal to the President. As such they were perceived to be “safe” as they would not challenge the President’s powers in any way.

<sup>356</sup> Glenn E. Curtis “Introduction” in Lydia M. Buyers (ed.), *Central Asia in Focus: Political and Economic Issues*, Nova Science Publishers, Inc. NY, 2003, p. xviii

<sup>357</sup> See, the Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, Article 42, 1996.

parliament” as the referendum “became a tool of decision-making which strengthen power of regime through popular vote.”<sup>358</sup>

Another basic feature of the referendums was related to the violations of the constitution by Akaev himself. For example, on 16 September 1994, he issued a decree on the establishment of “Central Election Commission”<sup>359</sup> and appointed its members. However, Article 58 of the constitution provided that only the parliament could create such a commission.<sup>360</sup> Another example is related to the referendum call that he made to be scheduled for the October 1994. However, the president did not have the right of calling on referendum to amend the constitution of Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>361</sup> According to Articles 96-97, such amendments are under the direct prerogative of the *Jogorku Kenesh*:

Amendments and supplements may be adopted by the Jogorku Kenesh after a proposal by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, by a majority of the total number of deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh, or by no fewer than 300, 000 voters.<sup>362</sup>

Amendments to constitution can also be a result of Constitutional Court’s decision (according to Clauses 1, 3, 4 Article 82 of the constitution, Clause 2 Article 96). Thus, amendments to the constitution are not and should not be a prerogative of the president.<sup>363</sup> As one expert suggested, “from judicial point of view issues offered on the October referendum were anti-constitutional and were aimed at undermining the basics of constitutional order in the state.”<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> *ResPublica*, 22-29 September 1998, p.1

<sup>359</sup> *ResPublica*, 28 December 1995, p.1

<sup>360</sup> Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 58 (10), 1993

<sup>361</sup> *ResPublica*, 28 December 1994, p.3

<sup>362</sup> The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 96, Bishkek, 1994

<sup>363</sup> *ResPublica*, 28 December 1994, p.3

<sup>364</sup> Murat Ukushev “*Krizis Konstitutsionnoi Zakonnosti v Kirgizstane*”[Crisis of Constitutional Legality in Kyrgyzstan], *ResPublica*, 6 October 1994, p.7

Another important point that needs to be mentioned was about the shortage of time in which the referendums were conducted which would make it impossible for the people to analyze the proposed amendments in a detailed way. For instance, people were informed about the October 1994 referendum only in September.<sup>365</sup> With the exception of the 2003 referendum, when the process began a year before the actual date, all of the four others were officially announced very late, just a month or two before the actual referendum day. Transparency of discussions prior to the referendums also emerged as another problematic issue. For the 2003 referendum, for example, the public was not aware to which extent the topics discussed was actually related to amendments. Moreover the public had no information on the work being conducted by the “expert group” working under the president in which there was no member from the Constitutional Council. These developments were met with suspicion.<sup>366</sup> Although for two months, the government and the opposition worked together and had agreed on the same amendments, these amendments were not later put to public vote: the electorate had to vote on the final draft formulated by the same “expert group.”<sup>367</sup> Furthermore, the draft amendments also did not include all of the proposals given by the Constitutional Council. As such without any real public involvement amendments were realized that further increased the powers of the president at the expense of both the legislative and judicial branches.

In addition to these problems, several cases of harassment and arrests of people who opposed the constitutional amendments took place prior to some referendums. For example in September 1998 in Jalal-Abad, citizens who were planning to peacefully rally against the referendum were arrested. Sometimes such harassments were observed on the referendum day too, as was the case for the October 1994 referendum. Although gross violations of laws and the constitution were reported on the day of the referendum day, about 86 percent of these reports were falsified by the

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<sup>365</sup> “*Aresti v Jalal-Abade – anticonstitutsionalni*” [Arrests in Jalal-Abad are anti-constitutional], *ResPublica*, 28 December 1994, p.2

<sup>366</sup> Iskakov G.T., *Elections and Democracy in Kyrgyzstan: Constitutional Design of Parliamentary-Presidential Relations*, Biiktik, Bishkek, 2003, pp. 342-348

<sup>367</sup> see Annual Report 2003 of the Kyrgyz Committee for Human Rights in *ResPublica*, 7 February 2003, p.2



authorities.<sup>368</sup> According to Topchubek Turgunaliyev, the leader of *Erkin Kyrgyzstan*, “the main reason of such falsification was dependence of Central Election Commission on governmental officials, *akims* [heads of regional administrations].”<sup>369</sup> There was no mechanism of providing the independence of Central Election Commission. During the referendums, several prominent journalists too were criminally prosecuted, ostensibly for libel.<sup>370</sup> Sometimes intimidation of oppositional leaders also took place. On 2 February 2003, for example, three main oppositional leaders, Omurbek Tekebaev, Jypar Jeksheev and Emil Aliev, were threatened to be prosecuted as they recorded a lot of falsifications during referendum.<sup>371</sup> This kind of intimidation was aimed to “make opposition fall salient.”<sup>372</sup>

One other major problem was related to several violations that would take place during the referendums. For example, in 2003, the results of referendum were “falsified” in terms of voter participation. According to some local observers less than 40 percent of the people had actually participated in referendum.<sup>373</sup> In Bishkek “only 32 percent of voters casted their votes, in Aksy rayon of Jalal-Abad province 90 percent of two villages refused to cast votes.”<sup>374</sup> The main reason was “internal boycott” against new tricks of regime, unawareness of people of the new version of the constitution and short period for preparation and conduct of referendum.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Topchubek Turgunaliyev, “*Tsarstvo Krivih Zerkal*” [Kingdom of Distorting Mirrors], *ResPublica*, 28 October, 1994, p.2

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>370</sup> John Anderson, “Creating a Framework for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52(1), 2000, p. 80

<sup>371</sup> See *ResPublica*, 7 February, 2003, p.1

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>373</sup> Report of Headquarters of Public Control and Conduct of Referendum, available in *ResPublica*, 7 February 2003, p.2

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3

Another violation was multiple voting by persons without ID's as well as family voting, in which the voters were given many ballot sheets to vote for the entire family.<sup>376</sup> Reportedly, the chairman of one of district election commissions openly declared that the *akim* ordered to spread blank bulletins.<sup>377</sup> According to the newspaper *ResPublica*, in 1994 referendum “Representatives of presidential administration put pressure upon *akims* to secure not less than 75 percent ‘yes’ vote.”<sup>378</sup> The same newspaper further announced irregularities during the tabulation process, which raised questions about the accuracy of the reported results and polling station procedural violations.<sup>379</sup> Similar accusations were made by the 1998 referendum for which the following was reported: “in general there are 2020 electoral districts in the country, whereas the number of independent observers was only 200, meaning thereby only 10 percent from the necessary number of observers.”<sup>380</sup>

Also for the 2003 referendum, National Democratic Institute (NDI) reported that “there were numerous examples of illegal voting, including ballot box stuffing, repeated voting by a single person and so-called ‘family voting.’”<sup>381</sup> University students were pressured to vote and, in some cases, to vote several times. NDI observers noted “serious problems with vote counts, including questionable routing of protocols and unmistakable indications of improper tampering with tabulations.”<sup>382</sup> NDI also reported:

[t]hroughout the country, domestic and international election observers faced obstacles to reviewing voting and counting procedures. Domestic observers were prevented from entering certain polling places and removed from others.

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> *ResPublica*, 28 October 1994, p.1

<sup>379</sup> *ResPublica*, 25 October 1994, p.1

<sup>380</sup> *ResPublica*, 20-26 October 1998, p.2

<sup>381</sup> “NDI statement following the February 2, 2003 Constitutional referendum in Kyrgyzstan”, Washington, DC, February 4, 2003, p. 2

<sup>382</sup> NDI Ibid. p.2

Some observers who were admitted to polling places were stationed in spots where they could not adequately view proceedings. Some were prevented from observing counting.<sup>383</sup>

NDI concluded that “the nature of the constitutional changes put to a referendum vote on February 2...[was not] conducive to democratic reforms in Kyrgyzstan... [as] the procedures surrounding the constitutional revisions, including those related to the development of amendments as well as those related to the referendum voting, undermine confidence that the referendum process was democratic.”<sup>384</sup>

Another common feature that has to be mentioned for the referendums is related to the manner in which Akaev used mass media institutions for his public speeches (which were then propagated in pro-governmental newspapers). In these speeches he would explain the importance of constitutional amendments via referendums, making specific emphasis on concepts like democratic transition, transformation, rule of law, and human rights. For example, for the 2003 referendum, the new version of constitution was referred to by Akaev as a “constitution of human rights” and its changed content as a compilation of the opinions of all citizens.<sup>385</sup> The concept of transformation would also serve him as an important rhetorical instrument.<sup>386</sup> In one of Akaev’s speeches in 2003, it is argued that the new constitution will put human rights into practice and further the processes of democratization and decentralization in the political sector.<sup>387</sup> He would refer to the 1993 Constitution, as the “constitution of the transition period” and by comparing Kyrgyzstan’s reforms with reforms of neighboring countries, Akaev tried to give the impression that Kyrgyzstan was in a leadership position in terms of implementing reforms.<sup>388</sup> He would further declare that the new constitution would guide the country “further on its ways to democracy,

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Judith Beyer, *Ibid.*, p.51

<sup>386</sup> Judith Beyer, *Ibid.*, p.52. Concept of transformation was used in two contexts: first, to explain changes in the new constitution; and second, to refer to changes in Kyrgyz society itself.

<sup>387</sup> Akaev’s speech “*Ludi Obsudili i Predlojili*” [The People has Deliberated and Suggested], *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 13 January 2003.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

economic affluence, peace and national unity.”<sup>389</sup> Shortly after the 2003 referendum Akaev stated that the goals of human rights, democratization, decentralization and independent judiciary were realized because of societal consensus.<sup>390</sup> He stated that Kyrgyzstan now entered a new period of “stable development”: “The bygone period was hard [...]. Especially in this period a strong presidential power was needed, being able to protect the country from all possible commotions and to warrant a peaceful political and socio-economic transformation of the whole society.”<sup>391</sup> In all these speeches Akaev tried to legitimize his actions as well as authoritarian policies to be necessary in the transition period. Referendums were seen as occasions to demonstrate the unity of the people and their support for him.

As referendum allows to legalize all the questions (decisions) and make them laws on the referendum day, President Akaev put a bunch of issues calling them “amendments”; by saying “yes” or “no” a voter had to decide on many important issues such as land reform or fiscal matters all of which were together. Akaev did this especially in the 1998 and 2003 referendums. Oppositional newspaper *ResPublica* questioned whether it was possible for a voter to express his/her opinion on almost half of the constitution’s text by simply saying “yes” or “no”? The 1998 referendum was called a “forceful change of the constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic in favor of political aims of certain individuals”<sup>392</sup>

As a final point, it must also be emphasized that all referendums were initiated by the president, rather than the parliament or the public.<sup>393</sup> As such, constitutional amendments since 1994 stemmed largely from leader rather than in response to

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Akaev’s speech “*Vpered! Pered Mami Lejat Tseli I Trudnie Zadachi*” [Ahead of Us Lie High Goals and Difficult Tasks], *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 5 February 2003.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> “*Ukazi Prezidenta KR ot 1 Sentyabra 1998 goda nezakonni*” [Presidential Decrees of 1 September 1998 are not legal], *ResPublica*, 28 December 1994, p.3

<sup>393</sup> Keith Bating and Richard Simeon, “Introduction: the Politics of Constitutional Change” in K. Bating and R. Simeon (eds.) *The Politics of Constitutional Change in Industrial Nations: Redesigning the State*, Macmillan, London 1985, pp.10-13

popular demands.<sup>394</sup> As Eric Sievers notes, amendments have been “engineered and discussed without much public input” and their usual purpose has been to insulate the presidents “from the limitations imposed by constitutional regimes.”<sup>395</sup> In other words, constitutional reform became a synonym for the legalization of authoritarianism.<sup>396</sup>

To summarize, as a result of these five referendums described in this part, the political system and balance of power in Kyrgyzstan moved to a strong presidential system with the president standing above all three branches. Critics countered that such changes, taken together with growing pressure on media and arrest of several opponents heralded a slide towards dictatorship<sup>397</sup> under strong presidential rule.<sup>398</sup> President Akaev emerged to be a leader who was willing to give up democratic commitments in order to preserve his own position.<sup>399</sup> He succeeded to maintain and actually increase his power by five referendums and a series of presidential decrees, as well as the closure of two newspapers and the parliament.<sup>400</sup> Although he began his term in 1990 with ideals of multiparty democracy, he moved closer to authoritarianism.<sup>401</sup>

### **2.3 Akaev Era: Parliamentary Elections**

In this chapter I will describe the three parliamentary elections that took place during the Akaev era (1991-2005). Parliamentary elections were considered to be vital for Akaev, as he had to take the main decisions regarding the future of the country in the

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<sup>394</sup> John Anderson, *Constitutional Development in Central Asia* Ibid., p. 316

<sup>395</sup> Eric W. Sievers, *The Post-Soviet Decline of Central Asia: Sustainable Development and Comprehensive Capital*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003, p. 78

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> John Anderson, “Constitutional Development in Central Asia” Ibid. p. 315

<sup>398</sup> John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy of Central Asia*, Ibid., p.148

<sup>399</sup> John Anderson, “Creating a Framework for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan”, Ibid., pp. 77-93

<sup>400</sup> 1994 Human Rights Report : Kyrgyz Republic, US Department of State, Feb. 1995, available at [http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1994\\_hrp\\_report/94hrp\\_report\\_eur/KyrgyzRepublic.html](http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1994_hrp_report/94hrp_report_eur/KyrgyzRepublic.html) (Accessed on 18.04.2009)

<sup>401</sup> Glenn E. Curtis, “Introduction” Ibid., p. xviii

parliament, including referendums and key appointments. It was also very important for him to have loyal supporters in the parliament, to support his policies. Therefore parliamentary elections would be used mostly in such a way as methods of minimizing legislative power in general and to control the opposition in the parliament.

Before starting to analyze the post-Soviet parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan under Akaev, a brief description of the *Supreme Soviet* elections in 1990 has to be given. The campaign for these elections began on 25 November 1989, exactly three months before the polling day. Election officials set aside one month for nominations, a week for the formal registration of candidates, and seven weeks for active campaigning. At stake in the elections were a total of 350 seats for the Kyrgyz Supreme Soviet.<sup>402</sup> The electoral legislation in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere in the USSR at that time had established equal conditions for candidates during the campaign. Therefore, the government agreed both to bear the costs transportation of the candidates and their electoral agents and to ensure equal access to the media.<sup>403</sup> The two-round elections were held on 25 February and 4 March 1990, with voter turnouts above 90 percent.<sup>404</sup>

Once the results of the elections were announced, it became clear that the Communist Party got a large and loyal majority. All 40 *raikom* (district committee) first secretaries, *obkom* (province committee) first secretaries, and the four top level Communist Party secretaries secured seats in the parliament.<sup>405</sup> In this new Supreme Soviet, the Communist Party members, mostly from the governmental, industrial and agricultural sectors<sup>406</sup> comprised 90 percent of the deputies (317 out of 350).<sup>407</sup> The

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<sup>402</sup> Eugene Huskey, "The Rise of Contested Politics in Central Asia: Elections in Kyrgyzstan, 1989-90", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 47(5), July 1995, p. 822

<sup>403</sup> In Kyrgyzstan the estimated outlay per candidate was 2000 rubles, most of which was used for paying the salaries of the candidates and their electoral agents. "*Respublikanskaya izbiratel'naya komissiya: pervye shagi*" [Republican Election Committee: the First Steps], *Kommunist Kirgizstana*, 12.06.1989, pp. 34-35.

<sup>404</sup> Eugene Huskey, "The Rise of Contested Politics in Central Asia: Elections in Kyrgyzstan, 1989-90", *Ibid.*, p.825

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*

pattern seemed to be representation based on posts and not people. The predominance of *nomenklatura* workers among the deputies ensured that communists would have a major influence in the legislative branch. However, now there was also a small group of “oppositional” deputies within the parliament, who had run as independent candidates. This was an unprecedented development in the history of Kyrgyzstan during the Soviet era. To put it differently, even if the Communist Party members got 317 seats out of 350, the existence of the remaining 23 would indicate the beginning of a new era. As put forward by an expert, “Although independent deputies (who were later called national-democrats) lacked unity and extra-parliamentary organization, they nonetheless represented a troubling specter for politicians insistent on public unity and suspicious of democratization and *glasnost*.”<sup>408</sup> Among the most outspoken of the independent deputies was Topchubek Turgunaliyev, party bureau secretary of the Kyrgyz Female Pedagogical Institute, who would later emerge as one of the major leaders of opposition.

The period of 1990-1994 can be characterized as an era of shifting alliances, as some members of Supreme Soviet who were elected as communists, later quitted membership in the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan and joined forces with the oppositional deputies.<sup>409</sup> This first parliament elected in 1990 and disbanded in 1994, generally did not support Akaev’s policies. Both communists and national-democrats expressed hostility to ideas such as private property, land ownership and special provisions for Russians and other minorities.<sup>410</sup> Both groups protested the inauguration of the Slavic University in Bishkek, an institution designed to give Russians (and other non-Kyrgyz speakers) access to higher education. Parliament balked at further introduction of economic reforms, and nationalists accused Akaev of betraying the Kyrgyz nation. Akaev eventually decided to dissolve this parliament

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<sup>407</sup> Svetlana Sorokina, “*Demokratiya Utverzhaetsya*” [Democratization is Being Started], *Sovetskaya Kirgiziya*, 18 April 1989, p. 1.

<sup>408</sup> Eugene Huskey. *Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> There is lack of adequate, consistent data on the composition of the Supreme Soviet deputies who served between 1990 and 1994.

<sup>410</sup> Paul Kubicek, “Authoritarianism in Central Asia: Curse or Cure?” *Third World Quarterly*, 19(1), 1998, p. 37

on 5 September 1994 in order to realize his reforms. A majority of political parties and movements, both on the left and the right, condemned this decision and called it a *coup d' etat*.<sup>411</sup> After five months, new parliamentary elections would be held.

### **2.3.1 1995 Parliamentary Elections**

On 5 February 1995, the first multi-party parliamentary elections of the post-Soviet era were held. A new-style 105-seat bicameral parliament was established<sup>412</sup> with a new name, the *Jogorku Kenesh*. As had been decided by the October 1994 referendum, in this new body, there were 35 seats in the lower chamber and 70 seats in the upper chamber. While each chamber had different legislative responsibilities, the electoral procedures for both were the same in the 1995 elections. The deputies were elected in single-member districts with an absolute majority requirement. If the candidates could not get more than 50% of the votes in districts, a run-off election between the top two candidates would take place. The elections would be considered valid only if more than half of registered voters in the electoral districts had participated in elections.

Nomination of candidates began three months before the elections. The right to nominate candidates was given to individuals, registered political parties, labor collectives, social organizations and groups of electors in their place of residence (who would decide on their candidates by public meetings). It was suggested (especially for the last two cases) that the process of nomination could easily be subjected to manipulation by regional bosses.<sup>413</sup> Candidates nominated by labor collectives and groups of voters required at least 50 signatures; for self-nominated candidates the number was 500.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid., pp.37-38

<sup>412</sup> The previous unicameral *Supreme Soviet* had 350 seats representing the entire country. The last Soviet-era elections took place on 25 February and 4 March, 1990.

<sup>413</sup> John, Anderson. *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy*, Ibid., p.50

<sup>414</sup> "The Parliamentary Election in Kyrgyzstan February 5, 1995", Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1995, p.6



In addition to several self-nominated independent candidates, all of the twelve registered political parties in Kyrgyzstan at the time nominated their own candidates to the parliament. There were 161 such candidates 40 of which were from the best organized group, the Communist Party. The communists (at the very left of the spectrum) advocated the need to strengthen the integration of the former Soviet republics, to increase the role of state in the economy, to provide subsidies to viable collective farms, to halt redistribution of state property, to ban the sale and purchase of land, to give Russian the status of state language and to restore Soviet-era social rights and guarantees. *Asaba* (Banner), another political party at the very right of the spectrum, would advocate the revival of Kyrgyz traditions and language, accept only the Kyrgyz people as candidates, and refuse to accept Akaev's proposals for both dual citizenship to Russians and privatization of land. In between these two extremes there were the Social Democrats, whose vague program introduced 'democratic socialist principles' into all spheres of life; *Erkin Kyrgyzstan*, which stressed state regulation of the economy on behalf of the Kyrgyz people; *Ata-Meken* (Fatherland), a split party of *Erkin Kyrgyzstan*, that had a more centrist, pro-governmental position; the Republican People's Party, which sought a constructive opposition; and the Agrarian Party, which advocated a protectionist policy for Kyrgyzstan's agro-industrial complex.<sup>415</sup> In addition to the candidates of these parties, social organizations such as the Union of Industrialists and Businessmen and the Slavic Fund also nominated candidates. Overall, 1,021 candidates were registered, out of whom eventually 936 would contest for the 105 seats. As put forward by a scholar, the programs of these candidates were "indistinguishable" from each other as they were "offering populist appeals with little substantial content."<sup>416</sup>

In the first round of elections held on 5 February 1995, the turnout was 72.8 percent. Only sixteen candidates could win seats, so run-off elections took place.<sup>417</sup> In this

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<sup>415</sup> "The Parliamentary Election in Kyrgyzstan February 5, 1995" Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1995, p. 7. It must be noted that political parties in Kyrgyzstan apart from remaining weak, also revolved around a single leader. It is not always easy to locate them at the left, right or center.

<sup>416</sup> John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy*, Ibid., p.51

<sup>417</sup> Glenn E. Curtis, "Kyrgyzstan: A Country Study" in Lydia M. Buyers (ed.), *Central Asia in Focus: Political and Economic Issues*, Nova Science Publishers, Inc. NY, 2003, p.163

second round of elections held on 19 February 1995, the turnout was lower, about 61 percent.<sup>418</sup> Unlike the first round, in the second round candidates did not have to win a majority of votes. After this round, sixty more deputies were elected, and now the elected deputies constituted more than the two-thirds needed for a quorum to convene the legislature.<sup>419</sup> New elections were scheduled in a couple of few districts to fill up the remaining seats as less than half of the registered voters in these districts had participated the elections. Final results of the 1995 parliamentary elections are provided in Table 1.

As can be seen from Table 1, the majority of elected deputies were independent candidates who were not affiliated with any political party, so it was difficult to assess the political orientation of the new legislature. In the composition of newly formed chambers, however, there was a striking difference. The lower house included mainly executive officials and members of the intelligentsia (lawyers, journalists, medical workers and educators) and the upper house was dominated by business leaders, some of whom apparently sought parliamentary seats in order to acquire immunity from prosecution.<sup>420</sup> The elections represented a rebuff to Akaev, because many independent candidates were able to win the elections on their own and local bosses were preferred over those candidates who had earlier been officials appointed by Akaev.<sup>421</sup> Furthermore, it became clear that political parties have weak roots in the Kyrgyz society and their influence is limited to either the capital city Bishkek or to a particular region or even district.<sup>422</sup> For a few days after the elections there were rumors that Akaev would declare the elections invalid, but he stated that he would work with the new parliament and expressed his hope that it would make a

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<sup>418</sup> Central Election Commission release available in *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 21 February 1995

<sup>419</sup> Ibid. p.9

<sup>420</sup> Eugene Huskey, "Kyrgyzstan: the Fate of Political Liberalization," in *Conflict, cleavage, and change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, eds. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, NY, USA : Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 263-264

<sup>421</sup> John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy*, Ibid., p.52

<sup>422</sup> Rafiz Abazov, "*Politicheskie Preobrazovania v Kirgizstane i Evolucia Prezidentskoi Sistemi*" [Political transformation and Evolution of Presidential System in Kyrgyzstan], *Central Asia and the Caucasus Journal*, 1(2) 1999.

constructive contribution to the reform process.<sup>423</sup> Expecting the *Jogorku Kenesh* to be intransigent, Akaev took advantage of some divisions within the deputies and pushed through new rules that would expand his own power at the expense of parliament.<sup>424</sup>

**Table 1 Results of 1995 Parliamentary Elections<sup>425</sup>**

Party Name	Orientation	Number of seats	% of votes
Social-Democratic Party	centrist	14	13.3%
<i>Asaba</i>	Nationalist, rightist	4	3.8%
Unity of Kyrgyzstan	-	4	3.8
Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan	Oppositional, leftist	3	2.85%
Democratic Party <i>Erkin Kyrgyzstan</i>	Oppositional	3	2.85%
<i>Ata-Meken</i>	Moderate, nationalist, centrist	3	2.85%
Republican Party	Oppositional, centrist	3	2.85%
Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan	Oppositional, centrist	1	0.95%
Agrarian Party	Pro-government <sup>426</sup> , centrist	1	0.95%
Democratic Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan	Pro-presidential <sup>427</sup>	1	0.95%
Agrarian-Labor Party of Kyrgyzstan	Pro-government	1	0.95%
Democratic Party of Economic Unity	Pro-government	0	0
<b>Unaffiliated</b>		<b>67</b>	<b>63.8%</b>
Total		105	100%

Although according to some reports, the elections of 1995 were “free and fair”<sup>428</sup> as the registered candidates did have their names listed properly on the ballots, there

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Paul Kubicek “Authoritarianism in Central Asia: Curse or Cure?” *Third World Quarterly*, 19(1), 1998, p 38

<sup>425</sup> A. Elebaeva and N. Omuraliev, “*Informatsiia o Politicheskikh Partiakh Kyrgyzstana*” (unpublished manuscript, September 1995); “List of the Jogorku Kenesh members”, distributed by the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic, Washington, DC, November 16, 1995. Quoted in Eugene Huskey, “Kyrgyzstan: the Fate of Political Liberalization”, *Ibid.*, p. 262

<sup>426</sup> In Kyrgyz context, pro-government party is a party which supports the government’ policies, reforms and seeks cooperation with it.

<sup>427</sup> In Kyrgyz context pro-presidential party is a party which openly supports the incumbent president and is headed by a person loyal to the president or one of his relatives.

<sup>428</sup> Freedom House, “Kyrgyz Republic”, *Nations in Transit*, 1998, p.349

were several problems as well. International observers from the OSCE, UN and EU reported irregularities such as ballot stuffing, family voting and fraud in some regions:

There were many reports about the use of pressure and bribes. Candidates told of being intimidated into withdrawing, or of local officials who would not give them the mandated airtime on local television, or allow their platforms to be printed in local newspapers. In Talas oblast, candidates alleged that the entire oblast press, radio and television had been ordered to work on behalf of one candidate and against all the others. They also charged that their meetings with voters had been cancelled. Candidates in Naryn oblast alleged that local authorities dismissed one candidate's trustees and refused another candidate television airtime. Elsewhere, candidates charged that their assistants had been fired from their jobs. And throughout the country, there were allegations that candidates were buying votes with money, gasoline, or other deficit commodities, such as flour, rice, or shoes.<sup>429</sup>

Another problem was related to the ability of *akims* to manipulate the electoral process in their favor, as was the case in the Issyk-Kul region, where the regional governor, Jumagul Saadanbekov is reported to mobilize “his 200-person akimiat, local state enterprises, the regional procuracy, and the young toughs to support the candidacy of the former Prime Minister Tursunbek Chyngyshev.”<sup>430</sup> Eventually Chyngyshev claimed victory. One of the losers of the election, the former parliamentary speaker Medetkan Sherimkulov, charged the officials in his election district to connive to ensure his defeat. Another major influential group in the 1995 parliamentary elections was the state enterprise directors and private businessmen. While *akims* exercised their bureaucratic power in the elections, this group exercised financial power, such as distribution of certain resources like wheat and money.<sup>431</sup> Similar scenarios, with varying degrees of giving “gifts”, intimidation and fraud occurred throughout Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>429</sup> Rafiz Abazov, “*Politicheskie Preobrazovania v Kirgizstane i Evolucia Prezidentskoi Sistemi*” [Political Transformation and Evolution of Presidential System in Kyrgyzstan], *Central Asia and the Caucasus Journal*, 1(2) 1999, p. 8. On February 27, Akaev established an independent public commission to investigate these allegations. Its members included representatives of parties, trade unions, movements, ethnic associations, media, labor groups, and lawyers. (*Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 28 February 1995) Even though such a commission was established it did not have any considerable effect.

<sup>430</sup> Eugene Huskey, “Kyrgyzstan: the Fate of Political Liberalization,” *Ibid.*, p. 260

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, p.261

Perhaps the biggest losers in the 1995 parliamentary elections were the political parties and social movements that were “unable to field a full slate of candidates across the country.”<sup>432</sup> As was mentioned earlier, out of a total of 1,021 candidates a mere 161 had party affiliations. Of the 105 members of the *Jogorku Kenesh*, only 38 were party members, with only 15 of them having run as a candidate of a political party. All the remaining members were independents.<sup>433</sup> Although these parties represented a wide range of political tendencies, no single party could hold more than four seats in the *Jogorku Kenesh*. In most instances, only the leader of the party could make it to the legislature. Even the Communist Party could not succeed in sending many deputies, only six of the former communist deputies could win seats. The deputies were also coming from a variety of different occupational backgrounds: government officials (central, regional, local), businessmen, representatives of the intelligentsia, and clan leaders. The single largest group (25) was engineers, followed by seven economists, seven teachers, five surgeons and five lawyers.<sup>434</sup>

As Eugene Huskey argued, “If the [1995] parliamentary elections represent[ed] a defining moment, it is not in the consolidation of democracy but in the criminalization and regionalization of politics in Kyrgyzstan.”<sup>435</sup> According to John Anderson, these elections threw up new problems, as electoral system favored the old elites, regional bosses and criminal elements, while leaving ethnic minorities and women severely underrepresented.<sup>436</sup> Perhaps most importantly, as the 1993 Constitution made no provision for a two-chamber parliament, the two houses soon found themselves engaged in “bitter wrangling over their respective spheres of influence and authority.”<sup>437</sup> This situation lasted for about two years. The powers between the two chambers would be changed later, as a result of the 1996 referendum. The lower chamber became a permanent legislative body and upper

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Freedom House, “Kyrgyz Republic”, *Nations in Transit*, 1998, p.351

<sup>434</sup> *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 22 February 1995

<sup>435</sup> Eugene Huskey, “Kyrgyzstan: the Fate of Political Liberalization,” p. 265

<sup>436</sup> John Anderson, “Constitutional Development in Central Asia” *Central Asian Survey*, 16 (3), (1997) p. 315

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

chamber started to meet occasionally to approve the budget and confirm presidential appointees.

### 2.3.2 2000 Parliamentary Elections

On 26 April 1999 the *Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie* (Legislative Assembly) of *Jogorku Kenesh* passed a new election code drafted by the government.<sup>438</sup> It brought many changes to the election practice in Kyrgyzstan the impact of which would be clearly seen in the 2000 parliamentary elections. The first major change was about the introduction of a mixed electoral method. According to this, the lower house, *Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie* (now 60 members), would be composed of 45 deputies elected from single-member districts and 15 deputies nominated by political parties on the basis of proportional representation with 5% electoral threshold. As for the upper house, *Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei* (now 45 members), it would be composed of deputies elected from single-member districts. In order to secure a victory in the first round (for both chambers), a candidate had to get an absolute majority of the registered voters in that district. If no such majority could be achieved, then the two leading candidates would enter the second round of voting, in which a plurality of the votes cast would be sufficient. In addition to these changes in the electoral system, there were two other new arrangements. One made the Central Election Commission (CEC) a permanent body,<sup>439</sup> and the other introduced (for the first time among the post-Soviet countries after Russia) and put into practice a new automated system of vote calculations *Shailoo* (Elections).<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> RFE/RL, “Kyrgyz Parliament Passes New Election Code”, Asia Times online <http://www.atimes.com/c-asia/AD29Ag02.html>(Accessed on 15.04.2008)

<sup>439</sup> The Central Election Commission had been established by Akaev in September 1994 as a temporary institution that was responsible for running elections. At that time, Akaev's formation of the CEC contravened the constitution, which gave this duty to the parliament. Moreover, the CEC's 15 members included three representatives of political parties, two of whom were members of parties established by the government, while 12 members belonged to organizations funded or otherwise controlled by the government. (“The Parliamentary Election in Kyrgyzstan February 5, 1995”, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1995, p.6)

<sup>440</sup> The CEC used an automated information system for the transfer of information from the Territorial Election Commissions to the CEC, for publishing voter turnout levels during the day, and the publication of the results at the end of the process. This was an effort to increase the transparency of the process. The results from the *Shailoo* automated vote tabulation system are published, in a reasonable timeframe, for all levels, including Precinct Election Commissions' results. This ensures full transparency and accountability. (OSCE, “Kyrgyz Republic Parliamentary Elections 20 February & 12 March 2000. ODIHR Final Report”, Ibid. p. 28)

The elections were held on 20 February 2000 (the first round) and 12 March 2000 (second round). The total number of candidates for both chambers was over 600.<sup>441</sup> However, this number would eventually be reduced down to 413<sup>442</sup> as some candidates ended up either not being registered due to their voluntary decisions or being discharged by the decisions of CEC, Supreme Court and local courts.<sup>443</sup> Eventually, 230 candidates ran for *Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie*<sup>444</sup> and 183 candidates ran for *Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei*.<sup>445</sup> For the national party list proportional elections, a 5% threshold was also applied.<sup>446</sup>

As was the case in 1995, several different parties with different political orientations participated in the 2000 elections. Among the six political parties and blocks that ran in elections, the main opposition parties were *Ata-Meken*, the People's Party, the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, and *Ar-Namys*, all of which were well-established in certain regions of the country.<sup>447</sup> *Ata-Meken* advocated a multi-party system and supported democratic development, promotion of private ownership, access to health care, education, employment and housing, and combating corruption. The party's main areas of support were in the south, in Osh and Jalal-Abad *oblasts*.<sup>448</sup> People's Party advocated stabilization of economic, political and social life and sustainable development, protection of rights and freedoms of citizens, cooperation with the other former Soviet states, and fight against discrimination on the basis of nationality, class, language, religion, race and gender. People's Party also aimed to promote state guarantees of minimum wage for the unprivileged groups

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<sup>441</sup> "Elections to Jogorku Kenesh 2000 in Numbers" (Word Document in Russian) (Central Election Commission of Kyrgyzstan) available at <http://www.shailoo.kg/?name=kenesh> )

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

<sup>443</sup> Anara Tabyshalieva "The Kyrgyz Republic on the Verge of Change?" Helsinki Monitor, 14(3), 2003, p.219

<sup>444</sup> Rafiz Abazov, "The Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan, February 2000", *Electoral Studies* 22(3), 2003, p. 549

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> According to Article 80 of the Election Code, the method for seat distribution is the Hare Quota, in which remaining seats are allocated by using the method of largest remainder. (see Election Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2000)

<sup>447</sup> Anara Tabyshalieva. Ibid. p.220

<sup>448</sup> "Report On The Parliamentary Elections In Kyrgyzstan February-March 2000", Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Washington., 2000, p.6

such as students, women and veterans of wars.<sup>449</sup> The Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan advocated democratic development of society, building of a state based on rule of law, and strengthening the unity of the Kyrgyz people. Finally, *Ar-Namys* declared its goals as promotion of social welfare by a democratic state and free economy, the creation of reliable banking system as one of condition of getting out of crisis and making Kyrgyzstan the financial center of Central Asia, lowering unemployment (especially among the young people), support for small and medium sized enterprises and restriction of the executive powers of the president.<sup>450</sup>

There were other oppositional parties such as the Communist Party and *Asaba*. The former fiercely attacked the government's radical "shock therapy" approach to economic reform and called for the revision of the privatization program, the reinstatement of state control over major sectors of the economy (including large industrial enterprises, mining, and foreign trade), and price regulation.<sup>451</sup> The party relied on its old network of party members, industrial workers, pensioners, war veterans, and a section of the urban intelligentsia, although it was unable to recruit support from younger voters.<sup>452</sup> As for *Asaba*, it mainly emphasized national revival, ethnic nationalism, and the strengthening of national sovereignty. It largely appealed to young and frustrated voters, especially the newly urbanized intelligentsia and the entrepreneurs, who had not achieved the anticipated prosperity because they had largely missed the economic opportunities generated by privatization and economic liberalization. The party was critical of the government's policy of multiculturalism and civic nationalism, and of its "unnecessary concessions" to ethnic minorities in language policy and other issues.<sup>453</sup>

There were also pro-government and centrist parties, such as *Maya Strana* (My Country), the Union of Democratic Forces, and the Democratic Party of Women,

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<sup>449</sup> *Politicheskie parti Kirgizistana* [Political Parties of Kyrgyzstan], IPP, Bishkek 2006, p. 45

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49

<sup>451</sup> Rafis Abazov "The Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan February 2000", *Electoral Studies* 22(3), 2003, p. 548

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> Rafis Abazov "The Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan" pp.547-548



which basically emphasized the necessity of continuation of market-oriented reforms, democratization and better living standards. *Maya Strana*, with its main area of support in the capital, further called for unifying the country by ending the north-south conflicts and defending private property.<sup>454</sup> These parties relied on the support of the bureaucracy, some sections of the intelligentsia and ethnic minorities, and the so called “new Kyrgyz” who made fortunes during the 1990s and wanted to preserve their political influence in legislature.

Some of these parties would be eventually eliminated. For example, the People’s Party and *Ar-Namys* were prevented from competing in the elections. People’s Party was barred because the Ministry of Justice determined that its charter was not in accordance with Article 92 of the Election Code of Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>455</sup> Five other parties were also barred because they were registered less than one year prior to the calling of elections, including the pro-presidential *Adilet* (Justice) Party and *Ar-Namys*.<sup>456</sup> The Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, which decided to unite with *Ar-Namys* informally, was also dismissed prior to elections. The *Pervomaiskii Rayon Court* (one of the local courts in Bishkek) and Supreme Court denied registration for this party due to alleged violation of inner-party regulations on promotions of candidates to elections.<sup>457</sup>

15 parties that were qualified to participate in the elections organized themselves into two election blocks. The first block, called the Union of Democratic Forces, included the Unity of Kyrgyzstan, the Social-Democratic Party of Economic Revival and *Adilet*. The second block, Manas, included the Republican People’s Party of

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> OSCE. “Kyrgyz Republic Parliamentary Elections 20 February and 12 March 2000. ODIHR Final Report” Ibid. p. 5. Article 92 of the Election Code has two important stipulations regarding party participation in the election: only parties whose “charters foresee participation in elections of state bodies”; and only parties “registered with the Ministry of Justice not later than one year prior to the day of appointment of elections ... shall have the right to participate in elections to the Legislative Assembly” (The Election Code of Kyrgyz Republic, adopted on 29 May 1999 available in Russian at <http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/law/codecs/?all=1>) (Accessed on 22.03.2008)

<sup>456</sup> OSCE. “Kyrgyz Republic Parliamentary Elections 20 February and 12 March 2000. ODIHR Final Report” Ibid. p. 5

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

Kyrgyzstan and the Party of Protection of Industrial, Agricultural Workers and Needy families.”<sup>458</sup> The rest competed as separate political parties (see Table 2).

The first round of elections was held on 20 February 2000, with a turnout rate of 64.4 percent.<sup>459</sup> It took several days before the CEC announced the official results as it had to investigate a number of complaints filed by the oppositional organizations and individuals regarding the elections. When the final results were announced, it was seen that in single mandate districts only three candidates could get more than 50% of the votes, so the second round of elections had to be held. In between the two rounds, six candidates decided not to run, eleven were discharged by court decisions and one by a CEC decision.<sup>460</sup> Soon after the first round, the CEC made a controversial decision: if a candidate decided not to participate in the second round of the elections or if he/she was dismissed, the other candidate automatically was accepted as officially elected. It was suggested that this decision was used as another means of eliminating and excluding potential oppositional candidates who could be pressured not to participate to the second round.<sup>461</sup> This happened to the leader of People’s Party Daniyar Usenov, who has secured more than 50 percent of votes in the first round.<sup>462</sup>

The second round was held on 12 March 2000. Turnout rose slightly to 61.9 percent.<sup>463</sup> 43 deputies were elected to the *Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie* and 42 deputies were elected to the *Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei*.<sup>464</sup> Five seats still remained empty and a final round of elections was held to fill these seats. The final results of the elections are shown in Table 2.

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<sup>458</sup> Kiniev Aleksandr. Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Central Election Commission release, available in *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 17 March 2000

<sup>460</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev, Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Anara Tabyshalieva, Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev, Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Central Election Commission release, available in *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 17 March 2000

<sup>464</sup> Rafis Abazov “The Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan”, Ibid., p. 550

**Table 2 Results of 2000 Parliamentary Elections<sup>465</sup>**

Party Name	Orientation <sup>466</sup>	Party List Seats	Single Member Constituency Seats	Total Seats	% of votes in (Proportional Representation)
Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan	Oppositional, leftist	5	1	6	27.78
Union of Democratic Forces (block)	Pro-presidential	4	8	12	18.63
Democratic Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan	Pro-presidential	2	0	2	12.7
Party of Afghan War Veterans	Pro-presidential	2	0	2	8.0
<i>Ata-Meken</i>	Oppositional, centrist	1	1	2	6.5
<i>Maya Strana</i>	Pro-government, centrist	1	3	4	5.0
People's Party	Oppositional	0	2 <sup>467</sup>	2	-
Democratic Party <i>Erkin Kyrgyzstan</i>	Oppositional, centrist	0	1	1	4.2
Agrarian-Labor Party of Kyrgyzstan	Pro-government, centrist	0	1	1	2.5
Agrarian Party	Pro-government, centrist	0	0	0	2.4
Manas Coalition (block)	oppositional	0	0	0	2.4
<i>Asaba</i>	Nationalist, rightist	0	0	0	1.5
Others <sup>468</sup>					8.5
<b>Independent Candidates</b>			<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>	-
Total		15	90	105	100

As can be seen from the Table 2, nine political parties entered the parliament, the Communist Party being the strongest among them. Pro-presidential/pro-

<sup>465</sup> Data provided from OSCE. "Kyrgyz Republic Parliamentary Elections 20 February & 12 March 2000. ODIHR Final Report" Ibid. p. 20. Proportional representation percentage is available in Rafis Abazov "The Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan, February 2000", *Electoral Studies* 22(3), 2003, p.551

<sup>466</sup> None of the parties is particularly cohesive and changes in the political orientation can be expected. The delineation into "pro-presidential" and "oppositional" is to reflect the general orientation of the parties.

<sup>467</sup> Though People's Party was denied registration to run on party list basis, two of its members were elected on the single-member district constituency basis.

<sup>468</sup> 8.5 percent of votes in proportional representation belong to many of fragmented small parties about which no specific data were given.

governmental parties were represented by the Democratic Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan, *Maya Strana*, Party of Afghan War Veterans and one of the blocks, the Union of Democratic Forces.<sup>469</sup> It became obvious that in general after the 2000 parliamentary elections, the majority of deputies in both chambers of *Jogorku Kenesh* were supporters of Akaev. Although the Communist Party got the majority of party-list seats (6 out of 15 allocated for political parties), a majority of the 73 independents were Akaev's supporters. As can be seen from Table 2, in single-member constituencies, pro-government and pro-presidential parties also won many seats. Table 2 also shows that in total only eleven oppositional candidates made their way to the parliament (party list plus single member constituency basis), representing four parties: People's Party, the Communist Party, *Ata-Meken* and *Erkin Kyrgyzstan*. Oppositional parties declared that in many cases the results were fabricated. These claims were not groundless, as during the campaign period President Akaev did everything possible to prevent the emergence of a united and consolidated opposition. For example, through the establishment of certain give and take relations and negotiations some oppositional leaders were given top positions in the government. Those who refused to give up found themselves under pressure as were the cases of Daniyar Usenov (the chairman of People's Party), Felix Kulov (the chairman of *Ar-Namys*) and Jypar Jeksheev (the leader of Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan). These leaders were arrested shortly or during the elections.<sup>470</sup>

The president also managed to suppress the opposition by other means such as disqualifying the opponents from participation in the elections by creating various obstacles like the requirement for a party to be registered for at least one year before elections day or sending strong real or potential rivals abroad to serve as ambassadors. That was the case for Bakyt Beishimov (sent to India), Chingiz Aytmatov (sent to Netherlands), Apas Djumagulov (sent to Germany) and Rosa Otunbaeva (sent to the United Kingdom).

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<sup>469</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev. Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev. Ibid.

Other factors also prevented the formation of strong political parties participating to the 2000 parliamentary elections. One such factor was the CEC that failed to act in an independent, fair, objective way. In addition to this, mass media institutions were biased and in most cases state officials intervened into the election process. Reports highlight gross violations during elections.<sup>471</sup> Coalition “For Democracy and Civil Society”<sup>472</sup> explained that they sent 56 complaints to courts, 45 complaints to General Prosecutor and 66 complaints to lower-level election commissions.”<sup>473</sup>

### **2.3.3 2005 Parliamentary Elections**

Parliamentary elections in 2005 had a major impact in Kyrgyzstan as it resulted in a series of developments that ended the Akaev era in the country. At the time of the elections, Kyrgyzstan was challenged by several factors such as further deterioration of economy, increasing social tensions, new expectations created by the “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine, and the uncertainty arising from Akaev’s term approaching to an end. As Akaev wanted both to continue to remain an influential political figure himself and to keep his clan in power, he aimed to control the parliamentary majority after the elections. It could become possible either through electing Akaev as the new prime minister or by electing his son or daughter as the new president. Elections were conducted according to the new rules introduced by the 2003 referendum. There would be a new unicameral parliament consisting of 75 deputies elected in single-mandate constituencies for five years.

Probably partly because of his hope that relatives are the most reliable people, and partly because of overall interference of Akaev’s family in the process of administration of the country, astonishing number of relatives of the president and his closest friends decided to run for a seat in the parliament in the 2005 parliamentary elections. In particular, Bermet and Aydar, daughter and son of the

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<sup>471</sup> Report of Coalition “For Democracy and Civil Society” available in *ResPublica*, 22 March 2000, p.3

<sup>472</sup> This coalition is a non-partisan and neutral organization working on strengthening democracy and building civil society in Kyrgyzstan. It unites more than 130 NGOs in every sphere of life and has a regional office in every oblast. Its principal partner is National Democratic Institute working on USAID grant.(<http://www.friends-partners.org/CCSI/nisorgs/kyrgyz/demandcs.htm>)

<sup>473</sup> Report of Coalition “For Democracy and Civil Society” available in *ResPublica*, 22 March 2000, p.3

president, two sisters of the wife of the president, son of Prime-Minister, son and son-in-law of the head of the Presidential Administration, brother of the Minister of Internal Affairs, husband of the Minister of Social Security, brother of the Chui *oblast* governor decided to stand for a seat in the parliament.<sup>474</sup> There were protests even before the election day on the matter of Bermet Akaeva's candidacy. For example, Bolot Maripov, a candidate who ran in the same electoral district with Bermet Akaeva (and would later become a deputy), applied to CEC several times, presenting evidence of violations during the election campaign period. According to Maripov, Bermet should have been dismissed as a candidate right from the beginning because in 2003 she resided in Switzerland. This was in open contradiction with Article 69(1) of the Election Code as well as Article 56(1) of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic in which it is stated that: "A citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic, who has attained the age of 25 and has permanently resided in the Republic for no less than 5 years before the election, may be elected a Deputy of the Jogorku Kenesh."<sup>475</sup> However CEC ignored the application by Bolot Maripov and did not dismiss Bermet Akaeva, thus violating the Election Code.<sup>476</sup>

Originally there were 425 registered candidates, however, 23 of them withdrew their candidacy in the pre-election period, and 12 were de-registered.<sup>477</sup> 389 candidates finally contested in the elections. According to the Election Code, candidates could either be nominated by the parties/blocs or be self-nominated, and registration of single-mandate candidates is performed by the Territorial Election Commissions. To stand as a candidate 30,000 som (750 USD) registration fee must be paid.<sup>478</sup>

Political parties contesting in the 2005 Parliamentary election were various: there were pro-government parties such as *Alga, Kyrgyzstan* (Forward, Kyrgyzstan) which

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<sup>474</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev, "Election to Jogorku Kenesh 2005 and events of 24-25 March 2005". Stratagema (available at <http://www.stratagema.org/polittechnology.php?nws=gpv0n7620409409>, 27 October 2005)

<sup>475</sup> Election Code, Article 69, paragraph 1, Bishkek, 2003

<sup>476</sup> *ResPublica*, 18 May 2005, p.2

<sup>477</sup> Linda Kartawich. "Kyrgyzstan: Parliamentary Elections 2005" (NORDEM Report 09/2005 p.11 available at <http://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/about/programmes/nordem/publications/nordem-report/2005/0905.pdf>) (Accessed on 12.07.2009)

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*

was recognized as Akaev's main tool in his attempt to control the next parliament. Although having no formal role within the party, the president's daughter, Bermet Akaeva, acted as a consultant to the party and was widely involved in its activities. *Adilet* was officially led by the head of the presidential administration, Toichubek Kasymov, but in practice it was led by the deputy Kubanychbek Jumaliev, a close friend of the president. *Maya Strana* started out as pro-governmental party, although later became relatively more independent, trying to promote political progress and economic reform. The Vice-Prime Minister Djoomart Otorbaev was the leader of this party that worked predominantly for the candidates in the south.

Opposition parties organized themselves into five oppositional blocks. The People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan (known commonly as the Movement) was among the most important ones including nine parties: Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan, Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, Republican Party of Kyrgyzstan, *Asaba*, *Kayran-el* (Poor Nation), Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, *Erkindik*, *Erkin Kyrgyzstan*, and New Kyrgyzstan. The ex-prime minister and the governor of Chui *oblast*, Kurmanbek Bakiev, a wealthy southerner, was leading the Movement. According to some, Kurmanbek Bakiev would be the strongest candidate in the presidential elections to be held soon after the 2005 parliamentary elections in October of the same year. The second block was the Civic Union for Fair Elections, which included *Ar-Namys* led by Felix Kulov; *Atajurt* (Fatherland) formed in 2004 by the former ambassador Roza Otunbaeva; and *Jani Bagit* (New Course) led by the former foreign minister Muratbek Imanaliev. In addition to these two blocs there were other oppositional parties that did not enter into any block but had a regional basis. Among these, *Ata-Meken*, which generally was associated with the parliamentary deputy Omurbek Tekebaev's home territory of Jalal Abad, and the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, which was predominately based in Bishkek and Chui *oblast*, where businessman Almaz Atambaev was influential and better known.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Linda Kartawich, *Ibid.* p.7

On 29 December 2004 these five oppositional blocks had signed a memorandum of cooperation to be united against “the administrative block.”<sup>480</sup> However, it is important to note that this unity was quite questionable as former Akaev loyalists were now standing as rival candidates for the parliamentary elections. Although the opposition blocs signed a memorandum, they were far from being united, because the parties within these blocks competed with each other, and loyalties shifted fast.<sup>481</sup> Each block struggled for its own political survival “[w]ithout actually upholding an alternative project for society.”<sup>482</sup> Moreover, the term “opposition” was also vague, because even the most well-known oppositional figures at one time served under Akaev. In this context, when we look at the composition of candidates, we see that one third of them were relatives of Akaev’s clan or his close allies. Another one third of candidates were wealthy businessmen trying to buy parliamentary seats, who according to one estimate would spend about 350 million USD for their election campaign (a number which is almost close to the whole budget of the country).<sup>483</sup> The final one-third was the “opposition” that hoped to get about a third of the seats in the new parliament.<sup>484</sup>

The first round of the elections was held on 27 February 2005 with a turnout of 60 percent.<sup>485</sup> There were 389 candidates, who officially ran as “independent” candidates. Two pro-governmental parties, however, *Alga*, *Kyrgyzstan* and *Adilet* could succeed to nominate the majority of the candidates (65 percent) affiliated with them.<sup>486</sup> Only 32 received the absolute majority of votes required to be elected, ten of

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<sup>480</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev. Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Linda Kartawich, Ibid. p.7

<sup>482</sup> Boris-Mathieu Petric, “Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan or the Birth of a Globalized Protectorate” *Central Asian Survey*, September 2005 24(3), p. 324

<sup>483</sup> Alexey Kochetov. “Is ‘Tulip Revolution’ Possible in Kyrgyzstan? Who is Next in Line after Ukraine?” Ethnicity and Nation Building Program, the Carnegie Moscow Center. The speakers were Roza Otunbaeva, co-chair of the opposition socio-political movement Atajurt and Mambetjunus Abylov, Chairman of the Democratic Party “Development.” available at <http://www.carnegie.ru/en/pubs/media/9127Otunbaeva%20Summary.pdf> (Accessed on 02.02.2004)

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Rafis Abazov, “The Parliamentary Election in Kyrgyzstan, February/March 2005”, *Electoral Studies* 26(2), 2007 p. 532

<sup>486</sup> Linda Kartawich. Ibid. p.6



whom were members of Akaev's *Alga*, *Kyrgyzstan* Party. President Akaev's son Aydar Akaev won the first round with almost 80 percent in the president's hometown of Kemin, in the Chui *oblast*.<sup>487</sup>

After the first round, only two oppositional candidates could win seats in their constituencies: Muratbek Mukashev of the *Atajurt* Party and Azimbek Beknazarov from *Asaba*. Other successful candidates were all known to be pro-governmental. In other constituencies, a second round was announced to be held on 13 March 2005.<sup>488</sup> The president's daughter Bermet Akaeva also had to go to the second round, as she could get 45 percent of the votes in the first round.<sup>489</sup> As all the candidates were officially designated as "independent" no meaningful table of results can be presented. Immediately after the first round of elections, Kurmanbek Bakiev, at that time the leader of the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan held a press-conference. He claimed the elections were the most unfair of all elections held during the post-independence period of Kyrgyzstan.<sup>490</sup>

On 13 March 2005, the second round of elections was held in 39 constituencies. The turnout was 58.99 percent.<sup>491</sup> This round was characterized by fraud and violations, further increasing discontent. On 22 March 2005, the CEC issued Resolution No: 58 declaring the total number of deputies of the *Jogorku Kenesh* to be 69.<sup>492</sup> Six seats had remained empty. After the final round with which these seats were also filled, it was declared that the oppositional parties got only 5 seats out of 75. The remaining

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<sup>487</sup> Bermet Stakeeva, "The Kyrgyz Republic: Twice Beaten Thrice Energised", *I know politics* (international knowledge network of women in politics), available at [http://www.iknowpolitics.org/files/Seethings%20and%20Seatings\\_Part2.pdf](http://www.iknowpolitics.org/files/Seethings%20and%20Seatings_Part2.pdf) (Accessed on 08.12.2009)

<sup>488</sup> SHAILOO (State Registration System). "Rezultati viborov Jogorku Kenesha KR 22 Marta 2005"/ The results of Parliamentary elections 22 March 2005 (The Central Election Commission, <http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/jogorku/results/?all=1>) (Accessed on 27.11.2008)

<sup>489</sup> Linda Kartawich, *Ibid.* p.7

<sup>490</sup> Kiniev Aleksandr, "Election to Jogorku Kenesh 2005 and Events of 24-25 March 2005"

<sup>491</sup> *Slovo Kirgiztsana*, 15 March 2005

<sup>492</sup> SHAILOO (State Registration System). "Rezultati viborov Jogorku Kenesha KR 22 Marta 2005" [The results of Parliamentary elections 22 March 2005], *Ibid.*

seats went to the two pro-presidential parties *Alga, Kyrgyzstan* and *Adilet*.<sup>493</sup> The majority of seats had been won by candidates from business circles with close links to local or national governments or to Akaev's family members or close associates.<sup>494</sup>

The composition of the new parliament as well as the qualifications of its deputies resulted in severe criticisms by the opposition.<sup>495</sup> The CEC received 425 complaints.<sup>496</sup> Many of the second round results were challenged in court. During the election campaign bribes were used by all candidates. As it was noted by the oppositional newspaper *Moya Stolica (My capital)*

poverty in high-mountainous villages forces a villager to accept pre-election give-aways (inducements). And though by heart and reason the person favors a particular candidate, but, having received a bag of flour or 100-200 soms (Kyrgyz currency equivalent to 5 USD), s/he already considers her/himself obliged to vote for the one who distributed the give-away.<sup>497</sup>

In addition to these problems, the intimidation of candidates as well as voters by pro-Akaev candidates also became a normal practice, including the cases of Bermet Akaeva and Aydar Akaev. There were also incidents of intimidation of observers. For example, in one district election commission, the head of local administration hit an observer of one oppositional candidate and broke her video camera.<sup>498</sup> In some polling stations, domestic non-partisan observers were denied full access to observe the election process.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> "The Chronicle of Revolution", Analytical Weekly issue of *Kommersant Vlast*, 28 March 2005

<sup>494</sup> Rafis Abazov, "The Parliamentary Election in Kyrgyzstan, February/March 2005", p. 532

<sup>495</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Kyrgyzstan*, available at [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2174\\_05.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2174_05.htm) (Accessed on 12.03.2010)

<sup>496</sup> SHAILOO (State Registration System). "Rezultati viborov Jogorku Kenesha KR 22 Marta 2005"[ The results of Parliamentary elections 22 March 2005], Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> "No Porajenie ot Pobedi uje Vozmojno Otlichit/ The defeat is already recognizable from the victory" (*Moya Stolica Novosti*, oppositional newspaper, 4 March 2005)

<sup>498</sup> ENEMO Statement on Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan. February 27 and March 13, 2005, ENEMO International Observation Mission Kyrgyz Parliamentary Elections 2005, available at [http://www.enemo.org.ua/Final%20ENEMO%20Mar%2015\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.enemo.org.ua/Final%20ENEMO%20Mar%2015_Eng.pdf), pp. 1-4 (Accessed on 16.09.2009 )

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

Polling station procedural violations such as voter list irregularities, presence of campaign materials inside polling stations, improperly filled copies of protocols, and instances of voting without proper identification were also observed. In some cases, these were the results of simple ignorance of law or poor administration, but in others there was intentional disregard of legal provisions. The European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO) election observers reported “a number of cases when nonpartisan observers were seriously restricted in their rights to observe all stages of the election process and instances of intimidation.”<sup>500</sup> ENEMO also reported a series of other violations that took place a few days before the first round of elections: “Radio Free Europe’s *Azattyk* (Liberty) signal was shut off; power was cut to Kyrgyzstan’s largest independent printing newspaper MSN, and pro-government television stations aired information to discredit several candidates, in violation of the Kyrgyz law.”<sup>501</sup> In addition, OSCE also reported that this was done under the pretext of conducting a radio frequency auction.<sup>502</sup> After the station’s signal was shut off, the station's programs were rebroadcast by radio *Almaz*. The *Azattyk* station could resume airing at its original frequencies only on 25 March 2005.<sup>503</sup>

Although international organizations such as the OSCE and ENEMO criticized the elections as “having failed to meet international norms of fairness and transparency,”<sup>504</sup> some civil society organizations loyal to Akaev’s family (such as the Association of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan, the Congress of Local Communities, and the Council of Democratic Security) were reporting that everything was going smoothly and whenever there was a problem, it was because of the opposition’s violation of the rules. These reports were also supported by the observers from some

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> ENEMO Statement on Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan. February 27 And March 13, 2005 (On 24 February 2005 starting at 18:00 the authorities prevented Radio *Azattyk* from airing on frequencies accessible to the entire country during electioneering.

<sup>502</sup> OSCE. “Elections 2005. Monitoring of Media during Elections Report for Parliamentary Elections in the Kyrgyz Republic”, p.74 available at [http://www.osce.org/documents/cib/2005/06/15138\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/cib/2005/06/15138_en.pdf)

<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

<sup>504</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, “Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution”, Ibid.

of the member countries of the CIS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization which were friendly towards Akaev's regime.<sup>505</sup>

All of these problems created a feeling of unfairness and resentment among the people, increasing the public anger and dissent against the Akaev regime. Soon after the second round of elections, the protests which had been ongoing prior to the elections started to intensify and opposition parties started to call for the cancellation of the parliamentary elections and the holding of an early presidential election. They held demonstrations in central Bishkek and in the south of the country, eventually taking control of local government buildings in the south of Kyrgyzstan.<sup>506</sup>

All these developments would lead to a popular uprising which started right after the 2005 parliamentary elections. As a result of this uprising, Askar Akaev's era would come to an end by the "Tulip Revolution" analyzed at the end of the next part.

#### **2.3.4 Parliamentary Elections in Perspective**

All the three parliamentary elections described above had some common characteristics. First of all, in these elections Election Code was constantly being changed in its provisions for electoral rules, number of seats, method of elections, and rules for party/candidate registration. This situation made it very difficult for potential candidates to find enough time to prepare themselves and to register for the elections. They also could not coalesce into viable oppositional entities. The use of single member districts virtually ensured that local issues and loyalties would triumph over attempts to build national parties and national political programs.<sup>507</sup> Indeed the electoral rules provided more favorable conditions for the *akims* as well as regional political and economic elites. However, the government did not even respect these electoral rules and manipulated them for its interests.

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<sup>505</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev, *Ibid.*

<sup>506</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Parliamentary Elections 2005. Kyrgyz Republic, Warsaw 20 May 2005, p.24

<sup>507</sup> Eugene Huskey, "Kyrgyzstan: the Fate of Political Liberalization," *Ibid.*, p. 260

Second common point is related to the attitude of the ruling elites associated with Akaev who chose to fight the oppositional parties not through intensive political campaign but through barring them from registering for the elections both in 2000 and 2005.<sup>508</sup> As was mentioned earlier the oppositional candidates were being intimidated and eliminated in various ways. This would become much more obvious in the 2000 elections in which potential candidates from the leading oppositional parties were forced out of the race. After the first round, Daniyar Usenov (People's Party) and Omurbek Suvanaliev (*Ar-Namys* Party) were discharged.<sup>509</sup> Although these candidates had qualified for the second round, they were de-registered based on complaints concerning their initial registration and their conduct in the election campaign. The official reason for de-registration for Daniyar Usenov was irregular financial declaration, and for Omurbek Suvanaliev vote-buying.<sup>510</sup> Moreover, a criminal case against Usenov dating back to 1996 was re-opened by the public prosecutor during the election campaign.<sup>511</sup> Another case was Felix Kulov's, who was eliminated after the first round and arrested after the election. Actually Felix Kulov had been sentenced to seven years in prison in 2000, after being accused of forgery, abuse of power and complicity in a crime, while he was the Minister of National Security in 1997-1998.<sup>512</sup> His relatives had been fired and were forced to leave Kyrgyzstan.<sup>513</sup> One other case was related to Omurbek Tekbaev (from the *Ata-Meken* party), who was elected in the first round, but was taken to court after the second round, accused of vote buying.<sup>514</sup> It is widely accepted that all these verdicts were politically biased, rather than juridical.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> Rafis Abazov, "The Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan, February 2000", *Ibid.*, p. 549

<sup>509</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev. *Ibid.*

<sup>510</sup> OSCE, "Kyrgyz Republic Parliamentary Elections 20 February and 12 March 2000. Final Report" *Ibid.* p. 8

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.* p.7

<sup>512</sup> *The Times of Central Asia*, newspaper, 31 March 2001

<sup>513</sup> *Asaba* newspaper, 2 February 2001.

<sup>514</sup> Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen "Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan", *Ibid.*, p. 21

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33

Third common characteristic of all the parliamentary elections, in close relation to the second point was the existence of several violations and subjective decisions of the judicial branch. Indeed, whenever there was a potential candidate able to challenge the presidential powers and the regime, Akaev used the judicial branch to eliminate these rivals. A similar attitude can be observed for the CEC which reinterpreted the Election Code so that it would serve the interests of the president better. That was the case, for example, in the 2000 elections in which a candidate was automatically acknowledged as the winner of elections if his rival refused to participate in the second round. As was pointed out earlier, this interpretation created room for abuse, because candidates could be pressurized and forced to give up. In fact, some oppositional leaders were either disqualified or their registration was annulled before the second round. So the other rival automatically was elected. This happened to Daniyar Usenov, who has secured more than 50 percent of votes in the first round.<sup>516</sup>

The fourth important characteristic of the parliamentary elections was related to the fact that the large majority of parties and coalitions presented very similar programs. Despite the fact that there are more than hundred political parties registered in Kyrgyzstan, the electorate does not usually see much of a difference among them.<sup>517</sup> Parties sometimes united, sometimes changed their platform and sometimes entered into frequently shifting electoral alliances. So what really distinguished the candidates from each other was only their origin, i.e. their regional or tribal ties. Since these ties are very strong in Kyrgyzstan, whenever there was a perception of “unfairness” to a fellow tribesman, it would create resentment among his supporters. That was the main reason in the 2005 elections in which almost everywhere opposition candidates were forced not to run for parliamentary seats.

Fifth characteristic is related to the general problem of family rule, i.e. “huge penetration of the president’s family into governing of the country” and dissatisfaction of some elites who were pushed from their advantageous positions by

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<sup>516</sup> OSCE, “Kyrgyz Republic Parliamentary Elections 20 February and 12 March 2000. Final Report” p.21

<sup>517</sup> Anara Tabyshalieva “The Kyrgyz Republic on the Verge of Change”, Ibid., p.220

the president's family members.<sup>518</sup> A small group of Akaev's family and friends had become enormously wealthy during his rule. This factor was especially relevant for the period after 2002, and for the parliamentary elections of 2005. The whole regime resembled more and more to a "family rule" in which informal power was in hands of the wife, daughter and son of the president. Furthermore, the main governmental posts and the most profitable sectors of business were allocated among the members of the family or among their favorites.<sup>519</sup>

As was mentioned earlier, such developments would eventually result in the emergence of a popular uprising, the so-called Tulip Revolution, that would oust Akaev from power and end his fifteen years of tenure.

### **2.3.5 The Tulip Revolution**

The uprising began with protests in the southern cities of Jalal Abad and Osh right after the official announcement of the 2005 election results. These initial protests focused on the announcement of the defeated pro-government candidates from the first round of elections as "winners" in the second.<sup>520</sup> In early March, supporters of dismissed candidate Ishembai Kadyrbekov put two *yurts* (tents) in the main square of the Naryn city, blocked public transportation, and closed the Bishkek-Torugart highway. Shortly, the number of demonstrators reached up to 1,500. Similar protest took place in the Issyk-Kul *oblast* and in Uzgen. On 7 March, Kurmanbek Bakiev (a "defeated" candidate) called for an emergency meeting for the *Jogorku Kenesh* and

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<sup>518</sup> Johan Engvall, "Kyrgyzstan: Anatomy of State", *Problems of Post-Communism*, 54(4), 2007, p.39

<sup>519</sup> The wife, daughter, and son-in-law of the President became very powerful and controlled major sectors of the economy such as finance, industry, military technologies, petroleum, stocks, communication, recreation, and media. The wife of the President created a famous charitable foundation *Meerim*, through which businessmen in Kyrgyzstan used to solve their problems (through transfer of money to the foundation). The son of the President Aydar Akaev, became the advisor of the finance minister and the president of the olympic committee of the country. The daughter headed the Aga Khan Foundation, the American University in Central Asia and *Alga Kyrgyzstan*. Other members of Akaev's family owned multiple foundations and public organizations, where a large amount of money was accumulated. For example, sisters of the wife of the President, president's brother and nephews held high positions either in business or in the government, such as governors and deputy governors. President Akaev was famous for his nepotism and tribalism in the sense of appointing relatives to high governmental positions. ("House built by Akaev" *Moya Slotica* [My Capital], newspaper, 6 February 2005)

<sup>520</sup> Yasar Sari and Sureyya Yigit "Kyrgyzstan: Revolution or not?" (Open Democracy, Free Thinking for the World, 4 April 2005 available at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/content/articles/PDF/2404.pdf>). (Accessed on 11 February 2008) However, the biggest scandal broke when CEC declared that Kurmanbek Bakiev lost in his own constituency, in Jalal-Abad.

prescheduled presidential elections.<sup>521</sup> On 14-15 March numerous supporters of candidates who lost in Osh, Uzgen, Alay and Toktogul *rayons*, as well as Jalal-Abad, Batken, and Talas cities organized protest rallies.<sup>522</sup> The protests would soon reach Bishkek. The opposition leaders, supported by thousands of voters, asked the parliamentary elections of 27 February and 13 March to be pronounced invalid. They also demanded Akaev's resignation and called for early presidential elections to be followed by new parliamentary elections.<sup>523</sup>

On 16 March 38 deputies of the incumbent parliament appealed to the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, the Chairman of *Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie* of *Jogorku Kenesh*, and the UN Security Council, stating that the parliamentary elections failed to comply with democratic standards and the president had not fulfilled his functions as a guarantor of the constitution.<sup>524</sup> Two days later, several protestors in Osh were beaten and injured after being attacked by soldiers and special police forces.<sup>525</sup> In the meantime, Askar Akaev organized a pro-government demonstration in the *Alatoo* square, located at central Bishkek the goal of which was to show that people in northern Kyrgyzstan supported him. Students and doctors were told that failure to attend this meeting would result in their being expelled or fired. As was put forward by some scholars, "It was one of the regime's final errors before it was toppled in a popular uprising that, moving from Osh and Jalal Abad to Bishkek, involved only a few thousand active protestors."<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev, "Election to Jogorku Kenesh 2005 and Events of 24-25 March 2005". Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> OSCE Elections 2005. Monitoring of Media during Elections Report for Parliamentary Elections in the Kyrgyz Republic, p.4

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> These demonstrators were split into groups of 100-200 people who randomly went on to storm almost all administrative buildings, including the regional and city administration, the police and security service headquarters, and the prosecutor's office. Many others roamed the streets, wielding rubber batons they had seized from the militia, and blocking traffic. They said they would unblock the traffic only when state television in Bishkek broadcast a report about events in the south. (Yasar Sari and Sureyya Yigit Ibid.)

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.



The opposition accused the government of launching war against its own people and demanded immediate resignation of the president.<sup>527</sup> As the government continued to ignore the protestors and their demands, discontent grew and groups from different provinces of the country started coming to Bishkek, eventually meeting there on 24 March 2005. The total number of protesters is unknown, but it is estimated to be more than 20,000 people. Protestors from outside Bishkek brought with them *yurts* and intended to convene a non-violent sit-in in front of the White House. Around 13:30 in the afternoon, a street-fight started among the protestors and a group of agitators who started to attack the crowd of demonstrators. The security forces, positioned to protect the White House, intervened into the fight.<sup>528</sup> With the sound of a bullet fired, things started to get out of control. The demonstrators became more agitated and aggressive. As a result, security forces opened fire using blank cartridges. Angry protestors stormed the presidential compound and this time the police did not try to stop them. Some officials who could not run away were heavily beaten. The main government building was overrun by the people who were now inside.<sup>529</sup> As was noted by Ben Paarmann, “it remains a small miracle that no one got killed during the clashes.”<sup>530</sup> By this moment Akaev had already left the White House and immediately escaped to Moscow. He would finally resign from his post on 4 April 2005.<sup>531</sup>

As the Tulip Revolution took place immediately after the 2005 parliamentary elections, some scholars have analyzed it in specific reference to electoral politics. For example, Bunce and Wolchik call the Tulip Revolution an “electoral revolution” with certain characteristics: 1) the conscious deployment of an electoral model of democratization; 2) an upsurge in mass participation, not just in elections, but also in the streets before and sometimes after the elections; 3) a major turnover

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<sup>527</sup> “*Osh Zla*”/ Osh is Angry (*Comersant* newspaper, Moscow. 21 March 2005, No: 48 pp.1-9)

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>529</sup> Andrew Tully, “Kyrgyzstan: U.S. Urges Opposition to Exercise Restraint, Follow Rule of Law” (*The Agonist News*, March 25, 2005 available at <http://agonist.org/story/2005/3/24/44551/9812> (Accessed on 12.04.2008))

<sup>530</sup> Ben Paarmann, “A Kyrgyz Déjà Vu” (*Soasspirit*, issue 4, 2005 p.27) available at <http://www.paarmann.info/blog/archives/KyrgyzDejaVu.pdf> (Accessed on 20.12.2007)

<sup>531</sup> OSCE “Elections 2005. Monitoring of Media during Elections Report for Parliamentary Elections in the Kyrgyz Republic”, p.4

in governments, sometimes to the point of regime change; and 4) significant improvement in democratic performance after the election.<sup>532</sup> Authors argue that the goal of electoral revolution is “to transform rigged electoral rituals into fair elections, thereby facilitating a transition from an illiberal to a more liberal government.”<sup>533</sup> Bunce and Wolchik further mention a variety of “tools” in electoral revolutions used by the people such as the formation of a unified opposition, utilization of international and domestic election monitoring as well as the media and public-opinion polls, and preparations for public protests if incumbents try to steal elections.<sup>534</sup> As was discussed in detail before, all of these points could be found in the Tulip Revolution.

Mark R. Beissinger uses the term “stolen elections” in explaining mass mobilization of people against pseudo-democratic regimes upon the announcement of fraudulent electoral results.<sup>535</sup> Emir Kulov, too, underlines stolen elections as the main motivating trigger for the Tulip Revolution. According to him, elections become stolen when the final results are either manipulated or annulled in favor of the incumbent elite.<sup>536</sup> In such cases, they not only mobilize ordinary citizens, but also strengthen the opposition and divide the regime, which might significantly shape the outcomes.<sup>537</sup> Emir Kulov further differentiates stolen elections from “manipulated elections.”<sup>538</sup> Manipulated elections lead to protests, if there is widespread discontent over the incumbent regime increasing over the preceding years and if the opposition candidates have limited, yet available, political space to compete in the elections. Kulov argued that 2005 parliamentary elections were not only stolen, but also

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<sup>532</sup> Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, *Ibid.*, p.5

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>535</sup> Mark R. Beissinger, *Ibid.*, p.261

<sup>536</sup> Emir Kulov, “March 2005: Parliamentary Elections as a Catalyst of Protests”, *Central Asian Survey*, 27(3-4), September-December 2008, p. 338

<sup>537</sup> Mark R. Thompson, and Philipp Kuntz, “Stolen elections: the case of the Serbian October”, *Journal of Democracy*, 15 (4), 2004, pp.159–172.

<sup>538</sup> The examples of manipulation include legal (or formal) obstacles, restricting opposition from a fully-fledged campaign, buying of votes and using administrative (or state) resources that favor the incumbent elite (Emir Kulov p. 339)

manipulated and they entailed “both co-ordination of work within the opposition camp and the mobilization of voters ... which in this case have been decisive in escalating the political crisis around elections.”<sup>539</sup> As such, “political space, although limited for competition and voicing resentment was largely possible due to the existing election design, which was more prone to conflicts among candidates, and to the inability of the incumbent to cope with numerous ‘critical’ constituencies.”<sup>540</sup>

## **2.4 Akaev Era: Presidential Elections**

After describing the referendums and parliamentary elections in the Akaev era, the final part of this chapter will look into presidential elections all of which ended with the victory of the incumbent president. As was the case with the referendums and parliamentary elections, presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan also did not contribute to democratizations but rather turned out to be tools of increasing presidential powers.

### **2.4.1 1990 and 1991 Presidential Elections**

Summer 1990 was marked by a separation among the Kyrgyz communists into conservatives and reformists. In October 1990, the members of the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan<sup>541</sup> decided to go on a hunger strike. 114 deputies of Kyrgyz *Verhovnii Soviet* supported the strike. On 22 October 1990, the participants of the strike demanded the resignation of the chairman of the *Verhovnii Soviet* Absamat Masaliev, and the establishment of a presidential rule, a multi-party system, and the removal of the Communist Party from its leading position. This event revitalized political activity among the Kyrgyz people. Fearing the growth of opposition that would also be supported by the democratic circles in Moscow on the

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<sup>539</sup> Emir Kulov, *Ibid.*, p. 342

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*, p.343

<sup>541</sup> Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan is a political movement that was established in May 1990 as a bloc of several anti-communist political parties, movements and non-government organizations in Kyrgyzstan. Many intellectuals, workers, and students from different ethnic groups including the Kyrgyz, Russian, Ukrainian, German, Jew, Uzbek, and Dungan supported it. Later, it became a political party in June 1993 with Jypar Jeksheev as its chairman.

one hand, and aiming to strengthen their own position on the other, the conservative leaders of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan decided to introduce the institution of presidency. Since the communists held an absolute majority in the parliament, Absamat Masaliev planned to move easily from a party leader to the first president of Kyrgyzstan.<sup>542</sup> However the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan had underestimated the influence of the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan and the level of dissatisfaction among the members of the *Verhovnii Soviet*. Although he had absolute majority in *Verhovnii Soviet*, Absamat Masaliev could not get the necessary number of votes to be elected as the president. According to the electoral rules, the candidate who did not receive 50 percent of votes among the members of *Verhovnii Soviet* could not continue the electoral race. Absamat Masaliev's rival Apas Jumagulov however also could not get the necessary majority.<sup>543</sup> As both candidates were disqualified and neither could run in the second round of voting, on October 27 1990, the *Verhovnii Soviet* selected Askar Akaev as a compromise candidate for the republic's post of president. As a result, 46-years old Akaev, unknown at that time as a politician, was elected as the first president of the Kyrgyz Republic. Akaev's election was only narrowly victorious.<sup>544</sup> Although neither he nor the communist elites of Kyrgyzstan had ever supported the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Akaev was personally committed to the goals of perestroika and to democratizing and reformation of the Soviet system.<sup>545</sup>

Introduction of presidency in Kyrgyzstan was seen as a logical step in political development of the country, as "it filled the political vacuum which emerged as a result of Communist Party's loss of leading positions in political and ideological

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<sup>542</sup> Rafiz Abazov, "Politicheskie Preobrazovania v Kirgizstane i Evolucia Prezidentskoi Sistemi" [Political Transformation and Evolution of Presidential System in Kyrgyzstan], *Central Asia and the Caucasus Journal*, № 1(2) 1999.

<sup>543</sup> *Sovetskaya Kirgizia* [Soviet Kyrgyzia], newspaper, 23 October 1990

<sup>544</sup> Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.178

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, p.159

spheres.”<sup>546</sup> Thus although appointed by the communist era *Verhovnii Soviet*, Akaev’s regime was accepted to be based not on the Communist Party, but rather on the new institution of presidency.<sup>547</sup>

In April 1991 Jumagalbek Amanbaev was elected as the first secretary of Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan after Absamat Masaliev. Most of the communists in the parliament were still supporting the centralized rule of the party. In the first half of 1991, Akaev did not enter into any open confrontation with the communist elite and included Jumagalbek Amanbaev in the government, alongside with Kazat Akmatov (from the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan).<sup>548</sup>

One of the most serious challenges to presidency in Kyrgyzstan at this time was the *coup d'état* attempt against Gorbachev in August 1991.<sup>549</sup> The leaders of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan supported the *coup* and attempted to remove President Akaev. However the failure of the *coup* attempt resulted in the temporary ban of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan. In September 1991 the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan stopped its activities as a result of a parliamentary decision and its property was announced as state property. After this decision, some deputies under the leadership of Akaev announced that they quitted membership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. On 31 August 1991 Kyrgyzstan became a sovereign and independent state. In order to legalize his position in this new era, Akaev decided to organize presidential elections on 12 October 1991 in which he ran unopposed and

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<sup>546</sup> Dair Tokobaev, “*Stanovlenie instituta prezidenta v KR. Ot razvala SSSR do 24 Marta 2005 goda*” [Establishment of institute of president in Kyrgyzstan. From dissolution of USSR to 24 March 2005], paper in Russian, p.1, available at <http://www.welcome.kg/ru/history/nz/> (Accessed on 07.10.2009)

<sup>547</sup> Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Ibid., p.175

<sup>548</sup> *ResPublica*, 22 November 1994, p.3

<sup>549</sup> The 1991 Soviet *coup d'état* (August 19 - August 21 1991), also known as the August Putsch or August Coup, was an attempt by a group of members of the Soviet Union's government to take control of the country from the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The coup leaders were hard-line members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union who felt that Gorbachev's reform program had gone too far and that a new union treaty that he had negotiated dispersed too much of the central government's power to the republics. Although the coup collapsed in only three days and Gorbachev returned to his post, the event destabilized the Soviet Union and is widely considered to have helped in bringing about both the demise of the Communist Party and the collapse of the country. (Yevgenia Albats and Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, *The State Within a State: The KGB and Its Hold on Russia - Past, Present, and Future*, 1994, Farrar Straus and Giroux, pp. 276-293.)

secured 95.3 percent of votes.<sup>550</sup> Turnout was announced to be 99 percent.<sup>551</sup> The Kyrgyz Parliament banned the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan from running a candidate, though such a candidate would probably have received little support.<sup>552</sup> Despite the lack of real contest, the elections were widely recognized as free and fair by the international community.<sup>553</sup> Later Askar Akaev admitted that his candidacy was not predicted, he even did not plan or anticipate such a privilege and he hoped only to be a temporary president until the country would stabilize.<sup>554</sup>

In the period from October 1990 to April 1993 Akaev himself headed the cabinet and worked with the deputies of the *Verhovnii Soviet*. After February 1992, he became both the head of state and the head of government, with prime minister serving as his deputy.<sup>555</sup> Although the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan played an important role in Akaev's coming to power, he refused to be affiliated with any political party and declared that the president must be outside party groupings. In his program, Akaev emphasized building a democratic, pluralistic society with a multi-party system.<sup>556</sup> He also declared his goal for extensive reforms for the liberalization of economy.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> Central Election Commission release (in Russian) in *Slovo Kirgizistana*, 16 October 1991

<sup>551</sup> Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Ibid., p.178

<sup>552</sup> See Turar Koichuev et al., *Sovremennii Politicheskie Procesi* [Modern Political Processes], Bishkek NAN 1996, p.15

<sup>553</sup> There were no international monitors during this election, so account of fairness are difficult to measure. (Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, p.179)

<sup>554</sup> Dair Tokobaev, Ibid., p.2

<sup>555</sup> David T. Twining, *The New Eurasia: a Guide to the Republics of the Former Soviet Union*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993.

<sup>556</sup> Rafiz Abazov, "*Politicheskie Preobrazovania v Kirgizstane i Evolucia Prezidentskoi Sistemi*" [Political transformation and Evolution of Presidential System in Kyrgyzstan], Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid.

## 2.4.2 1995 Presidential Elections

Despite such developments, by 1995 democratization in Kyrgyzstan was far from complete, and a “liberal” and “consolidated” democracy had not yet emerged.<sup>558</sup> By February 1993, 107 states and multiple international organizations and institutions had recognized Kyrgyzstan as a “democratizing sovereign state” and a member of international community.<sup>559</sup> This international recognition and the promise of capital influx, gave Akaev significant domestic credibility, especially among those clan elites competing for state resources.<sup>560</sup> Political elites expecting to gain from international aid and investment, at first agreed to support Akaev’s reforms. Therefore Akaev could succeed to maintain social stability during 1991-1995 and he included all major clans in the government, further increasing his support among the clan leaders. As such, as 1995 presidential elections (originally scheduled to be held in 1996) approached, Akaev was sure that he would stay in power, although he had already started to lose support especially among the urban intelligentsia.<sup>561</sup>

As the 1993 Constitution points out, a citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic may be elected president if he is not younger than 35 years of age and is not older than 65 years of age, who has command of the official language and have been a resident of the republic for not less than 15 years before the nomination to the office of president (Article 43). The president is to be elected once every five years, for not more than two terms.<sup>562</sup> The president cannot be a deputy of the *Jogorku Kenesh*, and cannot hold other posts and engage in free enterprise activity.<sup>563</sup> The president must suspend

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<sup>558</sup> Kathleen Collins, *Ibid.* p.175

<sup>559</sup> Askar Akaev announced this in *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 2 September 1992, p.1

<sup>560</sup> Turar Koichuev and Vladimir Ploskih, *Askar Akaev: Uchenyi Politik[Politician Scientist]*, Bishkek, Ilim, 1996, p.37

<sup>561</sup> Kathleen Collins, *Ibid.* p.232

<sup>562</sup> The Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, Article 43 (1), 1993. English version is available at <http://www.uta.edu/cpsees/KYRGCON.htm>

<sup>563</sup> The Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, Article 43 (4), 1993.

his activity in political parties and organizations during the term until the beginning of a new election for president.<sup>564</sup>

As for the method of election, a new election for the office of president shall be held two months before the date on which the powers of the president expire.<sup>565</sup> The president is to be elected by the citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic by a majority of actual votes cast; elections shall be held on the basis of universal, equal, and direct suffrage by secret ballot.<sup>566</sup> The number of candidates for the office of president shall not be limited. Any person who has registered and has obtained not less than 50,000 voter signatures may be a candidate for president.<sup>567</sup> The election shall be considered valid if more than fifty per cent of all electorate have taken part in the election. In the first ballot, a candidate shall be considered elected to the office of president if he has obtained more than half of those votes cast in the election. If none of the candidates obtains more than half of the votes cast in the first ballot, only the two candidates who have obtained the largest number of votes shall appear on the second ballot. A candidate who obtains more than half of the votes cast in the second ballot shall be considered elected if not less than fifty per cent of all voters have taken part in the second ballot.<sup>568</sup> The results of the election for president shall be confirmed by the Constitutional Court not later than seven days after the date of the election.<sup>569</sup> After the Chairman of the Supreme Court announces the results of voting, the president shall take the oath of office within 30 days.<sup>570</sup>

Though presidential elections were planned to be held in 1996, they were prescheduled to be conducted soon after the parliamentary elections of February

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<sup>564</sup> The Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, Article 43 (5), 1993.

<sup>565</sup> The Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, Article 44 (1), 1993.

<sup>566</sup> The Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, Article 44 (2), 1993.

<sup>567</sup> The Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, Article 44 (3), 1993.

<sup>568</sup> The Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, Article 44, 1993.

<sup>569</sup> The Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, Article 45, 1993.

<sup>570</sup> The Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, Article 45, 1993.



1995 by Akaev on 24 December 1995.<sup>571</sup> The 1995 presidential elections would be the first competitive elections in Kyrgyzstan. Although the oppositional groups were caught by surprise due to the call of early elections, they managed to present their presidential candidates. However as a result of a Supreme Court decision, some of them were barred from running in the elections.<sup>572</sup> These candidates claimed that their removal was aimed at minimization of votes' dispersion and securing Akaev's victory in the first round.<sup>573</sup> It was clear that some of the eliminated candidates were powerful enough to have a real chance of being elected, such as Jumagalbek Amanbaev, the ex-first secretary of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, who worked in agricultural sector for many years and was very respected and well-known among the people in Naryn and Issyk-Kul provinces.<sup>574</sup>

Eventually, only three candidates were allowed to run for the presidency: Askar Akaev, Absamat Masaliev (former leader of the Kyrgyz Communist Party) and Medetkan Sherimkulov (former Chairman of the Supreme Council). One scholar claims that in the 1995 presidential elections Akaev mobilized voters through his own clan networks as well as his wife's.<sup>575</sup> As opposed to the situation in 1991, when most people voted for Akaev as a father figure of national unity, in 1995 he was re-elected due to clan-based mobilization.<sup>576</sup> This process would involve certain regional *akims* (who were Akaev's kinsmen) to negotiate with the elders or respected

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<sup>571</sup> Akaev announced that he would bring forward presidential elections to 24 December 1995, to solve controversy on proposal to extend the presidential term, which was rejected in September 1995 by parliament. (John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy*, p.53)

<sup>572</sup> Just before elections, on 10 October 1995, Central Election Commission had set out specific rules of candidate registration, which included specific numbers of signatures based on total number and regional distribution, so three candidates were declared unqualified right before the elections. (Freedom House, "Kyrgyz Republic", *Nations in Transit*, 1998, p.350). The Supreme Court decision to cancel the registration of Mamat Aibalaev, Jumagalbek Amanbaev and Omurbek Tekebaev was declared to be due to irregularities in the process of collection and falsifications of signatures. (Aleksandr Kinev, *Kirgizsyen do i posle Tulpanovoi Revolucii* [Kyrgyzstan before and after Tulip Revolution] Stratagema available at <http://www.igpi.ru/info/people/kynev/1128082583.html>)

<sup>573</sup> Aleksandr Kinev, *Kirgizsyen do i posle Tulpanovoi Revolucii* [Kyrgyzstan before and after Tulip Revolution] Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.232

<sup>576</sup> Kathleen Collins, "Clans, Pacts and Politics: Understanding Regime Transition in Central Asia", Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1999, Chapter 7.

members of the local community by either making promises or by putting pressure on them to vote for Akaev. The scholar argues that “these hierarchical networks of clan patronage became an effective means of undermining open competition without the blatant use of force or the canceling of elections altogether.”<sup>577</sup>

In his brief electoral campaign Akaev emphasized further deepening of economic reforms and liberalization of the economy. He distanced himself from political parties and other organizations.<sup>578</sup> The other two candidates directed criticisms to his policies that were similar in nature. Absamat Masaliev stressed the values and achievements of the socialist epoch, which were lost during Akaev’s short term in office. He severely criticized Akaev’s economic policies, which according to him, led to the deterioration of living standards, squandering of state property and increase of corruption.<sup>579</sup> Masaliev also criticized privatization, which resulted in cheating of the public and enrichment of a small group of people.<sup>580</sup> Medetkan Sherimkulov’s views were similar to those of Absamat Masaliev, additionally he emphasized the need for the protection of social guarantees and development of society-oriented policies.<sup>581</sup>

However, the opposition candidates remained largely ineffective and Askar Akaev was reelected with 71.5 percent of the votes<sup>582</sup> with a turnout of 89.19 percent.<sup>583</sup> Absamat Masaliev got 24.42 percent and Medetkan Sherimkulov 1.72 percent.<sup>584</sup> However, Akaev had lost more than 20 percent of the votes between the two

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<sup>577</sup> Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.232

<sup>578</sup> Rafiz Abazov, “*Politicheskie Preobrazovania v Kirgizstane i Evolucia Prezidentskoi Sistemi*” [Political Transformation and Evolution of Presidential System in Kyrgyzstan], *Central Asia and the Caucasus Journal*, 1(2) 1999, available at [http://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-02-1999/st\\_06\\_abazov.shtml](http://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-02-1999/st_06_abazov.shtml) (Accessed on 07.05.2009)

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

<sup>582</sup> John Anderson, “The Kyrgyz Parliamentary and Presidential Elections of 1995”, (Electoral Studies, 15(4), 1996)

<sup>583</sup> Data provided by Central Election and Referenda Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, available in National Human Development Report for the Kyrgyz Republic 1999

<sup>584</sup> Central Election Commission release in *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 28 December 1995

presidential elections (down from 95 percent in 1991 to 71.5 percent in 1995). The southern regions, which had no candidate from their own clans and had voted for Akaev back in 1991, did not opt for him this time. Akaev further lost the widespread support of the pro-democracy parties and intellectuals. However, by generating the support of northern clans, Akaev succeeded to win the elections.<sup>585</sup> As such he gained legitimacy through his clan identity.

### 2.4.3 2000 Presidential Elections

These elections took place in an environment of instability resulting from security threats in the south,<sup>586</sup> a worsening economic situation, continuing opposition to the results of the recent parliamentary elections and the failure of authorities to adequately address electoral irregularities. One of the major issues prior to the elections was Akaev's intention to run. It was suggested that he violated the constitution by declaring his candidacy.<sup>587</sup> Despite a Constitutional Court decision of 1998 permitting Akaev to run in the 2000 election, questions over the issue remained at the forefront of debate. Some opposition leaders stated that the incumbent had already served two terms, being elected both in 1991 and 1995. The Constitutional Court, however, had ruled that the president had only served one term under the new constitution.<sup>588</sup>

According to the newly introduced requirement of the Election Code adopted in 1999 (Article 61), presidential candidates had to be fluent in state language, that is they have to have “the ability to read, write, express ... ideas and publicly give speech in

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<sup>585</sup> Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.236

<sup>586</sup> In August 1999, people of Kyrgyzstan were shocked to learn that Muslim terrorists had crossed the border from Tajikistan and kidnapped four Japanese geologists and their Kyrgyz interpreter for ransom. Soon after, the terrorists also kidnapped a Kyrgyz general and several military officials. Two months later, as a result of military operations, negotiations and a ransom pay the hostages were set free and the terrorists were allowed to return into Tajikistan unharmed. (“Will Fighting Return To Batken, Kyrgyzstan This Spring?”, 03.15.2000, *the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute* available at <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/533>, Accessed on 27.11.2009)

<sup>587</sup> In September 1995 Askar Akaev in his annual message admitted that he was elected as the president on 27 October 1990 for only a five-year term. (*ResPublica*, 5 September 2000, p.3) Article 43(2) of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic prohibits the same person to be elected as a president for more than two terms.

<sup>588</sup> It was decided that President Akaev could run in 2000, given that his 1995 election was technically his “first” under the new constitution, ratified in 1993. (Freedom House, “Kyrgyz Republic”, *Nations in Transit*, 1998, p.351)

state language.”<sup>589</sup> Although the 1993 Constitution did not require that candidates for presidency must pass an exam to determine the level of their fluency in state language, the CEC established a linguistic committee to assess the candidates’ command of Kyrgyz language keeping its exclusive right to judge their fluency. This linguistic committee was “not legitimate” and became a political tool of removing seven candidates respected by the people who could become rivals to Askar Akaev.<sup>590</sup> OSCE assessed this examination as follows:

... assessing a candidate’s command of the State language was in breach of Article 25 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, ratified by the Kyrgyz Republic, and Article 5 of the OSCE Copenhagen Document. Language requirement can serve to limit the possibilities for political participation by national minorities. In the Kyrgyz context, it was also used to limit the possibilities for participation by opposition candidates.<sup>591</sup>

Another report also pointed out that the most prominent obstacle in front of the candidates was the language test administered by the CEC. Though the constitution did require the president to have a command of the state language, the constitution and the election law did not specify how that competency should be measured.<sup>592</sup> Six presidential candidates failed the test according to criteria that were neither made public nor adopted in a uniform way. The whole process fostered speculation that the evaluation of the language tests was open to politically motivated maneuvers. Felix Kulov, the strongest oppositional candidate for the elections, refused to take language test and was therefore eliminated.<sup>593</sup> Two of the other candidates, Ishak Masaliev (son of Absamat Masaliev, the former first secretary of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, and the new leader of this party) and Dooronbek Sadyrbaev

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<sup>589</sup>Election Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, adopted on 29 May 1999, Article 61, Bishkek. This condition was not there during 1995 presidential elections.

<sup>590</sup> “Statement of Political Parties’ Leaders and Deputies of Jogorku Kenesh on Gross Violations of the Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic and Code of Elections made during Presidential Elections on 29 October 2000” available in *ResPublica*, 5 December 2000, p.3

<sup>591</sup> OSCE, “Kyrgyz Republic 29 October 2000 Presidential Elections OSCE/ODIHR Final Report” Warsaw 16 January 2001, p.3 available at [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2001/01/1383\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2001/01/1383_en.pdf) (Accessed on 03.04.2008)

<sup>592</sup> Statement of the NDI Pre-Election Delegation to Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, September 8, 2000 [http://www.ndi.org/files/1088\\_kg\\_preelect.pdf](http://www.ndi.org/files/1088_kg_preelect.pdf) (Accessed on 16.03.2009)

<sup>593</sup> *ResPublica*, 7 November 2000, p. 5.

(leader of *Kayran-el*<sup>594</sup> Party) applied to the Constitutional Court to review the CEC's decision on the establishment of a linguistic committee. The Court, however, declined the appeal on 13 October 2000.<sup>595</sup> Out of the original fifteen candidates, only seven (Askar Akaev, Tursunbek Akunov, Almazbek Atambaev, Dooronbek Sadyrbaev, Tursunbai Bakir uulu, Omurbek Tekebaev, Melis Eshmkanov) had passed the language examination.<sup>596</sup> Following a controversial registration process, the CEC eventually registered six candidates for the election. Three candidates (Almazbek Atambaev, Omurbek Tekebaev and Melis Eshimkanov) made a collective political statement that the linguistic committee was used with a purpose of getting rid of candidates who were capable of becoming a real rival to the president.<sup>597</sup>

Shortly before the elections, Felix Kulov publicly declared that he would support the candidacy of Omurbek Tekebaev.<sup>598</sup> This development was quite unpredicted and created a shock, although the chance of Akaev was still much higher, as he could use administrative resources as well as mass media in his presidential campaign. Askar Akaev was also openly supported by Vladimir Putin and Islam Karimov during their visits to Bishkek.<sup>599</sup>

As a result of the elections, Akaev got 74.47 percent of the votes. The percentages for the other candidates were as follows: Omurbek Tekebaev 13.89 percent; Almazbek Atambaev 6 percent; Melis Eshmkanov 1.08 percent; Tursunbai Bakir

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<sup>594</sup> Established in 1999, this party could not win parliamentary seat in 2000 or 2007 parliamentary elections.

<sup>595</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev. Ibid.

<sup>596</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev, Ibid.

<sup>597</sup> “The Joint Statement of pre-election campaign staffs of candidates for presidency of the Kyrgyz Republic A. Atambaev and O. Tekebaev” (Kyrgyzstan Election Watch Elections “Conducted With Fierce Violations” November 1, 2000 available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/election/kyrgyzstan/kew110100d.shtml> (Accessed on 12.05.2008)

<sup>598</sup> OSCE, “Kyrgyz Republic 29 October 2000 Presidential Elections. Final Ibid. Report” p.4

<sup>599</sup> Aleksandr Kiniev. Ibid.

Uulu 0.96 percent; Tursunbek Akunov 0.44 percent and “against all”<sup>600</sup> 0.67 percent.<sup>601</sup> Turnout was 77.28 percent.<sup>602</sup>

#### **2.4.4 Presidential Elections in Perspective**

For variety of reasons Askar Akaev had remained the only president of Kyrgyzstan through 1991-2005. When the presidential elections during his era are analyzed, one common feature that was observed for parliamentary elections as well needs to be emphasized: in all of these elections, potential rivals were eliminated through a variety of different means, such as disqualifying them and creating various new obstacles like the formation of the Linguistic Committee in 2000 presidential elections.

One major method of eliminating strong candidates (either real or prospective) was to appoint them to other posts. For example, Bakyt Beishimov was appointed as the ambassador to India, Chingiz Aytmatov was appointed as the ambassador to Netherlands, Apas Djumagulov was appointed as the ambassador to Germany, and Rosa Otunbaeva was appointed as the ambassador to the United Kingdom. In some other cases, the candidates were eliminated by legal persecution, by arrests or criminal cases. Sometimes old cases were re-opened, as was seen in the example of Azimbek Beknazarov. Askar Akaev also attempted to prevent the emergence of rivals by changing ministers and prime ministers on a regular basis, preventing any single minister or politician from building a power base of his or her own. Prime ministers were removed before they could become popular enough to challenge the president. Between 1991 and 2005, the governments changed ten times and prime ministers changed 12 times (one prime minister serving twice).<sup>603</sup> At that time, the average term in the office for a prime minister in Kyrgyzstan was about a year. As

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<sup>600</sup> “Against all” or “None of the Above” is a ballot choice in Kyrgyzstan that allows the voters to indicate their disapproval regarding all of the candidates participating in the elections.

<sup>601</sup> OSCE, “Kyrgyz Republic 29 October 2000 Presidential Elections OSCE/ODIHR Final Report” Ibid. p. 14

<sup>602</sup> *Vibori Prezidenta KR 2000: tsifri i fakti* [Presidential Elections in Kyrgyzstan 2000: numbers and facts], Central Election Commission, Bishkek 2001

<sup>603</sup> Boris Silaev served as prime-minister twice, in 1998 and in 1999.

such, according to one analyst, Kyrgyz prime ministers have always been weak actors in the political system. Although a series of constitutional amendments were made, none of these amendments gave them more powers; rather they made way for the president to be the strongest executive figure.<sup>604</sup> Regularly changing the prime ministers was also a method of dealing with potential rivals, even if they did not belong to the opposition. As for the ministers, they were also constantly rotated and sometimes were sent abroad as ambassadors as mentioned above.

Potential rivals were also eliminated by repressing them through official bodies, such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Security Service, and the state procurator. Despite constitutional guarantees against arbitrary arrest and detention without trial (Article 18 of the Kyrgyz Constitution), not only these rivals but also journalists, religious leaders, and civil society activists have also been temporarily jailed or detained. According to a scholar, Kyrgyzstan's official bodies "certainly favored the protection of the incumbent government over the rights of individuals."<sup>605</sup>

In this framework, two such incidents can be given as specific examples. One was related to Felix Kulov. In January 2000, Felix Kulov, was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment on charges of abuse of office, even though he had been acquitted of these charges in August 2000. When Kulov intended to run in the October 2000 presidential elections, new charges of embezzlement were brought against him on 17 July 2000.<sup>606</sup> The international community criticized his retrial as politically motivated. As for Kulov himself, he would protest the whole process and refuse to take the language exam, declaring the establishment of a linguistic committee as an unconstitutional method.<sup>607</sup> Another such incident took place in January 2002, when Azimbek Beknazarov, a deputy severely criticizing Akaev's policies, was arrested

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<sup>604</sup> Gulnura Iskakova, *Ibid.* p. 428

<sup>605</sup> Eric McGlinchey, "A Survey of Democratic Governance. Kyrgyzstan" *Ibid.*, p. 254

<sup>606</sup> Human Rights Watch World Report 2002: Europe and Central Asia. Article "Human Rights Developments" is available at <<http://hrw.org/wr2k2/europe13.html>> (Accessed on 17.12.2008)

<sup>607</sup> He was allowed to run for the presidential elections, because in August 2000 a court passed the verdict of 'not guilty' on him. After being acquitted by a military court, his case was later re-opened by a higher-level military court. (OSCE, "Kyrgyz Republic 29 October 2000 Presidential Elections. Final Report" *Ibid.* p.3)

and detained in custody. Beknazarov was demanding the president's impeachment, because of the concessions that he had made to China in turning over a disputed land at a border area to this country. Upon his arrest, Beknazarov was charged with allegations of abusing his office when he had been the inspector of Toktogul *rayon* Office of the Public Prosecutor back in 1995. Opposition activists believed that his arrest aimed to silence him.<sup>608</sup> It was claimed that the National Security Council along with the Public Prosecutor created a special commission which intentionally investigated Beknazarov's profile in order to find compromising evidence. The arrested deputy started a hunger-strike as a protest. Eventually on 19 March 2002 Beknazarov was released from prison after spending there about two months.<sup>609</sup>

There were other such cases regarding less influential candidates. For example, Daniyar Ussenov, the leader of the People's Party was found guilty of criminal charges dating back to 1996. As a result, he was constitutionally ineligible to stand in the election.<sup>610</sup> Another presidential candidate, Topchubek Tuganaliev of the *Erkindik Party*, was also arrested in May 2000 and was charged with plotting to assassinate the president. On 1 September 2000 he was given 16 years in prison.<sup>611</sup> In an interview published in the oppositional newspaper *ResPublica*, Topchubek Tuganaliev explained how the charges were fabricated and demanded to be cleared of all of them.<sup>612</sup>

In the process of arresting and charging the presidential candidates, the judicial bodies also played a major role. It is possible to suggest that in Kyrgyzstan courts are often manipulated and are subject to executive pressure. Although the constitution stipulates that the judiciary is to be independent, the courts nevertheless

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<sup>608</sup> Kyrgyz Committee for Human Rights. "Human Rights Developments" available at <http://www.kchr.org/archive/2003/04/20030407.html> (Accessed on 03.06.2009)

<sup>609</sup> Bruce Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: Court Ruling Restores 2003 Constitution", RFE/RL, September 17, 2007.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid.

<sup>611</sup> "Zayavlenie Politicheskikh Partii i Obshchestvennosti Kirgizstana" [Message of Kyrgyzstan's Political parties and the Public] available in *ResPublica*, 5 September 2000, p.3

<sup>612</sup> *ResPublica*, 21 March 2000, p.1



reflect first and foremost the interests of executive power.<sup>613</sup> During the Akaev era, the Kyrgyz courts failed to perform one of their main duties of checking the executive power, as Akaev appointed both national and regional level judges as well as state prosecutors based more on loyalty than on merit. In addition, Akaev regularly dismissed judges and prosecutors, as the constitution vaguely allowed, “on the grounds provided by law” (Article 81). Those magistrates considered to be potential trouble makers for Akaev thus were sacked for failing attestation exams or for alleged ill health.<sup>614</sup> Furthermore, judges, like most public servants, are poorly paid and thus are susceptible to bribes. Although there were some cases of prosecution, it remained questionable whether there was a genuine effort on the part of the executive to reduce corruption in the judiciary. Prosecuting judges for corruption, as the opposition emphasized, was a means by which the president could ensure continued control and judicial dependency.<sup>615</sup> Given this dependency, court decisions often did not reflect the primacy of the rule of law, but rather the interests of executive power.<sup>616</sup>

In this context, the decision of the Constitutional Court allowing Akaev to run for presidency for the third time in 2000 was perhaps the most noticeable example of judicial dependence. According to one of the most famous oppositional figures, Zamira Sydikova, who was the chief editor of the oppositional newspaper *ResPublica*, Akaev’s nomination in 2000 was “illegitimate.”<sup>617</sup> By being elected to his third term Akaev clearly violated Article 43 of the constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic that limits the presidential rule to two terms.<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>613</sup> Eric McGlinchey, *Ibid.* p. 252

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>615</sup> Interviews with members of political opposition and independent NGO activists (Kyrgyzstan, 1999-2002) provided by Eric McGlinchey, *Ibid.* p. 252

<sup>616</sup> Eric McGlinchey *Ibid.* p. 253

<sup>617</sup> Zamira Sydikova “*Predvibornie Tehnologii Akaeva*”/[Election techniques of Akaev], *ResPublica*, 12 September 2000, p.3

<sup>618</sup> Askat, Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen “Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan”, *Ibid.*, pp.30-31

In attempting to eliminate potential rivals Akaev also actively used administrative resources. In 2000 presidential elections, for example, public officials regularly interfered into the election process by “vote buying.”<sup>619</sup> It was reported that “during the meetings with voters, candidate Akaev and his wife Mayram Akaeva distributed computers and other material things.”<sup>620</sup> Also during the election campaign period Akaev presented certain awards to people.<sup>621</sup> It was also reported by the Coalition “For Democracy and Civil Society” that the CEC sent a special letter to all precinct election commissions, which prohibited their representatives to make observations on the election day.<sup>622</sup> Another example of using administrative resource is related to the distribution of local governmental and administrative positions to those people who are dependent on the president.<sup>623</sup> In order to keep their seats, these people did all they could possibly do to “secure” the necessary election results in favor of Akaev in provinces.<sup>624</sup>

The administrative resources were used during election campaigns as well, in which there were “gross violations” of both the constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Law “On Election of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.”<sup>625</sup> For example, right from the beginning of the election campaign period in 1995, conditions for agitation were not equal. The distribution of broadcasting time on TV was extensively given to Akaev whose candidacy was openly and exclusively supported and by the pro-governmental media institutions.<sup>626</sup> In clear violation of the Law “On Election of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic” Akaev openly made a speech on

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> “Zayavlenie Politicheskikh Partii i Obshestvennosti Kirgizstana” [Message of Kyrgyzstan’s Political parties and the Public] available in *ResPublica*, 5 September 2000, p.3

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

<sup>622</sup> *ResPublica*, 1 November 2000, p.3

<sup>623</sup> State institutions essentially became a resource offering profits. (Johan Engvall “Kyrgyzstan: Anatomy of State”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 54, No:4, 2007, p.39)

<sup>624</sup> Cited in *ResPublica*, 21 November 2000, p.13

<sup>625</sup> Statement made by presidential candidates Absamat Masaliev and Medetkan Sherimkulov in *ResPublica*, 26 December 2000, p.1

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

the Kyrgyz Radio on the day of elections calling people to vote for him.<sup>627</sup> On the election day, in three polling stations (in Naukat, Suzak, and Kadamjai), the representatives of Absamat Masaliev and Medetkan Sherimkulov were not allowed as observers.<sup>628</sup> These kinds of violations occurred in many precinct election commissions as well.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that results of the presidential elections held in Kyrgyzstan were often doubted for their accuracy and reliability. During the period of 1991-2005 the rival candidates were repressed so that “no constructive or competent opposition surfaced by early 2000.”<sup>629</sup> According to one comment, Akaev’s “overwhelming victories at polls demonstrate[d] to potential rivals that they ha[d] little hope of defeating the incumbent.”<sup>630</sup> Akaev attempted to use the election results as indicators of regime support. Until 2005, in all presidential elections rivals had ended up being defeated. Though Akaev came to power under “competitive elections” in 1995 and 2000, he then changed the rules in a way that guaranteed him almost total political control. As elections are safe, reliable and more predictable means of accomplishing legitimacy, to organize them periodically was an important tool of legitimation.

When Askar Akaev was first elected as the president of Kyrgyzstan in 1990, he had the credentials and reputation of a liberal reformer. Over time, however, he adopted the same autocratic strategies of rule that his Central Asian colleagues used from the outset of the Soviet collapse. Askar Akaev repeated their experience of violating civil and political rights as well as intimidating the oppositional candidates and independent media. This pattern was perhaps seen more clearly in presidential elections.

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<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid.

<sup>629</sup> Leonid Levitin, “Liberalization in Kyrgyzstan: ‘An Island of Democracy’”, *Democracy and Pluralism in Muslim Eurasia*, ed. Yacov Ro’I, New York, Frank Cass, 2004, p. 205

<sup>630</sup> Barbara Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes”, presented at American Political Science Association, Sept 2005, p.3

The next chapter of the dissertation analyzes the Bakiev era by looking at the 2007 parliamentary elections and 2005 and 2009 presidential elections. It will be pointed out that during both Akaev and Bakiev eras, the leaders, by using elections and referendums as tools of legitimizing their rule in the eyes of the people, in fact attempted to further increase their executive powers.

## CHAPTER III

### KURMANBEK BAKIEV'S ERA: 2005-2010

In this chapter I analyze Bakiev<sup>631</sup> era which lasted 5 years, as he was ousted as a result of 2010 April popular uprising.<sup>632</sup> Like in Chapter II on Akaev I analyze Bakiev era by looking at the referendums, parliamentary elections, and presidential elections which took place during his term. After describing them, I will focus on the commonalities of all referendums as well as parliamentary and presidential elections held during both Akaev and Bakiev eras.

When he first came to power, Bakiev proclaimed his political views through a number of public speeches, in which he promised many political reforms. However, as his oust from office showed, most of his policies, decisions and actions were against what he had proclaimed in his speeches. In other words, soon after he came to power, it became obvious that some of his actions contradicted his ideas and principles underlined in his speeches. For example, Bakiev asserted that the establishment of a democratic society was his main aim.<sup>633</sup> “Everything must be corrected so that authoritarianism will never come back”<sup>634</sup> He proclaimed in a TV speech in 2005, as the acting president that his government had four main tasks: 1) to build a new power structure that will prevent authoritarianism to make a comeback, 2) to eradicate corruption in the system, 3) to build a new economic policy, which

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<sup>631</sup> Kurmanbek Bakiev was born on 1 August 1949, in Masadan, Jalal-Abad in 1972, he graduated from the Kuybyshev Polytechnic Institute and became an electrical engineer. In 1979 he became deputy chief engineer at a factory in Jalal-Abad, and in 1990 became the director of the factory. Later he would be the first secretary of the Kok-Yangak city council, then the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Kok-Yangak and finally the deputy chairman for the Jalal-Abad region. In 1995 Bakiev was appointed as the governor of Jalal-Abad, and between 1997 and 2000 he served as the governor of the Chui *oblast*. Between December 2000 and May 2002, Bakiev served as the prime minister. In the aftermath of the Aksy events, he would resign from this post. The *Jogorku Kenesh* appointed him as the acting president on 24 March 2005, following the Tulip Revolution.

<sup>632</sup> When I was writing this dissertation Bakiev was still in office, so this dissertation does not aim to analyze the events of popular uprising of April 2010 and their consequences.

<sup>633</sup> Bakiev speech at the National Forum of Civil Society. 20.04.2005, *Vpered i u nas Yasnii Put'* [Ahead we have a Bright Path], Bishkek, Ilim, 2007, p.6

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*

would guarantee a favorable environment for economic growth, and 4) to allow a new and young generation of administrators, managers and politicians to be more influential in the country.<sup>635</sup> However time showed that these proclaimed goals and principles remain only on paper.

### **3.1 Bakiev Era: 2007 Referendum**

Years 2005-2007 were marked by a series of street protests against Kurmanbek Bakiev and demands for further constitutional reform. In 2006, a coalition of opposition members of the parliament, NGO leaders, and businessmen coalesced into a movement known as “For Reforms” that would be the backbone of an umbrella organization for the opposition. In early November 2006, the movement could succeed to bring “thousands of demonstrators into central Bishkek where they built a ‘tent city’ of more than one thousand.”<sup>636</sup> President Bakiev agreed to work with the parliament on more constitutional reforms as a result of the six-day protest organized by the “For Reforms” movement. Soon after this development, the parliament hastily passed a new constitution on 9 November 2006.<sup>637</sup> According to this constitution, the next parliamentary elections would be carried out with a mixed voting system in which 50 percent of the seats would be distributed according to party lists, and the number of seats would be increased from 75 to 90. The government was now to be formed by the party that could win more than 50 percent of the seats in parliament. According to this 2006 constitution, the president’s powers would be decreased, whereas the parliament would have more powers regarding economic issues and presidential appointments to the positions of the chairmen of the National Bank and the Central Election Commission, and the Prosecutor-General, as these appointments were now subject to the approval of the parliament.<sup>638</sup> Therefore, the new

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<sup>635</sup> TV speech of acting president of the Kyrgyz Republic, Kurmanbek Bakiev, 05.05.2005 in *Vpered i u nas Yasnii Put'* [Ahead we have a Bright Path], Bishkek, Ilim, 2007, p.13

<sup>636</sup> Peter Sinnott, “Kyrgyzstan: A Political Overview”, *American Foreign Policy Interests*, 29(6), November 2007, p 429

<sup>637</sup> Erica Marat, “March and After: What Has Changed? What Has Stayed the Same?” *Central Asian Survey*, 27(3-4), 2008, pp.229-230

<sup>638</sup> “Constitution Agreed, but is Crisis Over?”, IPP (Institute for Public Policy), <http://www.ipp.kg/en/analysis/326/> (Accessed on 03.03.2009)

constitution had changed the power balance between the president and the parliament, seemingly in favor of the latter.<sup>639</sup>

The November 2006 Constitution was further amended by the parliament in five areas: (1) a political party that wins over 50 percent of seats will form the Cabinet, to be approved and appointed by the president. If no party manages to get more than half of seats, the president has a freedom to pick up another party (out of those who won seats in the parliament) to form the government, (2) The parliament will consist of 90 members, at least half of which would be elected on the basis of proportional representation system, (3) The National Security Service, which was under direct control of the president, now will be under control of the government, (4) The president conceded the right to appoint local judges to the parliament. (5) The procedure of impeaching the president became more complicated, requiring 3/4ths of the votes of parliamentary deputies as opposed to 2/3rds in the 2003 Constitution.<sup>640</sup> This final version was eventually signed by President Bakiev on 15 January 2007. As the process of amending the constitution has been on the agenda for quite some time, several different proposals were being discussed. However, these last two versions accepted in November 2006 and January 2007 can be characterized with their “unexpectedness and speed of adoption.”<sup>641</sup> As one expert argues, “the main changes in the constitution took place mainly because of redistribution of power between two popularly elected government bodies - the president and the parliament.”<sup>642</sup> Since both of them get their powers from the people, these two “popularly elected bodies find difficulties in reaching compromises, while powers and relations between them are many times changed in the constitution.”<sup>643</sup> As will be described below, the new constitution that would be enacted after the 21 October

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<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Gulnara Iskakova “Constitutional Reform and Powers of the Highest Government Bodies in Kyrgyzstan: A New Balance?”, IPP, available at <http://www.ipp.kg/en/analysis/386/> (Accessed on 03.03.2009)

<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

2007 referendum would be the third within twelve months. According to an expert, “the power the President gets from the people [was] almost unrestricted.”<sup>644</sup>

However on 14 September 2007 the Constitutional Court cancelled both the November 2006 and January 2007 constitutions, as being “unconstitutional” and restored the 2003 Constitution.<sup>645</sup> The decision of the Constitutional Court was explained as follows:

There were serious procedural breaches in the both cases and the Constitutional Court ruled on 14 September that the law on the regulations of parliament, passed on 7 November 2006 [and signed by president on 9 November], was anti-constitutional. Therefore, adoption of the two new constitutions on 7 November and 30 December [which was signed by president on 15 January] according to those regulations, were against the law. Chairwoman of the Constitutional Court Cholpon Bayekova said on 14 September that canceling of the law on the parliamentary regulations leads to cancellation of the action of the both constitutions.<sup>646</sup>

President Bakiev, by using the decision of the Constitutional Court as political and legal excuse, declared a new referendum to be held on 21 October 2007. With this referendum, the process of constitutional reform would continue, as the people would be presented a new draft constitution and a new election code. There would be two general questions asked to the people: whether they accept the new version of the constitution and whether they accept the new election code.

In one of his speeches Bakiev underlined that “the aim of 2005revolution was the constitutional reform and prevention of power usurpation by one person.”<sup>647</sup> Pro-Bakiev politicians also expressed their arguments on the necessity of referendum. According to one such argument:

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<sup>644</sup> A. Nussberger, “Comments on the Constitutional Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic”, European Commission For Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission), Strasbourg, 6 December 2007

<sup>645</sup> Bruce Pannier, “Kyrgyzstan: Court Ruling Restores 2003 Constitution”, RFE/RL, September 17, 2007. Kurmanbek Bakiev’s proponents argued that “amendments were not about consolidating the power but about taking responsibility for the reforms. (Svetlana Kulikova p.2)

<sup>646</sup> “Kyrgyzstan is Back to the Akayev Constitution”, *Kyrgyz Weekly Live Journal*, available at <http://kyrgyz-weekly-e.livejournal.com/2007/09/15/> (Accessed on 12.12.2009)

<sup>647</sup> President Bakiev’s speech in Jalal-Abad on 16 October 2007, available in *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 23 October 2007, p.4



The decision to conduct a referendum on the constitutional reform is the only correct one. Today the head of the state has taken full responsibility upon himself during this complicated stage for Kyrgyzstan when we found ourselves in the judicial dead-end...I hope that the people's vote will finally put a stop to the pulling of the rope, when the parliament, instead of adopting good laws, is involved in relationship management.<sup>648</sup>

According to the CEC, 75.4 percent of the electorate voted in favour of the new version of the constitution and 75.45 percent voted for the new Election Code, with a turnout rate of 80.64 percent.<sup>649</sup> As a result of the 2007 referendum, many changes were introduced to the functioning of the legislative and the executive branches in the country and the electoral formulas were changed once again.

As for the main changes introduced by the referendum regarding the legislative and executive branches, one novelty was related to the increase in the number of the deputies of the *Jogorku Kenesh* from 75 to 90. The *Jogorku Kenesh* was given the function to elect and dismiss from office the chairperson and the members of the Accounting Chamber upon the proposal of the President. The chairman of the National Bank would also be elected by the parliament upon nomination by the president. It was now also possible for the main party in the *Jogorku Kenesh* to form the cabinet to be confirmed by the President.

As for the results of the referendum regarding the new Election Code, there was now a new electoral method of political party-lists with 5 percent threshold. The new Election Code also aimed to include more women, young people and representatives of various ethnic groups residing in Kyrgyzstan into the *Jogorku Kenesh*. Article 72.3 provided that no more than 70 percent of the candidates, and a maximum of three consecutive candidates in each list, could be of the same gender. It further required 15 per cent of the candidates in each list to be below 35 years of age and no less than 15 percent to represent various ethnic groups.<sup>650</sup> As is was claimed by one

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<sup>648</sup> Interview given by Issyk-Kul governor Kydykbek Isaev , in *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 21 September 2007

<sup>649</sup> Central Election Commission release, available in *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 23 October 2007, p.3

<sup>650</sup> Election Code, Article 72(3), Bishkek, 2007.

prominent Kyrgyz bureaucrat, these amendments to the Election Code expanded the opportunities of young people and different ethnic groups to be included into the political parties, political life and the parliament, helping them to make their demands and interests to be heard during the process of political decision-making.<sup>651</sup> However according to other accounts the new Election Code was very comprehensive and “unnecessarily complicated.”<sup>652</sup>

### **3.1.1 2007 Referendum in Perspective**

One of main features of the 2007 referendum was related to the powers of the president that remained almost untouched as compared to the 2003 Constitution. Additionally the president was granted powers concerning re-organization and abolition of governmental institutions that were associated and affiliated with him, as well as powers to appoint heads and deputy heads of ministries of defense, national security, internal affairs and foreign affairs. Further, the president would appoint key national and local level government officers, thus building a vertical power structure, as these people were no longer elected but appointed by him.

Ironically, the aim of November 2006 and January 2007 Constitutions was to curtail some presidential powers; however the result was the reverse. Although in the new October 2007 constitution, the principle of the separation of powers is explicitly stated (Article 7), there are several other provisions that suggest a concentration of power in the president’s hands. The president dominates the executive, as he determines the main direction of external and internal policy of the state (Article 42 of the constitution), he appoints the prime minister on the basis of a proposition by the strongest party in the parliament (Article 46), he can dismiss the prime minister and the government as well as the ministers without any special reason, he can appoint the heads of the administrative organs and on the basis of a proposition of the prime minister dismiss them on his own initiative; he can appoint and dismiss the heads of the local state administration; he appoints the State Secretary and defines his status and competences;

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<sup>651</sup> Interview given by Beaktur Zulfiev, Head of Legal Policy Department, the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 5 October 2007

<sup>652</sup> A. Nussberger, “Comments on the Constitutional Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic”, *Ibid.*

he forms the Presidential Administration; builds up and presides over the Security Council and the Secret Service; he builds up and structures all the state organs that are under his command and appoints and dismisses the leaders; he can determine the conditions of payments for the civil servants, he appoints and dismisses persons to all the other key positions in the state (Procurator general, Chairperson of the National Bank, Chairperson as well as half of the members of the Central Election Commission, Chairperson of the Auditing Chamber) with the consent of the parliament; he nominates all candidates for the Constitutional Court who are then elected by the parliament; he can suspend all the normative acts of the government and other organs of executive power; he can call the *Jogorku Kenesh* for a meeting outside its regular schedule with his own agenda, and he can call for a referendum on his own initiative and decide on a referendum initiated by 300,000 voters or by the majority of the deputies.<sup>653</sup>

This newly established system is clearly a presidential one, as the president has now the power “to determine the structure and the personal composition of state organs as well as their payment.”<sup>654</sup> According to one expert:

In comparison to other models of democracy in Europe the system established in Kyrgyzstan on the basis of the new Constitution seems to show quite a significant shift of power to the President. As this is not really counterbalanced by the competences given to the legislative and judicial branches, the newly established system might not be in conformity with the principle of separation of powers that the Constitution itself declares to be of fundamental importance.<sup>655</sup>

In addition to these points, it is also necessary to emphasize that the referendum was used as a means to put into effect a whole new constitution and a different election code simplified into two questions. The way these questions were put on the referendum did not allow the people any chance of article-by-article voting on each amendment, so they had to simply say “yes” or “no” on important and complicated

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<sup>653</sup> A. Nussberger, *Ibid.*, p.5

<sup>654</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*

issues related to the 2007 Constitution and the Election Code.<sup>656</sup> Furthermore, the period given for public discussion was only a month and that was not enough for a voter to evaluate all of the proposed changes. In other words, there was a serious shortage of time, just as the case during Akaev's era.<sup>657</sup> Bakiev set the date of the referendum on 19 September 2007, so the voters were given only 38 days to make their decisions.<sup>658</sup> Obviously in this short period the content of the documents to decide on remained largely non-discussed for a majority of citizens. However, as one analyst suggests, for a voter to make a healthy decision, the proposals should have been "broadly and publicly discussed in comparison with not only the current legislation but also alternative and more progressive drafts."<sup>659</sup> In another report, it is suggested that "the hastily called 2007 referendum drew criticism from civil-society groups ... [and] the vote had failed to meet international standards."<sup>660</sup> According to an NGO leader in Kyrgyzstan:

The haste around the referendum is indicative of the fact that they [the authorities] simply want to get a super presidential constitution draft and secure their power. I am afraid that they will deceive only themselves, just like Akaev did in his time... With every passing day, we are shocked at how our authorities devolve, and this concerns the president himself. He says one thing, does the opposite, plans a third thing, and the outcome is always very complicated.<sup>661</sup>

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<sup>656</sup> Svetlana Kulikova, "Alternative Views of Good Governance: Coverage of 2007 Constitutional Referendum by Kyrgyzstan's Print and Internet-Based Media" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the ISA's 50th Annual Convention "Exploring The Past, Anticipating The Future", New York City, NY, USA 15 February 2009, p.1

<sup>657</sup> Erica Marat, "March and After: What Has Changed? What has stayed the same?", *Ibid.*, p.232

<sup>658</sup> *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 5 October 2007

<sup>659</sup> Svetlana Kulikova *Ibid.*, p.1

<sup>660</sup> Freedom in the World, Kyrgyzstan 2008, available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2008&country=7427> (Accessed on 12.03.2009)

<sup>661</sup> Interview given by NGO leader Asiya Sasykbaeva in Bishkek Press Club, independent online portal, 26 September, 2007. (in Russian)

It has also been suggested that if they were given “a chance to study and ponder Bakiyev’s draft of constitution, the Kyrgyz population would have immediately found lots of inconsistencies and shortcomings in the document.”<sup>662</sup>

The 2007 referendum was further criticized due to several violations, manipulations and vote rigging. According to a number of NGOs and observer groups in Kyrgyzstan such as Interbilim and *Taza Shailoo*<sup>663</sup>, the turnout was much lower, about 30 to 40 percent of voters.<sup>664</sup> One opposition leader made the following comment: “The referendum showed 80 percent turnout, but there are not that many people in Kyrgyzstan now. I thought they would do 60-65 percent, but they aimed higher and produced 80 percent!”<sup>665</sup> Further, the spokeswoman of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Urdur Gunnarsdottir, said that “there were numerous irregularities during the election campaign and the voting itself.”<sup>666</sup> The authorities did not respect transparency and accountability and the country missed an opportunity to hold honest and fair democratic referendum. Furthermore, the Coalition “For Democracy and Civil Society” discovered that members of local voting committees brought up to 600 empty ballots to ballot boxes.<sup>667</sup> The Coalition also reported that the local governments were instructed to ensure at least a 65 percent turnout in their precincts. Cases of single persons having multiple ballots

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<sup>662</sup> Ajdar Kurtov, “Why is Kyrgyzstan not Switzerland and not even the USSR?”, *Russian Institute of Strategic Studies*, Fergana.ru, 17.10.2007 available at <http://enews.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=2172> (Accessed on 01.09.2008)

<sup>663</sup> *Taza Shailoo* is an association which observes elections in Kyrgyzstan. It has the dual mission of bringing together all those interested in improving the electoral process and monitoring elections and referenda at all levels in the country.

<sup>664</sup> Tamerlan Ibrahimov, “Referendum Results in Kyrgyzstan”, *the Center for Political and Legal Studies*, Bishkek, October 25, 2007, available at <http://www.eurasianhome.org/xml/t/expert.xml?lang=en&nic=expert&pid=1298> (Accessed on 15.10.2009)

<sup>665</sup> Duyshenkul Chotonov, *Ata-Meken* party leader, quoted in Svetlana Kulikova p.17

<sup>666</sup> Cited in *Kyrgyz Weekly*, (live journal) 16 - 22 December, 2007, available at <http://kyrgyz-weekly-livejournal.com/>(Accessed on 02.12.2009)

<sup>667</sup> “*O Faktah Massovogo Podvoza i Podvornogo Obhoda Soobshchaet Koalitsiya*”[Coalition Reports Facts of Mass Transportation (of Voters) and Visits to Each Neighborhood], *Akipress.kg*, October 21, 2007

were also widespread. Interbilim called the October referendum the “most cynical” in the history of Kyrgyzstan.<sup>668</sup>

### 3.2 Bakiev Era: 2007 Parliamentary Elections

One major development that led to the 2007 parliamentary elections was the decision to dissolve the parliament after the 2007 referendum. On 22 October 2007 President Bakiev dissolved the *Jogorku Kenesh*. In his speech of 22 October 2007, he argued that “this step was necessary as the parliament duplicated the executive branch, tried to influence appointments of high officials, interfered in day-to-day work of the Cabinet and Ministries, tried to control government enterprises promoting interests of some MPs.”<sup>669</sup> He also added that “deputies openly lobbied for the interests of their businesses or business of their relatives.”<sup>670</sup> In another speech, Kurmanbek Bakiev further said that he dissolved the parliament “due to insurmountable differences between the *Jogorku Kenesh* and Constitutional Court”<sup>671</sup> and that he used his legal right given to him according to Article 63(2) of the Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic. The declared aim of new parliamentary elections was to form a new legislative body on the basis of party lists in order to eradicate the influence of clan and tribe divisions during the elections.<sup>672</sup> On 23 October 2007 President Bakiev issued a decree to hold the pre-term parliamentary elections on 16 December 2007. Between this decree and the elections, Bakiev ruled by other decrees all of which had the power of law. The parliament’s dissolution created an environment of political uncertainty in which the president had unlimited power as he was now performing both the executive and the legislative functions in the absence of a parliament. After the dissolution of the *Jogorku Kenesh*, Bakiev quickly formed his own political party *Ak Jol (Bright Path)* that “embraced virtually all employees of the public sector” to

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<sup>668</sup> “*Tsentr Interbilim: Takih Tsinichnyh Vyborov ne Bylo Eshche Nikogda*” [Interbilim Center: Such Cynical Elections as Never Before], Akipress.kg, October 22, 2007.

<sup>669</sup> President Bakiev’s speech of 22 October 2007, available in *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 23 October 2007, p.1

<sup>670</sup> Ibid.

<sup>671</sup> President Bakiev’s speech, *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 26 October 2007, p.1

<sup>672</sup> President Bakiev’s speech in Jalal-Abad on 16 October 2007, *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 23 October 2007, p.4

contest in the parliamentary elections.<sup>673</sup> This is how Kurmanbek Bakiev justified the creation of *Ak Jol*:

At best, everyone is simply criticizing the executive power and our mistakes. Who will and should make things happen? Until today, there was no political force in the country that would undertake the work, achieve the goals and meet the challenges the country faces. This is why I myself made a decision to found it [Ak Jol] as a new political force, a party of creation, responsibility and action.<sup>674</sup>

According to the new election system adopted as a result of the 2007 referendum, the new parliament had 90 deputies elected for five-year terms, their mandates allocated according to the proportional representation system with closed party lists in a single nationwide constituency. This system included “unusual provisions for translating votes into parliamentary seats; [as now the] parties were required to pass two separate thresholds, determined as percentages of all registered voters.”<sup>675</sup> According to Article 77(2) of the Election Code:

The political parties which are to be expelled from distribution of deputies’ mandates are those whose candidates’ lists received less than 5 percent of the votes from the voters’ lists within the whole country and less than 0.5 percent of the votes from the voters’ lists, within each oblast, and the cities of Bishkek and Osh.<sup>676</sup>

According to one comment, this newly introduced changes in election system had some inconsistencies because now “it was possible that a party might receive more than five per cent of the vote nationwide, but if it missed the 0.5 percent in only one region, it would not gain parliamentary representation, thus compromising the objective of proportional representation.”<sup>677</sup> If no party could pass both thresholds, the elections needed to be repeated, allowing room for an endless cycle of failed

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<sup>673</sup> Erica Marat, “March and After: What Has Changed? What Has Stayed the Same?” *Ibid.*, p.232. In order to win parliamentary election public servants were “made” members of *Ak Jol*.

<sup>674</sup> President’s speech at *Ak Jol* Founding Congress, *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 15 October 2007

<sup>675</sup> OSCE/ODIHR “Pre-Term Parliamentary Elections 16 December 2007: the Kyrgyz Republic”, Warsaw 24 April, 2008, p.1

<sup>676</sup> Election Code, Article 77, Bishkek 2007.

<sup>677</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, “Pre-Term Parliamentary Elections 16 December 2007: the Kyrgyz Republic”, p.5

elections. The Election Code did not clearly specify how this second threshold should be determined; therefore the CEC had to make a decision on that. According to one analysis, the CEC

initially determined this second threshold to be calculated against all registered voters nationwide. A protracted appeal process followed, and a final decision of the Supreme Court was issued only after election day on 18 December. The decision overturned the CEC resolution on calculating the 0.5 per cent threshold. In a nontransparent adjustment, the 0.5 percent was then calculated by the CEC against the number of registered voters in each respective region. This created uncertainty, and the rules for allocation of parliamentary seats compromise the objective of proportional representation.<sup>678</sup>

*Ak Jol* appealed this decision of the CEC to a local court first, but having lost the case, took it to the Supreme Court. As will be explained below, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of *Ak Jol*.

Initially nineteen political parties intended to stand for the 2007 elections. Seven of them were denied registration: the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, the Peasants' Party of Kyrgyzstan, the Green Party of Kyrgyzstan, Party of Afghan War Veterans, *Rodina* (Fatherland), *Taza Koom* (Clean Society), and *Zamandash* (Compatriot). Out of these seven parties, six were denied registration by the CEC for lack of compliance with the gender distribution provision in Article 72(3) of the Election Code<sup>679</sup> and one on the basis of failing to comply with the minimum number of candidates required for ethnic representation provision in Article 25(3). Once these parties were out of the electoral race, there were twelve parties that were granted registration: *Aalam* (Universe), *Ak Jol* (*Bright Path*), *Ar-Namys* (Dignity), *Asaba* (Banner), *Ata Meken* (Motherland), *Erkin Kyrgyzstan* (Free Kyrgyzstan), *Erkindik* (Freedom), *Glas Naroda* (The Voice of the People), *Novaya Sila* (New Force), Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan, Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, and *Turan*.

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<sup>678</sup> Ibid., p.1

<sup>679</sup> It is important to note that after the registration process ended, parties removed candidates from party lists with impunity and without replacements that would make lists compliant with the prescribed gender distribution order. (OSCE/ODIHR "Pre-Term Parliamentary Elections 16 December 2007: the Kyrgyz Republic", p.5)



Compared to other parties, *Ak Jol* was the best organized with largest financial resources. Although it was only recently formed, it had developed an extensive regional infrastructure prior to the elections. The party held a variety of campaign activities, including concerts and sports competitions that targeted a wide spectrum of voters. It also used innovative campaign techniques such as text messaging and billboards featured prominently nationwide.<sup>680</sup>

The elections were held on 16 December 2007. According to the final results issued by the CEC on 20 December 2007, *Ak Jol* received 71 seats, the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan received 8 seats and the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan received 11 seats (Table 3).<sup>681</sup> Official turnout was 73.86 percent.<sup>682</sup> In his speech after the announcement of the results of parliamentary elections, President Bakiev made the following comment: “we started moving on the path of party system in the country... [and the] elections are the first step.”<sup>683</sup> Bakiev also added that he was pleased with the results of the elections in which three parties got seats in the parliament.<sup>684</sup>

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<sup>680</sup> Ibid., p.11

<sup>681</sup> Central Election Commission, “Final Results of Parliamentary Elections 2007” (in Russian) available at <http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/category/vybory-deputatov-zhk-kr-2007-po-partijnym-spiskam/> (Accessed on 20.10.2009)

<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

<sup>683</sup> *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 21 December 2007, p.1

<sup>684</sup> Ibid., p.2

**Table 3 Results of 2007 Parliamentary Elections<sup>685</sup>**

Party Name	Orientation	Cast of votes for each candidate's list	Number of Seats <sup>686</sup>	% of votes
<i>Ak Jol</i>	Presidential	1,245,331	71	78.8
Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan	Oppositional/centrist	188,585	11	12.2
Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan	Oppositional/leftist	140,258	8	8.9
<i>Ata-Meken</i>	Oppositional	228,125	0	-
<i>Turan</i>	Nationalist <sup>687</sup>	55,628	0	-
<i>Ar-Namys</i>	Oppositional	44,048	0	-
Democratic Party <i>Erkin Kyrgyzstan</i>	Oppositional	28,315	0	-
<i>Asaba</i>	Nationalist/rightist	23,459	0	-
<i>Erkindik</i>	Centrist	25,753	0	-
Aalam	Centrist	13,503	0	-
Glas naroda	Centrist/rightist	12,074	0	-
<i>Novaya Sila</i>	Centrist	5,823	0	-
Against all		6,481	-	-
Total			90	100

The gender requirement according to the new election system gave positive results in terms of the number of female deputies, especially considering the fact that in the previous parliament composed after the 2005 elections, there was not a single female in the *Jogorku Kenesh*. Due to gender quota introduced in the new Election Code, 39 percent of the registered candidates in this election were women, out of who 23 gained seats (18 from the *Ak Jol* Party, 3 from the Social-Democratic Party, and 2 from the Communist Party). Similar positive results were received for the people below 35 years old and for the representatives of various nationalities, who could each get over 20 seats.<sup>688</sup> It was noted that despite a better representation of women,

<sup>685</sup> Data is provided by OSCE/ODIHR, "Pre-Term Parliamentary Elections 16 December 2007: the Kyrgyz Republic", pp. 26-27

<sup>686</sup> Based on Article 77 of the Election Code of Kyrgyz Republic on elections in KR; CEC determined following distribution of deputy's mandates, received by political parties.

<sup>687</sup> See Valentin Bogatyrev, "Status of Formal Political Institutes and Interactions with Informal Political Structures in Kyrgyzstan" IPP, available at <http://www.ipp.kg/en/analysis/599/> (Accessed on 09.12.2009)

<sup>688</sup> *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 21 December 2007, p.3

ethnic minorities, and young politicians, “the parliament became full of ‘dead souls’ willing to follow the regime.”<sup>689</sup> As for the *Ak Jol* Party, which gained the majority of seats after the elections, it soon “became a dominant political faction in the parliament and infamous for being replete with unprofessional people with uncertain political views.”<sup>690</sup>

### 3.2.1 2007 Parliamentary Elections in Perspective

The most serious problem of these elections resulted from the CEC’s decision that the 0.5 percent regional threshold should be calculated out of the total number of voters in the country. As was mentioned above, having lost in local court on this point before election day, the *Ak Jol* Party resubmitted its case to the Supreme Court and won after the elections. This is how a report evaluated the Supreme Court’s final decision:

One could compare this to having the rules of the game changed after the game had ended. However, this post-election change is understandable, since before the elections the *Ak Jol* party was not sure whether it would be able to overcome the narrowly-defined threshold in some regions.<sup>691</sup>

Thus, ambiguity of this law allowed for different interpretations and created opportunities for manipulation of the electoral process. The new Election Code also contained certain provisions imposing several restrictions on the right to stand as a candidate. According to Article 72, Clause 2 of the Election Code, candidates may be nominated only by political parties, making it impossible for independent candidates to stand alone. Article 78 of the Election Code also establishes that deputies lose their mandate if they leave a party, and they are dismissed from it if the party “ceases activity.” According to a report, “This gives party leaderships a disproportionate control over deputies elected by popular vote and challenges the commitment that

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<sup>689</sup> Quoted in Erica Marat, “March and After: What Has Changed? What Has Stayed the Same?”, p.232

<sup>690</sup> Erica Marat, “March and After: What Has Changed? What Has Stayed the Same?”, Ibid., p.232

<sup>691</sup> Final Report of *Taza Shailoo* on its Monitoring of the Early Parliamentary Elections in the Kyrgyz Republic, December 16, 2007, *Taza Shailoo*, January 10, 2008, p. 8, available at [http://www.ndi.org/files/2334\\_kg\\_elfinalreport\\_engpdf\\_07082008.pdf](http://www.ndi.org/files/2334_kg_elfinalreport_engpdf_07082008.pdf), (Accessed on 11.07.2009)

candidates who obtain the legally necessary votes remain in office until their term expires.”<sup>692</sup> Another limitation is specified in Article 72 of the Election Code according to which the political parties are required to submit their candidate lists to the CEC containing no less than 90 and no more than 100 candidates (Article 25). This provision is evaluated to represent “an unreasonable hurdle.”<sup>693</sup> Furthermore, Article 72(5) of the Election Code prohibits changes to candidate lists following their submission, only when candidates are withdrawn; it is possible to replace them.<sup>694</sup> One scholar makes the following comment on this point:

Parliamentary elections by party list will not be a step toward democratization and stability, but more tightening the screws...On the grand scale of things, all our constitutional struggles were about one dilemma: whether the president [Bakiev] shares the access to power (i.e. economic resources as well) or he does not share with anybody. He has chosen the second. But the people would have been better off with the first.<sup>695</sup>

This comment is related to another relevant point about these elections: Bakiev’s reluctance in sharing political power. His party *Ak Jol* received majority of seats in the new parliament and was now secure from the pressures of strong oppositional deputies. Elections were hastily called right after the October 2007 referendum, giving less than two months to the opposition to get ready for them. Furthermore, the registration process was characterized by several inconsistencies that excluded many candidates from the elections.

Another major issue was related to use of administrative resources as well as pressure, utilized for campaign purposes by local administrators in favor of *Ak Jol*.<sup>696</sup> In particular, reports were received of pressure on teachers and students in Jayil, Kyzyl Kyya, Naryn, Osh, Sokuluk and Talas, to become members of *Ak Jol*, to vote

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<sup>692</sup> OSCE/ODIHR “Pre-Term Parliamentary Elections 16 December 2007: the Kyrgyz Republic”, p.5

<sup>693</sup> Ibid., p.9

<sup>694</sup> “*Upravlaemie Parlamenskie Vibori v Kirgizii*” [Managed Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan] *Obshchestvenii Reiting* newspaper, 17.12.2007, available at [www.pr.kg/news/inopress/2007/12/17/148/](http://www.pr.kg/news/inopress/2007/12/17/148/) (Accessed on 17.01.2008)

<sup>695</sup> Interview with Gulnara Iskakova quoted in Svetlana Kulikova, p.18

<sup>696</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, “Pre-Term Parliamentary Elections 16 December 2007: the Kyrgyz Republic”, p.12

for the party or to attend their campaign events. In several instances, threats reportedly included job loss or expulsion from the educational institution.<sup>697</sup> The pressure and intimidation of some groups of voters were also reported. There were also some cases of pressure on private owners “to terminate rent agreements with other parties” in Batken, Chui and Osh regions as well as allegations of “intimidation of party activists and candidates” from Batken, Chui, Jalal-Abad and Osh regions.”<sup>698</sup> Therefore, it is possible to suggest that the political parties participating in the elections had an unequal start right from the beginning.

In addition to such problems, there were several other issues that casted doubt on the fairness of elections. Various observer organizations such as the ENEMO, *Taza Shailoo*, the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, and other credible and experienced monitoring groups reported many problems regarding the elections. One such report noted “significant failings” because:

...access to the media, especially state-run outlets, was limited for opposition parties and heavily imbalanced in favor of the ruling party and that opportunities for debate between parties were restricted. Concerning election day itself, ... [there were] many vote counting irregularities, ballot stuffing, multiple voting, the significant misuse of early voting and mobile voting procedures, and the widespread revision of precinct protocols at higher-level election commissions.<sup>699</sup>

The same report also stated that the CEC has failed to fulfill the requirements of Article 48 of the Election Code, which stipulates that both the final general results and the results at each precinct should be published<sup>700</sup> for full transparency. However that was not provided and the CEC was criticized due to “delayed and non-transparent announcement of nationwide turnout figures and preliminary party

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<sup>697</sup> Ibid., p.13

<sup>698</sup> OSCE, Ibid. p.13

<sup>699</sup> “NDI Statement on December 16, 2007 Parliamentary Elections”, January 7, 2008 available at [http://www.ndi.org/files/2264\\_kg\\_statement\\_parlect\\_en\\_020108.pdf](http://www.ndi.org/files/2264_kg_statement_parlect_en_020108.pdf) (Accessed on 16.03.2009)

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

totals,” and “inconsistencies between preliminary and final totals” and the failure “to post polling station data on its website.”<sup>701</sup>

Another problem was related to the manner in which the seats were distributed. Article 78(2) of the Election Code stipulates that the CEC must distribute all seats to parliamentary deputies within three days after the results are finalized. However, the seats were distributed to parliamentary deputies on 20 December 2007, four days instead of three, without an official publication of the election results in the mass media. *Taza Shailoo* reported that “these regulations do not correspond with the democratic principles of conducting elections and are illogical and inconsistent.”<sup>702</sup> *Taza Shailoo* also noted that significant violations reported on the election day had an impact on the results of the election. For example, there were “problems with the voter lists, breaches in polling station opening procedures, vote buying and bussing of voters, misuse of early voting and mobile voting provisions, multiple voting, pressure on observers, ballot stuffing, and serious violations during the vote count and tallying of results.”<sup>703</sup>

As a result of this parliamentary elections, President Bakiev had a parliament that simply performed the function of validating his decisions, a pattern “repeating the Russian and Kazakhstani scenarios”, where “one party dominating the legislative branch ... effectively cut out major opposition parties from ... legitimate outlet for their political activities.”<sup>704</sup>

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<sup>701</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, “Pre-Term Parliamentary Elections 16 December 2007: the Kyrgyz Republic”, p.2

<sup>702</sup> “Final Report of *Taza Shailoo* on its Monitoring of the Early Parliamentary Elections in the Kyrgyz Republic”, p. 8

<sup>703</sup> Ibid.

<sup>704</sup> “New Concept of Political System in Kyrgyzstan”, *Central Asia Harvard List*, Washington., DC, December 12, 2008 available at <http://centralasiaharvard.blogspot.com/2008/12/lecture-new-concept-of-political-system.html>

### 3.3 Bakiev Era: Presidential Elections

#### 3.3.1 2005 Presidential Elections

After the Tulip Revolution and fleeing of Askar Akaev from the country, the parliament appointed Kurmanbek Bakiev as the acting prime minister and acting president until a new presidential election could be held. On 26 March 2005 Bakiev was confirmed as the acting president by the CEC and the parliament. Askar Akaev resigned on 4 April 2005, and on 11 April the parliament accepted his resignation, after which new presidential elections were scheduled for 10 July 2005. On 12 May an agreement was made between Kurmanbek Bakiev and Felix Kulov according to which Kulov withdrew from the electoral race to be immediately appointed as the vice prime minister. While many viewed this agreement critical for maintaining stability in the country, the agreement lessened the degree of electoral competitiveness.<sup>705</sup>

One of peculiarities of the 2005 presidential elections was their conduct according to Article 58(6) of the Election Code, which stated that the time for pre-termed presidential elections would be reduced by 1/4, i.e. presidential elections had to be held in three months instead of four. Therefore the time dedicated to the organization of election polling station commissions, administration of the election, voter list preparation, registration of candidates, and campaigning was also reduced.

Presidential candidates could be nominated in one of three ways: by self-nomination; by the initiative of a group of at least 100 voters associated by a common place of residence or work; and by a registered political party or an electoral bloc. Keneshbek Dushebaev and Jypar Jeksheev were political party nominees from *Akyikat* (Justice) and the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan respectively; and the others were either self-nominated or group nominees. Nominees were required to collect a minimum of 50,000 signatures, with at least 3 percent coming from each of the seven oblasts and from the cities of Bishkek and Osh. They also had to make sure that these

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<sup>705</sup> OSCE/ODIHR “Kyrgyz Republic 10 July 2005 Presidential Election Final Report”, Warsaw 7 November 2005

signatures would be accepted as valid by the *oblast* and Bishkek and Osh City Election Commissions as well as the CEC.<sup>706</sup> Once a nomination had been made and registered by the CEC, the nominee could begin the process of signature collection.<sup>707</sup>

Initially, there were a total of twenty two self-nominated candidates for presidency. As three of them decided not to participate, only nineteen candidates submitted their applications to the CEC. Later, five candidates withdrew their applications: Almazbek Atambaev, Bayaman Erkinbaev, Jenishbek Nazaraliev, Felix Kulov, Dastan Sarygolov. Among the remaining fourteen candidates, twelve could pass the language test: Akbaraly Aitikeev, Kurmanbek Bakiev, Urmatbek Baryktabasov, Tursunbai Bakir uulu, Keneshbek Dushebaev, Jypar Jeksheev, Gaisha Ibragimova, Nazyrbek Nyshanov, Amanbay Satybaev, Damira Omorkulova, Toktayim Umetalieva, Jusupbek Sharipov.<sup>708</sup> Among these twelve candidates, five candidates could not complete the signature collection/verification stage.<sup>709</sup> Thus seven candidates remained to run for the office of the president: Tursunbay Bakir uulu, Keneshbek Dushebaev, Jypar Jeksheev, Jusupbek Sharipov, Toktayim Umetalieva, Akbaraly Aitikeev and Kurmanbek Bakiev. After his registration on 23 June 2005, Jusupbek Sharipov also withdrew from the elections.

In the 2005 presidential elections, Toktayim Umetalieva was the first women who ever contested a presidential election in Kyrgyzstan. Two other women (Gaisha Ibragimova and Damira Omurkulova) were also nominated but they did not pass the signature collection/verification stage. As was put forward in a report, “Factors that may lie behind the low women candidacy rate include traditional societal values and high entry barriers such as the inability of women candidates to gather sufficient

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<sup>706</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, “Interim Report No. 2, 27 May – 17 June 2005. Presidential Elections 2005”, Election Observation Mission to Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, p.1

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

<sup>708</sup> Central Election Commission website, [www.shailo.gov.kg](http://www.shailo.gov.kg). The Kyrgyz language proficiency test, required by the Election Code, was conducted by a Linguistic Commission created by Central Election Commission resolution and approved by parliament.

<sup>709</sup> Nazyrbek Nishanov, Amanbay Satybaev, Kubanychbek Apasov, Gaisha Ibragimova and Damira Omorkulova.



funding.”<sup>710</sup> All seven presidential candidates were from the majority Kyrgyz ethnic community, which comprises around two-thirds of the population of Kyrgyzstan.

The CEC issued the election results on 13 July 2005. Bakiev was declared the winner, getting 88.71 percent of the votes with an official turnout rate of 74.96 percent. The other candidates got the following rates of votes: Akbaraly Aitikeev 3.62 percent, Tursunbay Bakir uulu 3.93 percent, Keneshbek Dushebaev 0.51 percent, Jypar Jeksheev 0.9 percent, and Toktayim Umetalieva 0.52 percent.<sup>711</sup> As Bakiev was considered like a hero after the Tulip Revolution, his victory was both anticipated and desired.

### **3.3.2 2009 Presidential Elections**

The developments prior to the 2009 presidential elections have already been described in the part on the 2007 referendum. As it was mentioned in that part, Bakiev’s four years in power were characterized by a tense political situation and frequent standoffs between the government and the opposition parties. According to one scholar:

Disappointment in Bakiev already became apparent in the first few months of his leadership. During his first year in power, Bakiev failed to clean up the [... remnants] of Akaev’s corruption, despite promises made before the ‘revolution’ and after acquiring power. Bakiev was able to gain quick, yet short-lived popularity among the masses, even though he was largely unknown before the removal of Akaev. However, within weeks after winning presidential power in June 2005, Bakiev began to quickly lose the support of his colleagues who had risen with him against Akaev’s regime.<sup>712</sup>

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<sup>710</sup> OSCE/ODIHR “Kyrgyz Republic 10 July 2005 Presidential Election Final Report”, Warsaw 7 November 2005, p. 20

<sup>711</sup> Central Election Commission release printed in *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 19 July, 2005

<sup>712</sup> Erica Marat, “March and After: What Has Changed? What Has Stayed the Same?”, *Ibid.*, p.231

One major development prior to the 2009 elections was the decision of the Constitutional Court that was issued on 19 March 2009.<sup>713</sup> According to this decision, President Bakiev had been elected under the previous constitution so he had the right to be a candidate again. The Court also ruled that new elections were to be held no later than last Sunday of October 2009. The *Jogorku Kenesh* subsequently set the election date for 23 July 2009.<sup>714</sup>

The nomination period lasted from 20 March to 17 May 2009. In order to be registered by the CEC, potential candidates had to collect a minimum of 50,000 support signatures from voters (some 1.7 percent of registered voters), with a minimum of 3 per cent in each oblast as well as in the cities of Bishkek and Osh (Article 62(1) of the Election Code). They also had to prove their command of the Kyrgyz language, which was tested by a special commission nominated by the CEC and approved by the parliament.<sup>715</sup>

Initially there was a total of twenty-two candidates nominated either by political parties or by self-nomination to stand for election. Six candidates (Guljamila Estebesova, Ismail Isakov, Askarbek Istanov, Damira Omurkulova, Erlan Satybekov, Janybek Suyunaliyev, all independents) withdrew from the registration process on their own will. Ten were denied registration for different reasons: two (Kutmanbek Eshenbaev, Azamat Atambaev) failed the Kyrgyz language test; four (Askarbek Abyshev, Kuttubek Asylbekov, Murat Borombaev, Bakyt Kerimbekov) submitted an insufficient number of signatures by 2 June 2009 deadline; three (Omurbek Bolturukov, Nazarbek Nyshanov, Almaz Parmanov) had problems with paying the election deposit and one (Akbaraly Aitikeev) was denied registration for submitting an insufficient number of valid signatures.<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>713</sup> “Constitutional Court: Presidential election must take place in Kyrgyzstan before 25 October 2009”, Akipress News Agency, 19 March 2009

<sup>714</sup> OSCE “Kyrgyz Republic, Presidential Elections 23 July 2009”, Warsaw 22 October, 2009, p.4

<sup>715</sup> Ibid., p.10

<sup>716</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-12. They had to pay 1000,000 Kyrgyz som (some 1,600 euro)

Finally, six of the initial twenty-two candidates were registered by the CEC: Almazbek Atambaev (independent candidate representing the United People's Movement and the chairperson of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan); Kurmanbek Bakiev (the incumbent President from the *Ak Jol* Party); Jenishbek Nazaraliev (independent); Temir Sariiev (from the *Ak Shumkar* (Gerfalcon) Party); Nurlan Motuev (independent, though affiliated with the *Joomart* (Generous) Movement); and Toktayim Umetalieva (independent).

During the campaign, although all six candidates conducted their own campaigns throughout the country, President Bakiev remained the most visible candidate the whole time. His billboards, especially those showing him in his capacity as the president, were widely displayed. His party *Ak Jol*, that has been active since its foundation in October 2007, also organized a large-scale campaign for Kurmanbek Bakiev. In general, Bakiev's campaign focused mainly on the stability and the socio-economic progress made over the past four years. There was also a strong emphasis on regional stability and on Kyrgyzstan's role in dealing with international terrorism in the region.<sup>717</sup>

The other candidates had their own priorities. Almazbek Atambaev emphasized the necessity of further political, socio-economic and legal reforms as well as the increased transparency in public life. Temir Sariiev stressed the need for new people in politics and a new mentality based on universal values. His campaign message placed a strong emphasis on the rule of law, improvement of the socio-economic situation, and enhancing relations with neighboring countries. Jenishbek Nazaraliev's election program stressed improvement of social conditions, attracting foreign investment, and development of closer relations with the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Islamic world. Nurlan Motuev stressed the importance of intensifying economic activity and fighting corruption. As for the only female candidate, Toktayim Umetalieva, the main issues were socio-economic problems and the need to raise the status of women in society. Umetalieva also underlined the need

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<sup>717</sup> Ibid., p.12

to protect the southern part of the country from terrorism and proposed moving the capital to the south.<sup>718</sup>

Although towards the end of the campaign period, these other candidates also increased their visibility by posting their own billboards and posters, the results would not change.<sup>719</sup> Kurmanbek Bakiev received 76.12 percent of the votes, Almazbek Atambaev 8.41 percent, Temir Sariev 6.74 percent, Toktayyim Umetalieva 1.14 percent, Nurlan Motuev 0.93 percent, and Jenishbek Nazaraliev 0.83 percent respectively. 4.66 percent of the voters used the option “against all.”<sup>720</sup> Turnout was 79.1 percent.<sup>721</sup>

### **3.3.3 Presidential Elections in Perspective**

It is a commonly accepted fact that Kyrgyzstan has a history of flawed elections, in which there are several problems of free speech and assembly. That stands true for the presidential elections as well. According to Laura Jewett, the Director of Eurasia Programs of National Democratic Institute for International Affairs:

citizen confidence in Kyrgyzstan’s election procedures is low...NDI conducted focus group discussions with Kyrgyzstani citizens and found that respondents generally do not have faith in the transparency and fairness of [presidential] elections in Kyrgyzstan. Some expressed a reluctance to vote, because they believe the results to be predetermined.<sup>722</sup>

A similar observation is made by an ENEMO report in which it is stated that

although the [2009] presidential election was conducted peacefully overall, it was negatively affected by serious violations during voting and vote counting procedures on election day. Stuffing of ballot boxes, multiple voting, abuses of the provision for early voting, and denying access to observers during crucial aspects of vote counting and tabulation at the district election

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<sup>718</sup> Ibid. p.12

<sup>719</sup> OSCE “Kyrgyz Republic, Presidential Elections 23 July 2009”, Warsaw 22 October, 2009, p.12

<sup>720</sup> Central Election Commission release, 27 July, 2009, Bishkek

<sup>721</sup> Ibid.

<sup>722</sup> Laura Jewett, “Hearing on “Kyrgyzstan Before the Election”, NDI, June 18, 2009

commissions will likely undermine public confidence in the election process.<sup>723</sup>

Some of the domestic election monitoring groups in Kyrgyzstan, such as the “Alliance of Civic Organizations and It’s Time for MY Choice”, also expressed similar ideas.<sup>724</sup> 2,886 observers from “It’s Time for MY Choice” conducted an independent monitoring of the 2009 elections starting one week prior to the election day. According to these observers, there was massive early voting during the week prior to the election day at the district election commissions of Bishkek by those citizens that did not fit in the criteria provided for in the Election Code to have the right of early voting.<sup>725</sup> Furthermore, “The procedure for issuing absentee ballots did not have clear procedures and, thus, was not able to be monitored well.”<sup>726</sup> There was also massive ballot box stuffing, often by the members of the precinct election commissions, especially in Talas, Chui and Issyk-Kul *oblasts*, as well as pressure of government officials on the voters, who were either inside or close to the polling stations. Once the observers of presidential candidates Almazbek Atambaev and Jenishbek Nazaraliev left the polling stations, the number of violations (including more ballot stuffing and pressure and intimidation of observers) increased dramatically.<sup>727</sup> On the election day, 14 independent monitors from the Alliance of Civic Organizations in Bishkek and the Talas region were expelled from the polling stations and harassed when they tried to write official complaints about the violations that they witnessed.

There was also extensive use of administrative resources in favor of the incumbent candidate. Holding elections on a regular week day contributed to the fact that public

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<sup>723</sup> “Preliminary Statement on 2009 Presidential Election in The Kyrgyz Republic”, ENEMO Mission, 30 July, 2009

<sup>724</sup> CEC charged the Alliance of Civic Organizations for Voters’ Rights and It’s Time for MY Choice with electoral violations. The accusations were reported to be artificial, attempting to intimidate domestic observers and obstruct their work on election day, negatively affecting the transparency of the election process. (ENEMO Preliminary Statement)

<sup>725</sup> This category of citizens included health workers, teachers, communications workers from JSC Kyrgyztelecom, BGTS (Bishkek City Telephone Station), and plumbers. (Preliminary Statement of the Alliance of Civic Organizations “It’s Time for MY Choice” on the Findings of Independent Monitoring of the Course of Voting by the Electorate for the Presidential Election of the Kyrgyz Republic on July 23, 2009, p. 1)

<sup>726</sup> Preliminary Statement of the Alliance of Civic Organizations “It’s Time for MY Choice” Ibid. p. 1

<sup>727</sup> Ibid. pp.1-2

employees were subjected to pressure and intimidation by their supervisors. School principals, law enforcement officials and representatives of local authorities, who controlled the participation of their staff at the elections, were present at polling stations during the elections.<sup>728</sup> Finally, many precinct election commissions did not provide protocols to observers and did not sign them, so manipulation of ballot papers took place.<sup>729</sup> Thus, the constitutional right of citizens to vote freely, secretly, fairly, transparently and democratically was violated.

One final point is related to the use of administrative resources during the Bakiev era in his election campaigns, which were conducted very professionally. There were well-attended and well-organized rallies, and effective use of leaflets, billboards and TV advertising. The government helicopter would travel into different parts of the country to reach voters.<sup>730</sup> Elections news coverage was also in favor of Kurmanbek Bakiev. An OSCE report mentions extensive covering of Kurmanbek Bakiev's activities "presenting him mostly in his capacity of acting President rather than as a candidate."<sup>731</sup> The attention given to Bakiev in most media institutions, including the state-funded media, was therefore, "beyond what was reasonably proportional to his role as acting head of state."<sup>732</sup>

Finally, in the 2005 presidential elections, there was "a degree of unclarity and inconsistency" in terms of the registration process, "including a disputed deadline for signature collection and regional variation in the approach to signature verification."<sup>733</sup> For example, the CEC did not uphold a formal joint complaint by eight nominees concerning incorrect information being spread among voters that they could sign for only one nominee. The problem was publicly acknowledged by the CEC, although there were no effective measures to solve the problem. Several

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<sup>728</sup> For details see Ibid. pp.8-9

<sup>729</sup> Ibid., p. 2

<sup>730</sup> OSCE "Kyrgyz Republic, Presidential Elections 23 July 2009", Ibid., p.13

<sup>731</sup> Ibid.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid., p.16

<sup>733</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, "Interim Report No. 2, 27 May – 17 June 2005. Presidential Elections 2005", p.1

nominees or their representatives around the country told the OSCE Election Observation Mission that signature collectors for Bakiev spread false information. Further, there was a lack of clarity about the deadline for signatures to be submitted to the *oblast* election commissions for the first stage of verification. The deadline presented in the CEC Election Calendar was interpreted differently by the CEC officials and *oblast* election commissions as either 1 or 2 June, resulting also in different interpretations by the *oblast* election commissions. Consequently, not all nominees were able to submit all of the signatures they had collected, and some sought legal redress with the courts.<sup>734</sup> As was put in an OSCE report on the 2009 presidential elections:

On 19 June [2009], the OSCE/ODIHR EOM requested from the CEC details of the signature verification process by Osh City Election Commissions and by the CEC Working Group on Candidate Registration. Initially, the CEC declined the request, but on 3 July agreed to provide the CEC procedures and decisions on registration and the figures for signature verification for six of the seven candidates (the protocol on signature verification for Mr. Aitikeev was not made available). The CEC did not provide figures or breakdowns for the OEC verifications. This lack of transparency undermined confidence in the election process.<sup>735</sup>

The OSCE assessed the 2009 presidential election as “failed to meet key OSCE commitments for democratic elections, in particular the commitment to guarantee equal suffrage, to ensure that votes are reported honestly and that political campaigning is conducted in a fair and free atmosphere as well as to maintain a clear separation between party and state.”<sup>736</sup>

### **3.4 Comparison of Akaev and Bakiev Eras**

When we compare the referendums and parliamentary and presidential elections during the Akaev and Bakiev eras, it is possible to observe some commonalities

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<sup>734</sup> OSCE “Kyrgyz Republic, Presidential Elections 23 July 2009”, Final report, p.10

<sup>735</sup> Ibid., p.11

<sup>736</sup> Ibid., p.1

between these two periods. Although Bakiev' era was much shorter than Akaev's, some trends seem to be very similar.

### 3.4.1 Referendums

Both leaders used referendums as means of enhancing and concentrating political power. As was mentioned earlier, presidential powers (which were already significant right from the very beginning) were increased further by Akaev. Bakiev also has given signs of becoming an even more authoritarian leader, "driven by short-term goals to centralize his power while failing to design viable economic and political policies."<sup>737</sup> As an expert suggests, the constitutional reforms that he realized by the 2007 referendum "pointed toward the establishment of a superficially democratic, super presidential system reminiscent of the political systems in Kazakhstan and Russia."<sup>738</sup>

Another commonality between these two leaders is their attempt to justify the referendums as necessary tools for improving the political and economic reforms and the transition process as well as ensuring political stability. For example, prior to the 2007 referendum Bakiev suggested that he was ready to take "full responsibility ... during this complicated stage of Kyrgyzstan."<sup>739</sup> In another interview, he stressed political stability, which was expected to be provided by the referendum, as a necessity for the development of the economy:

During the last two years of political chaos we have accumulated a number of serious economic problems... This is why I believe that the referendum will put a stop, and after the adoption of the main law, which no one will be able to tailor for themselves any more, will start working on the economy. ... [W]here can the economy develop successfully? Only in the countries where there is political stability. We are about to realize a lot of major projects, but

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<sup>737</sup> Nations in Transit: Kyrgyzstan, 2008, Freedom House, available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2008&country=7427> (Accessed on 04.12.2009)

<sup>738</sup> Ibid.

<sup>739</sup> Interview with Issyk-Kule governor Kydykbek Isaev in *Slovo Kirgizstana*, 21 September 2007.



we can implement them only under the conditions a calm political environment.<sup>740</sup>

Another common feature is related to the shortage of time between the announcement and holding of referendums, making it impossible for the people to fully understand and discuss the content of changes put on vote. That was the general attitude of Akaev during the fourteen years of his rule. According to a scholar:

[Akayev] was fond of putting the issues he needed for nationwide ballots. The interim between his decrees on referendums and the referendums themselves was usually brief. The population was never given a chance to ponder the matter. It was simply told to go to the polling station and vote aye for another momentous decision (whatever it was). It was so with the referendums that amended the Constitution on October 22, 1994, February 10, 1996, October 17, 1998, and February 2, 2003.<sup>741</sup>

Bakiev continued this tradition in the 2007 referendum, in which he further created “an illusion of having developed his constitutional project as a result of protracted legal debates.”<sup>742</sup> Obviously, such short periods of time also prevented the opposition from persuading the public about the imbalanced powers the president would receive as a result of the referendum.

Another point of similarity between the Akaev and Bakiev eras is related to the nature of the issues put on referendum. In both periods, whole constitutional drafts and important pieces of legislation (such as the new Election Code) were put on the agenda of the referendums, without any possibility of voting on separate articles. Public opinion was usually ignored, interested parties were not consulted and referendums were imposed from above putting “a heavy decision making burden on the people.”<sup>743</sup> As commented by an expert, in such complicated matters such as adopting a new constitution or a new electoral law, it is not possible to expect the

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<sup>740</sup> “*Otvēt ludei Da*” [‘Yes’ from the People] MSN newspaper, 23 October 2007.

<sup>741</sup> Ajdar Kurtov, “Why is Kyrgyzstan not Switzerland and not even the USSR?” Ibid.

<sup>742</sup> See *Nations in Transit: Kyrgyzstan, 2008*, Freedom House.

<sup>743</sup> Svetlana Kulikova, p.19

citizens to study the proposed issues in a detailed way, “especially if they have no other option but to accept or to reject it as a whole.”<sup>744</sup>

One final commonality is about various violations such as massive ballot stuffing, pressuring the independent observers, and suspicious vote counts. Several international and local monitoring organizations often criticized referendums in Kyrgyzstan as “marked with widespread falsifications.”<sup>745</sup> Bakiev’s only referendum in 2007 was largely reminiscent of Akaev era referendums conducted in 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2003 referendums, in which he also tailored the constitution according to his own interests.<sup>746</sup>

### **3.4.2 Parliamentary Elections**

One major similarity regarding the parliamentary elections during both the Akaev and Bakiev eras is about the utilization of different electoral formulas, some of which were not very useful in the Kyrgyz context. For example, the party-list formula adopted by Bakiev for the 2007 parliamentary elections was not very appropriate for Kyrgyzstan, as political parties were to a large extent unknown and are unpopular among citizens. In these elections, the voters were not familiar with any party’s program and had little experience in differentiating between conservative or liberal views. Most voters continued to associate political parties with their leaders, since the party-building process was still conducted from the top down.<sup>747</sup> Although most Kyrgyz experts agreed that the party list system reduced divisions among the regions, others worried that such a system would in fact exacerbate social cleavages because the party list system would reduce the ties between the candidates and their constituencies. Further, as the 2007 parliamentary elections were pre-termed, obviously not all political parties and groups were able to prepare for the electoral race under new rules. This obviously put the opposition in a disadvantaged position.

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<sup>744</sup> A. Nussberger, “Comments on the constitutional Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic”, European Commission For Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission), Strasbourg, 6 December 2007

<sup>745</sup> Nations in Transit: Kyrgyzstan, 2008. Freedom House.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid.

<sup>747</sup> Nations in Transit: Kyrgyzstan, 2008. Ibid.

There were also certain problems related to the Election Code in both eras. During the Akaev era, electoral rules were not respected by the president; they were constantly changed and interpreted differently. For example, in the 2005 parliamentary elections, the President's daughter Bermet Akaeva was allowed to run for a parliamentary seat regardless the fact that she was violating Article 69, paragraph 1 of the Election Code as well as Article 56, paragraph 1 of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic concerning residency requirement. During the Bakiev era, *Ak Jol* members made use of the Election Code in such ways that smaller parties could not win seats in the parliament. As such, deputies supporting Bakiev and willing to be reelected in the next elections pushed for a new regulation in the new Election Code that would keep oppositional groups from winning the parliamentary elections.<sup>748</sup> According to this regulation, a party had to get 0.5 percent (or 13,500) votes in each of the country's seven administrative regions and its two largest cities, Bishkek and Osh, to be represented in the parliament.<sup>749</sup> As was pointed out in a report:

This restrictive threshold, called a regional barrier, potentially limits the chances for political parties that are concentrated in certain regions to gain representation in the Parliament. For instance, Bakiev's opponent, Felix Kulov, and his party enjoy support mostly in northern Kyrgyzstan. In a similar manner, political parties supported mainly by ethnic Uzbeks living in southern Kyrgyzstan are unknown to the population in the north.<sup>750</sup>

This situation becomes more of a problem, when we take into account the fact that political parties in Kyrgyzstan are usually unsuccessful in getting the votes of citizens at significant rates, because they are still weak and have regional character.

Another main character of the parliamentary elections of both eras was the existence of several violations such as vote buying, misuse of early voting opportunities and

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<sup>748</sup> Ibid.

<sup>749</sup> See Nurshat Ababakirov, "Problematic Threshold Angers Political Parties in Kyrgyzstan," Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst, November 28, 2007

<sup>750</sup> Nations in Transit: Kyrgyzstan, 2008. Ibid.

mobile voting provisions, incidents of multiple voting, pressure on observers, ballot stuffing, and serious falsifications during vote counting and tallying of results.

The existence of various types of attacks against the opposition was also an important common feature of Akaev and Bakiev era parliamentary elections. In fact, both leaders did everything possible to keep the opposition out of the parliament. Akaev employed various methods for not allowing the opposition into the *Jogorku Kenesh*, and Bakiev continued this practice, though with different methods. As was explained before, in order to concentrate power without being interrupted by the *Jogorku Kenesh*, Bakiev founded *Ak Jol*. Furthermore, while during the Akaev era, the *Jogorku Kenesh* was filled with wealthy politicians who could potentially stand in opposition to Akaev's regime, during Bakiev's era the Parliament was filled with politicians with much weaker financial bases. As an expert suggests, "While the parliament elected in 2005 during Akaev's reign was able to quickly change its loyalty to the new president, given its members' financial independence, Bakiev's parliament is more dependent on the regime and appears to be interested in its continuity."<sup>751</sup>

Furthermore, as compared to Akaev, Bakiev's government had far greater internal consolidation, thanks to *Ak Jol*, exhibiting loyalty to the president. Except for a few candidates, most of the new *Ak Jol* deputies had little experience in political or economic issues at the national level. Among its most prominent members, there are the former chair of the Constitutional Court Cholpon Bayekova, renowned surgeon Ernest Akramov, and the dean of the Kyrgyz-Slavic University Vladimir Nifadyev. As the December 2007 parliamentary elections were conducted on the party-list basis, majority of the deputies of the *Jogorku Kenesh* were from the *Ak Jol* and relied more on their party as opposed to supporters at the local level.<sup>752</sup>

It must also be pointed out that under both Akaev and Bakiev, we see high levels of involvement on the part of presidential families into the political and economic

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<sup>751</sup> Erica Marat, "March and After: What Has Changed? What Has Stayed the Same?", p.233

<sup>752</sup> Ibid.

affairs of the country, resulting in dissatisfaction among both the elites and the people. This was especially important factor in the 2005 parliamentary elections and in the eventual downfall of Akaev. Bakiev also continued this practice and surrounded himself with “loyal political supporters primarily interested in the continuity of the current political regime and their public offices.”<sup>753</sup> Furthermore, his support base is derived from personal ties such as his immediate family and close relatives who were brought to important positions. During the first two years of his rule, one of Bakiev’ relatives, Tashtemir Aitbaev, was appointed as the head of the National Security Council (SNB), while the president’s son, Marat Bakiev, served as Aitbaev’s assistant. In 2006, Aitbaev was replaced by another loyal ally, Busurmankul Tabaldiev, with the president’s youngest brother, Janysh Bakiev, as deputy chair.<sup>754</sup> Later, President Bakiev appointed Janysh Bakiev as the chair of the SNB. With *Ak Jol* having an overwhelming majority in the parliament, Bakiev could further use his “connections in the security agencies” and “control all cadre decisions in the government and parliament.”<sup>755</sup>

Bakiev’s eldest son, Maksim Bakiev, also controlled various businesses previously held by Aidar Akaev.<sup>756</sup> In November 2009, Bakiev appointed Maksim as the head of the Central Agency for Development Investment and Innovation<sup>757</sup>, a newly formed agency, “in which the credits of Russian federation, foreign help, grants and some other credits”<sup>758</sup> were accumulated and administered for realization of various economic projects. The members of this agency were personally appointed by the

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<sup>753</sup> Ibid., p.232

<sup>754</sup> Johan Engvall “Kyrgyzstan: Anatomy of State”, Ibid., p. 39

<sup>755</sup> Erica Marat, “March and After: What Has Changed? What Has Stayed the Same?”, Ibid., p.233

<sup>756</sup> Ramazan Dryldaev, Kyrgyz Committee on Human Rights, Bishkek, February 2006; EurasiaNet, “Kyrgyz President Appoints Brother Deputy Head of Security Service,” *Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*, March 3, 2006, quoted in Johan Engvall, “Kyrgyzstan: Anatomy of State”, problems of post-Communism, vol. 54, No:4, 2007, pp. 39-40

<sup>757</sup> Agency is the new structure under President’s institute, established as a result of state management system reforms, proclaimed by Kurmanbek Bakiev. According to Maxim Bakiev, the priority tasks include the appraisal of the country, including human and natural resources. (“Kyrgyzstan: The President’s son shared his plans on development, investment and innovation” Fergana.ru Information Agency available at <http://enews.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=1443>)

<sup>758</sup> Omurbek Tekebaev, “*Reformi ot Akaeva do Bakieva President Kirgizstana Privatiziruet Gosudarstvenuyu Vlast*” [Reforms from Akaev to Bakiev, President of Kyrgyzstan privatized state power], 27 October 2009, available at <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1256624640> (Accessed on 20 November 2009)

president, meaning that they were not accountable to the *Jogorku Kenesh*. It was suggested that his appointment was mostly aimed at grooming Maksim Bakiev for the presidential elections in 2014.<sup>759</sup> As such, according to the opposition, this appointment was simply another step in President Bakiev's move to concentrate more power in his own hands, despite his promise made in 2005 when he became the acting president, to implement constitutional reforms that would balance power between the three branches of government. Main ministries such as foreign affairs, interior affairs, and defense, as well as the National Security Service were also subordinated to the president, not the parliament. According to Roza Otunbaeva (a former Kyrgyz foreign minister, later the leader of the Social Democratic Party), members of President Bakiev's family can be found everywhere in the government.<sup>760</sup> As she pointed out: "Right now, in the [Kyrgyz] White House there are five Bakievs working in the upper echelons of power - and that is not even mentioning the many relatives [of President Bakiev] who have occupied every floor of the White House."<sup>761</sup> Maksim Bakiev's appointment meant that he would join his older brother and uncle, who also serve in the National Security Service.<sup>762</sup>

In summary, parliamentary elections in both Akaev and Bakiev eras can be seen as important tools of having a "controllable" parliament that does not impede leader's stay in power.

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<sup>759</sup> Tynchtykbek Tchoroev, Amirbek Usmanov, "With First Son's New Role, Kyrgyz Government Remains A Family Affair" *RFE/RL*, available at [http://www.rferl.org/content/With\\_First\\_Sons\\_New\\_Role\\_Kyrgyz\\_Government\\_Remains\\_A\\_Family\\_Affair/1870575.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/With_First_Sons_New_Role_Kyrgyz_Government_Remains_A_Family_Affair/1870575.html) (Accessed on 20.11.2009)

<sup>760</sup> Ibid.

<sup>761</sup> Quoted in Tynchtykbek Tchoroev, Amirbek Usmanov, "With First Son's New Role, Kyrgyz Government Remains A Family Affair", Ibid.

<sup>762</sup> President Bakiev's brother Janysh is head of the presidential guard; his brother Marat is Kyrgyzstan's ambassador to Germany; and another brother, Adyl, is an adviser to Kyrgyzstan's ambassador to China. His brother Jusupbek Bakiev died in February 2006, but the month before his death he briefly held, then voluntarily left, the post of deputy executive director of the Agency for Development and Investment - a role similar to the one Maksim Bakiev now holds. (Tynchtykbek Tchoroev, Amirbek Usmanov Ibid.)

### 3.4.3 Presidential Elections

One major commonality that we see during both Akaev and Bakiev eras was the attempt on the part of the presidents to eliminate potential rivals in presidential elections through various means. Akaev would use methods such as appointment of potential candidates to high official posts or to diplomatic missions as well as frequent changes of prime-ministers in order to prevent them from gaining popularity.<sup>763</sup> During the Bakiev era, a similar trend was observed, although for the presidential elections that took place in 2005, there was no need to do anything about the rivals, because Bakiev was already the “hero of the Tulip Revolution” and a new hope for the people. In 2009 elections, however, potential rivals were eliminated by similar techniques used by Akaev.

Another important means to eliminate potential rivals for presidential post was use of administrative resource by both Akaev and Bakiev, especially for the purposes of election campaigns. These resources were used by both leaders in television advertisements and news coverage in both private and public media outlets. Akaev would also use them for distribution of political and administrative offices and vote buying.

Another common point is related to the unreliable results of elections during both Akaev and Bakiev eras. As was explained in detail above, there were several violations and falsifications in the process of announcing the results of the presidential elections.

The last common feature was the generally biased attitude of the CEC. As was described earlier, the CEC treated candidates differently and in most cases failed to act in a non-partisan, objective and independent manner, preventing the conduct of free and fair elections in Kyrgyzstan. In general the level of confidence in the CEC is low, as it is not considered to be an independent and neutral institution.

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<sup>763</sup> During Bakiev era, from 2005 till 2010 seven prime-ministers served.

### 3.5 Concluding Remarks

Despite all the constitutional amendments, referendums and elections held in the Kyrgyz Republic, both Akaev and Bakiev have managed to firmly maintain their dominant status vis-à-vis the parliament and the cabinet. When these two eras are analyzed, it is possible to see that there has been significant variance between the large powers of the president and the reduced powers of parliament on the one hand, and a weak prime minister who was more dependent on the president than the parliament on the other. Furthermore, the system put the burden of political responsibility primarily on the prime minister; while the president, although enjoying significant powers, was basically considered to be politically irresponsible.<sup>764</sup>

The powers vested in the president resulted in a political system in which the country was ruled by one-person in practice. In such political environment, the role of political parties with different ideological principles turned out to be very negligible, if any. As a result, both in parliamentary and presidential elections, the competition was basically among certain individuals rather than different political parties with diverse interests or programs. As was already mentioned, in general the political parties have remained weak, with the exception of *Ak Jol* which was founded by Bakiev. This, however, may not be a very positive development because the main aim of creating *Ak Jol* was to “form a loyal party” as Erica Marat argued. According to her, “Bakiev replicated Akaev’s worst mistakes while discontinuing some of the more positive features of his predecessor.”<sup>765</sup>

In general both Akaev and Bakiev aimed to secure legitimacy by holding regular elections and referendums and by using them as means of public decision making. Rather than being a means of political choice, elections in Kyrgyzstan became “expressions of loyalty” and “regularly-held rituals where citizens are reminded of

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<sup>764</sup> Gulnara Iskakova “Constitutional Reform and Powers of the Highest Government Bodies in Kyrgyzstan: A New Balance?” Ibid.

<sup>765</sup> Erica Marat, “March and After: What Has Changed? What Has Stayed the Same?”, Ibid. p.239



the existence of the central state.”<sup>766</sup> One scholar argued that Akaev and Bakiev’s claim for legitimacy is reinforced by a lack of viable alternatives in the eyes of the population.<sup>767</sup> As it was described earlier, both leaders did everything they could to suppress the growth of popularity of any politician (or opponent) who could jeopardize their power.

When Akaev came to power in 1990, one of the basic ways of securing legitimacy was seen as realizing Western-oriented reforms in both economic and political spheres of life.<sup>768</sup> However, he was not successful in the longer run, as these reforms came to be seen as imposed from outside. As for Akaev himself, he was considered to be too naïve to have blindly followed foreign recipes. As one expert suggests, “The brief and hesitating liberalization in Kyrgyzstan presented problems for an eventual authoritarian turn. Liberalization was the centerpiece of Akayev’s legitimacy claims, and when economic change bore little fruit and political change went rapidly into reverse, he encountered a legitimacy crisis.”<sup>769</sup> As for Bakiev, when he came to power in 2005 as one of the heroes of the Tulip Revolution, he proclaimed that to continue toward the reform process in which *Ak Jol* would assume responsibility was his main target. He furthermore promised eradicating corruption in the country. However after the 2007 referendum, it became clear that his powers were increased, just as corruption. As the 2009 presidential elections showed, he now seemed invulnerable, at least in the short-run, with *Ak Jol* winning the majority of seats in the *Jogorku Kenesh*. However in April 2010 Bakiev was ousted from power.

When we analyze the referendums as well as the parliamentary and presidential elections held during the Akaev and Bakiev eras within the general theoretical framework presented in the Introduction of the dissertation, it is possible to suggest

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<sup>766</sup> Anna Matveeva, “Legitimizing Central Asian Authoritarianism”, paper presented at the annual meeting of the APSA 2008, Hynes Convention Center, Boston, Massachusetts, Aug 28, 2008, p.7

<sup>767</sup> Ibid.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid., p.14

<sup>769</sup> Edward Schatz, “The Soft Authoritarian ‘Tool Kit’: Agenda-Setting Power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan”, in *Comparative Politics*, 41(2), January 2009, p.2

that these minimum requirements of a formal democracy did not contribute to the development of democracy and/or legitimate political rule in Kyrgyzstan. Both Akaev and Bakiev established certain “institutional designs”<sup>770</sup> in order to gain recognition and legitimacy, especially via holding frequent referendums as well as regular parliamentary and presidential elections. However, these institutional designs being products of transitional circumstances could not necessarily indicate “a fundamental break” with the Soviet past.<sup>771</sup> Although both leaders portrayed themselves as being committed to democracy, this remained, to a large extent, in rhetoric. What we actually saw in Kyrgyzstan was the emergence of a particular type of “hybrid regime” that is “competitive authoritarianism” in which “formal democratic institutes are widely viewed as the principle means of obtaining and exercising political authority.”<sup>772</sup> However in competitive authoritarianism, although elections are held at regular intervals “incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters, and in some cases manipulate electoral results.”<sup>773</sup> As such, “the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standard for democracy.”<sup>774</sup> As was described in detail in Chapter II and Chapter III, both the Akaev and Bakiev eras represent typical characteristics of competitive authoritarianism as both leaders, despite the fact that they regularly held referendums and elections, violated constitutional and electoral rules and abused their presidential powers as well as administrative resources to harass and eliminate opponents by a variety of means.

In this general framework during 1990-2005 and 2005-2010 we saw the emergence of “superpresidentialism” and/or “patronal presidentialism” in Kyrgyzstan. As was pointed out in the Introduction, superpresidentialism is a political system that concentrates not only executive but also legislative and judicial powers as well in the

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<sup>770</sup> See Pauline Jones Luong, “After the Break-up: Institutional Design in Transitional States”, *Comparative Political Studies*, 33(5), June 2000, p.563

<sup>771</sup> Ibid., p.589

<sup>772</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism”, Ibid., p.52

<sup>773</sup> Ibid., p.53

<sup>774</sup> Ibid., p.52

hands of the chief executive, who eventually becomes inclined toward authoritarian reversion and becomes the greatest antagonist of consolidation of democratic gains.<sup>775</sup> That was also the case in Kyrgyzstan, as both leaders used referendums and elections for enhancing their powers, albeit by constitutional amendments. They utilized presidential decrees, constitutional powers of dissolving the legislative branch and manipulation of Constitutional Court and Central Election Commission to inhibit the emergence of strong institutions as well as alternative political parties and leaders.<sup>776</sup>

Perhaps as a reflection of superpresidentialism what we also observe in Kyrgyzstan is “patronal presidentialism” in which there is elite contestation and consolidation. In a system of patronal presidentialism “the president depends on the elites for implementing decisions and delivering votes; while the elites depend on the president for resources and/or the continuation in their posts.”<sup>777</sup> Cyclical phases of elite contestation and consolidation that Hale talks about are detrimental in Kyrgyzstan for president to stay strongly in power. This was and is evident in Kyrgyzstan’s post-independence history. For example, some of Akaev’s former supporters consolidated with his opponents and supported Bakiev taking high positions in his government. Also the notion of patronal presidentialism is valid for Kyrgyzstan because president was like a “patron” who wielded a high degree of informal power based on widespread patron-client relationships and exercises political authority, “primarily through the selective transfers of resources rather than formalized institutional practices, idea-based politics, or generalized exchange, as enforced through the established rule of law.”<sup>778</sup> This kind of informal transfers of resources was very widely used by both Akaev and Bakiev. According to Hale cyclical phases of elite contestation and consolidation are defined by elite expectations about future, so called “lame-duck syndrome” that precipitated elite defection from president when elites feel that president may leave office. This was exactly what happened in

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<sup>775</sup> Steven Fish, “The Dynamics of Democratic Erosion” in Richard D. Anderson et al, p.69.

<sup>776</sup> See Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 248-250

<sup>777</sup> Henry Hale “Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia”, *Ibid.*, p.138

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*

Kyrgyzstan just few months before toppling Akaev's regime. Majority of so-called leaders of the Tulip Revolution left Akaev's team not long before the revolution as they were deprived of resources, positions, offices and because elites had their expectations. Moreover in Kyrgyzstan political elites do not have strong ideological basis, they move from one political block to another (or from pro-government to oppositional camp) looking for a better place to reach limited resources available in Kyrgyzstan.

The emergence of competitive authoritarianism, superpresidentialism and patronal presidentialism in Kyrgyzstan can be seen as the direct result of weakness of formal institutions and lack of rule of law, which are major determinants of a failed democratic transition.<sup>779</sup> In this sense, governmental institutions such as the Constitutional Court, Central Election Commission and the *Jogorku Kenesh* failed to constrain the two presidents of Kyrgyzstan. When we look at the manner in which constitution was designed and/or amended via referendums, what we see is a continuous process of executive manipulation in which formal institutions and rules could not be decisive. That was the case for example in Akaev's participation to presidential elections for a third time in 2000.

It must be also mentioned that weakness of formal institutions is directly related to the strength of informal (patron-client) relations in Kyrgyzstan, a legacy, roots of which go back to the pre-Soviet era, but which continued to prevail during the Soviet rule as well. Therefore, the dominance of informal institutions in Kyrgyzstan, such as family and kinship structures, traditions, and social norms, tribal affiliations has impeded the establishment of rule of law and democratization and was used by regime as an instrument for achieving personal objectives. Explicitly personal goals, personal interests and personal sympathies and dislikes were expressed in cadre policy in Kyrgyzstan. This became raised to the framework of state practices. Therefore dealing with informal institutions in Kyrgyzstan is difficult in a context of weak state with poorly established governance structures. Social constrains such as tribalism and corruption impeded transition.

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<sup>779</sup> See Vladimir Gel'man, "Post-Soviet Transition and Democratization: Toward Theory Building", pp.92-93

This pattern is visible in studying referendums and elections in Kyrgyzstan in which we see personalized political and economic power with high levels of corruption, clientelism and patronage making formal system of governance irrelevant and meaningless.<sup>780</sup> Both Akaev and Bakiev failed to ensure impersonal economic and political power, as their immediate families, other fellow tribesmen and close associates enjoyed rewards from unfair distribution of economic and political resources.

Therefore, both leaders adopted the rhetoric of democratic commitment in order to legitimize their rule by organizing frequent referendums as well as holding regular parliamentary and presidential elections. However to what extent they could succeed in legitimizing the regime remains unclear.<sup>781</sup> Despite the fact that it was because of their supportive attitude towards holding regular parliamentary and presidential elections, their “belief in democratic principles” also remains unclear.<sup>782</sup> Both leaders postponed democratization suggesting that the country needed a strong leader as it is not ready for democracy.<sup>783</sup> It may also be possible, therefore, to suggest that they used referendums and elections as “legitimizing formulas”<sup>784</sup> and actually enhanced their presidential power by playing some sort of a game of “virtual politics” in which “an illusion of normal electoral politics” is played.<sup>785</sup> It may therefore be possible to conclude that what we saw in Kyrgyzstan during 1990-2010 was not consolidation of democracy but consolidation of authoritarian rule.

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<sup>780</sup> Neil Robinson, “The Political is Personal: Corruption, Clientelism, Patronage, Informal Practices and the Dynamics of Post-Communism”, *Ibid.*, p.1217-1218

<sup>781</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, *The Dynamics of Democratization. A Comparative Approach*, *Ibid.*, p.221

<sup>782</sup> Michael McFaul, “The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World”, p.224.

<sup>783</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell G. and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*, *Ibid.*, p.15

<sup>784</sup> Scott Mainwaring, “Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues,” *Ibid.*, pp.324-325

<sup>785</sup> Michael McFaul. Reviewed work(s): *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* by Andrew Wilson. *Slavic Review*, 66(1), Spring, 2007, pp. 167-168

The next chapter will discuss and analyze the perceptions and opinions of ordinary citizens of Kyrgyzstan about Akaev and Bakiev rule as well as elections and referendums which took place during their rule. Also the next chapter looks at political legitimacy as perceived by the respondents participating in the field research.

## CHAPTER IV

### FIELD RESEARCH: PERCEPTIONS OF THE KYRGYZ PEOPLE

#### 4.1 The Research Question and the Research Procedure

As was explained in the Introduction in this study the following questions were asked: 1) How did Akaev and Bakiev seek to legitimize their regimes? 2) How were the Akaev and Bakiev eras perceived by the citizens of Kyrgyzstan in terms of political legitimacy? 3) Which factors were important in the citizens' perception of legitimacy regarding these two leaders and their policies? The objective in asking these questions was to see how the people in Kyrgyzstan perceive the relationship between legitimacy and democratization in the post-Soviet era through elections and referendums.

In order to answer these questions, a field research was conducted in Kyrgyzstan in the form of in-depth interviews and questionnaires, asking the same set of structured and open-ended questions to a total 140 respondents from each of the seven *oblasts* of Kyrgyzstan, and the two largest cities of Bishkek and Osh (see Appendix C) between 15 February 2010 and 21 April 2010. The total number of respondents (from different age groups, occupations and nationalities) in each of these territorial units (city or *oblast*) depended on the size of the population residing there.<sup>786</sup> Out of 140 respondents, I had conducted face-to-face interviews with 61 people, and asked the remaining 79 respondents to fill up the distributed questionnaires. The interviews were recorded, decoded and then translated into English. The questionnaires were

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<sup>786</sup> The population of each oblast/city is provided in Appendix C. Data is available at <http://www.stat.kg/stat.files/tematika/демограф/Кыргызстан%20в%20цифрах/регион.pdf>

distributed to the respondents with the help of my acquaintances. The total number of questions in the questionnaire was 34.<sup>787</sup>

The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, including the probing questions which aimed at obtaining more information or a better idea about the real opinions of the respondents, who were sometimes giving quite vague answers. In some other cases, some of the concepts (such as “consolidation of democracy”) about which the respondents were not sufficiently informed, needed elaboration by the researcher. This was more of a case for the elderly respondents (50 and above) who did not fully understand the questions, especially those related to the presidential system, referendums, and interest representation. Some respondents had no idea on the difference between the presidential and parliamentary system. Moreover, specific concepts such as “interest representation” were confusing for these respondents.

The period in which I conducted the field research was a very critical time for Kyrgyzstan, on the eve of the events of 7 April 2010 that resulted in the oust of Bakiev and his succession with Rosa Otunbaeva. People were worried and fearful and were sometimes reluctant to participate in an interview. This was more of a case for those respondents working in the governmental organizations or state bodies such as state hospitals, schools, and bureaucratic agencies. In some cases, they agreed at first to participate, but later changed their minds and refused. Some respondents were especially cautious in answering the questions if the interview was conducted at their workplaces. They were even more careful in answering the questions on the evaluation of Bakiev and his regime. People seemed to be more open to express their views on the evaluation of the Soviet Union, an era which was now over. I could, however, overcome this difficulty by explaining that my research had only an academic purpose, and not political.

Another problem I had encountered was that some people, who initially agreed to fill up the questionnaires, later returned them empty, arguing that they could not fill

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<sup>787</sup> Understandably, the length of the questionnaire (with 34 questions in total) disturbed some of the respondents despite the fact that it was not distributed by a total stranger, but by people whom they knew; hence most of the “don’t-knows” or “no comments” might have been the result of this.



them up, as they did not “understand politics” or that they were “not interested in politics,” and do not follow political developments. Probably some of these respondents were scared to openly express their view, fearing that this information will be given to SNB (*Slujba Natsionalnoi Bezopasnosti*-National Security Service) or to their immediate supervisors. Some of those who returned empty questionnaires also said that they were not politicians, and in order to respond to these kinds of questions, one needed to be a professional politician. When I offered detailed explanation on the questions, some potential respondents tried to avoid the questions altogether. Therefore, there were some unanswered questions or questions to which “no comment” was given as an answer.<sup>788</sup>

The respondents working in the private sector<sup>789</sup> however seemed to be more open in answering the questions and providing their own critical evaluations of both Akaev and Bakiev regimes, although here too, some questions were unanswered or just answered with an “I don’t know.” Finally, I was surprised to see that some respondents suspected me of working for the *SNB* or any other such agency (either in Turkey or abroad). They asked me why I was asking about the regime, politics and legitimacy. Although I had explained them that I was writing my Ph.D. thesis and the purpose of the research was academic, they were still suspicious of me.

In this chapter, the perceptions and opinions of citizens of Kyrgyzstan are qualitatively analyzed in five general parts: (1) Perceptions of Soviet experience in Kyrgyzstan and the consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the country; (2) Perceptions of democracy and authoritarianism in terms of both their general meanings and in terms of their everyday practice in Kyrgyzstan; (3) Perceptions of leadership in general and perceptions of Akaev’s and Bakiev’s leadership qualities in particular; (4) Perceptions of and participation to elections (voting) and their role, importance and characteristics in Kyrgyzstan; (5) Perceptions of and participation to referendums and their role, importance and characteristics in

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<sup>788</sup> Total number of questionnaires returned completely empty was 5, but some questionnaires were returned partly empty, this is provided in discussion of each particular question, giving the number of responses such as “no comment”.

<sup>789</sup> Total number of respondents working in private sector is 35 (25 percent).

Kyrgyzstan. The analysis is based on the field research conducted between 15 February 2010 and 21 April 2010. A total of 140 respondents (66 men and 74 women) answered questions about a variety of different topics regarding the post-Soviet transition to democracy in Kyrgyzstan, by either filling in a questionnaire (79 people) or by participating to an in-depth interview (61 people). The respondents were from the seven regions of Kyrgyzstan - Batken *oblast*, Chui *oblast*, Jalal-Abad *oblast*, Issyk-kul *oblast*, Naryn *oblast*, Osh *oblast*, Talas *oblast* and two cities Bishkek and Osh, from a variety of different occupations<sup>790</sup>, ages (ranging from 19 to 80) and nationalities (out of 140 respondents, 129 were Kyrgyz, 7 were Russian, 2 were Uzbek, 2 were Tatar).<sup>791</sup>

The respondents were first asked general questions about the Soviet era and how they evaluated the political consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union for Kyrgyzstan. Then the respondents were asked how they saw democracy in general and the Kyrgyz experience in transition to democracy in particular, with a specific emphasis on the two post-Soviet presidents of the country, Askar Akaev and Kurmanbek Bakiev. The respondents were asked to evaluate the Akaev and Bakiev eras, as well as the leadership qualities of these two presidents in terms of their qualifications and their ability to represent the interests of the people. The respondents were further asked specific questions about elections and referendums that aimed to assess their participation, their role in and connection with democratic transition, their deficits and their meaning. (For the list of questions, please see Appendix D) The qualitative analysis of the answers of the respondents, aimed at comprehending how the formal aspects of democracy are perceived in Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>790</sup> Respondents were from various occupations. Total number of respondents working in private sector is 35 (25 percent); in state (governmental) organizations – 38 (27.1 percent); in NGO – 10 (7.1 percent). The rest are retired, students or unemployed.

<sup>791</sup> For full documentation of the respondents, please see Appendix E, Table of Respondents.

## **4.2 Perceptions of the Soviet Experience in Kyrgyzstan and the Consequences of the Disintegration of the Soviet Union**

In order to understand the perceptions of democracy in Kyrgyzstan, respondents were firstly asked questions related to the Soviet era, as the political consequences of this era and of the dissolution of the Soviet Union are critical for a understanding the Kyrgyz people's political culture and mentality as well as their perceptions of democracy and of political legitimacy. Such perceptions were shaped to a large extend during the Soviet era. Furthermore, knowing more about the Soviet era perceptions may help us to understand to what extent the Soviet experience left its mark on people's minds. To that end the respondents were asked the following four questions: 1) How do you remember the Soviet Union? 2) How do you evaluate the political consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union for Kyrgyzstan? 3) How do you evaluate the political consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union for Kyrgyzstan in terms of the emergence of the multi-party system? 4) How do you evaluate the political consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union for Kyrgyzstan in terms of presidentialism?

The first part of this chapter will first look into how the Soviet era experiences in Kyrgyzstan are perceived by the citizens of the country, and then explore their opinions on the consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union for Kyrgyzstan.

### **4.2.1 The Soviet Experience in Kyrgyzstan**

When asked about how they remembered the Soviet Union, one of the most frequently mentioned themes was related to the positive image that the respondents had in their minds about their country to be a superpower. According to this major theme, the Soviet state was a "powerful" "strong" "great" and "mighty" state. For one respondent, the Soviet Union was actually "the strongest state in the world." The strength of their country was even emphasized by another respondent, who was too young in 1991 to have any real memory of the Soviet experience:

I was young, and so I do not remember the political attributes of the Soviet Union, however from literature I know that Soviet Union was a strong state that was able to resist other powers in the twentieth century.

A total of 38 respondents from all oblasts, of all age groups and occupations focused on the power, prestige, weight and influence the Soviet Union had in the international arena. According to one respondent, for example, the Soviet Union's policies "played an important role in world affairs." As such, another respondent suggested that the Soviet Union "was respected by the whole world." Similarly, as put forward by a couple of respondents respectively, the Soviet Union was "a hegemonic giant on the Eurasian continent" and "an important military and strategic power at the global arena." According to one respondent:

I remember the Soviet Union as a superpower in the spheres of military, education, medicine, science. The Soviet Union was the biggest power on the earth. Also in terms of territory and national composition, it was the biggest country. The Soviet Union was a member of United Nations and had prominent effect on the world in general.

As a result of this powerful perception of the Soviet Union, some respondents have also suggested that the Soviet Union was "respected and sometimes even feared by other countries." Likewise one respondent indicated that the Soviet Union was "a big world power feared by many." According to another respondent, the country "was a fair respond to imperialist challenges [and it] ... used to promote the socialist ideas around the world. [As such] the Soviet Union offered a model of development contrary to imperialism."

Some respondents also suggested that it was a proud feeling to live in a state like that. According to one respondent, for example, the Soviet Union was "a stable strong state in which citizens were proud of the country they live in." Likewise, one respondent suggested that citizens of the country "were proud of the Soviet ... achievements in, various spheres - from sport to space technologies." For another respondent, there was "pride for being a citizen of not only Kyrgyzstan, but the entire Soviet Union."

Some respondents (seven in total from different oblasts, age groups and occupations) also indicated that the Soviet Union had an effective domestic political system. As one respondent suggested, “the Soviet Union was ... a powerful union, a large country where order and discipline were present.” Similarly, according to another respondent, “During the Soviet time, state policy was conducted in a strict, enforcing manner ... [and] order was maintained.” This would therefore result in “certainty and regularity in all spheres.” One respondent further indicated that the political structure of the country was “logically organized, structured and administered.” As put forward by one respondent:

I remember the Soviet Union was a high speed political machine, decisions were not postponed. Policies were set up clearly, concretely and then implemented, and [then] the results were monitored and evaluated.

One respondent believed that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union provided such an effective mechanism. According to him:

I remember ... the Communist Party to bring up real patriots, hard-workers, honest and decent people. The state’s role in education and socialization of its citizens was crucial.

In relation to these perceptions, some respondents from all oblasts, age groups, and occupations have indicated that during the Soviet era, there was domestic stability in the country, especially in the political and economic spheres of life, under the rule of the Communist Party. According to one respondent, for example, the Soviet Union was “a politically stable state [in which] there were no rallies, protests, demonstrations.” Likewise another respondent suggested that during the Soviet era, there was “stability in the political arena, [as] all branches of power [worked] on the basis of succession and continuity.” One respondent also pointed out that the domestic policy of the Soviet Union “was stable, consistent, planned and sequential [as] the Communist Party had enormous role and place in the political system of the Soviet Union. All citizens strove to become a member of the Communist Party.” According to one respondent:

We are people who grew up under the Soviet system and we are socialized in a way that discipline, honesty and love for one’s country are our main

principles. The Communist Party, no matter how it is criticized at present, taught people to work honestly. Under the rule of Communist Party there was stability in all spheres.

According to some respondents, one of the most important reflections of this domestic stability was seen in the peaceful relations and solidarity among the many nationalities of the Soviet Union. A total of nine respondents from the Chui, Issyk-Kul, Osh and Jalal-Abad oblasts from various age groups and occupations have the Soviet system provided such an end result. According to few respondents there was unity and solidarity in the Soviet Union where people of different nationalities lived in harmony with each other. As for another two respondents, people from different republics enjoyed social peace and friendship during the Soviet era. The country was “peaceful [and] humane” as “[m]any nationalities lived in friendship [and] mutual-assistance.” As one respondent suggested, “the Soviet Union was a strong, peaceful state with wonderful human values that were nurtured in Soviet people such as brotherhood, tolerance, peaceful existence.” Likewise according to another respondent:

All republics and all the people of the republics were respected by the Center. Republics existed in the Union on the basis of equality, mutual respect and brotherhood. The Soviet Union had peaceful and friendly relationship with other countries. In the Soviet Union, citizens’ intellectual potential was revealed, developed and motivated. The USA could not forgive that the Soviet Union was the strongest, most powerful superpower.<sup>792</sup>

Another related theme emphasized by the respondents was social equality and social justice that existed in the Soviet Union. A total of 32 respondents from all *oblasts* and cities (except Talas and Osh) from various age groups and occupations emphasized the importance of free social services and many guarantees provided by the state at that time. The respondents have indicated that there was universal access to free education and free medical services, there was affordable accommodation, job

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<sup>792</sup> A couple of respondents have also indicated that during the Soviet era it was very easy and “affordable” to travel within the country in and out of the 15 republics. Another respondent said the following, “I was born and brought up in Soviet Union. For me the Soviet Union is still like my own dress, and my generation is the children of that time. I lived both in Soviet era and in post-Soviet era, so I can see the difference and I can say that the country was closed. This closeness we felt everywhere: we could not freely travel to foreign countries. But I did not feel the need to go somewhere abroad because I did not even imagine it. We moved inside the Soviet Union to Moscow or other places and that was enough.”

guarantee and regularly paid salaries as well as guaranteed retirement pensions. According to one respondent, Soviet people were “socially protected in all aspects.” A similar idea was expressed as follows: during the Soviet era, “there was [this] social and economic guarantee that all would have food and shelter.” The following was also suggested, in the Soviet system there was “no poverty, no hunger” and “the resources [of Kyrgyzstan] were utilized for the well-being of all Soviet people.” Another respondent suggested similar ideas:

I remember Soviet Union positively, as abundance of everything. As for me, I was completely satisfied with the Soviet rule, because I had everything, whatever I wanted I could afford. ... Those who worked had a sufficient income.

One respondent indicated that in such a society, “common people’s well being was important for the state [and] people were provided with services and goods. There was no division between the rich and the poor.” Therefore, the Soviet society was one in which:

The state provided free primary, secondary and high education. The state also employed the people and secured their salaries. Salaries were not too high but they were sufficient for average standard of life. There were no poverty and no homeless people. The risk to become jobless was minimal and guaranteed average salary ... made people think that life is good.<sup>793</sup>

As one respondent indicated, people “lived not very rich but satisfactory” during the Soviet era. As for another respondent, “in a certain way [people] were happy because [they] all lived in similar conditions and were thinking similarly.” A similar opinion was suggested as follows:

In the Soviet Union, level of crimes was extremely low, not because of good police record but because people were not inclined to commit crimes as the state satisfied their needs. Level of unemployment was also low. Corruption was not spread. People did not live in luxury but dignity [and] respect, and ethical norms were preserved.

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<sup>793</sup> A 69 year old Kyrgyz woman from Bishkek who is retired now.

Some respondents suggested that “in the Soviet Union there was more fairness [and] life ... was better than now.” It was also “easier and simpler.” One respondent gives a detailed synopsis of her impressions on the Soviet era as follows:

When I remember the Soviet Union, the first thing that comes to my mind is social equality, social justice and social security. All working people (such as teachers, doctors, engineers) were provided a place to live (flats). Also working people had a right to go to a monthly vacation once a year, and that vacation was paid by the state. Normally people had opportunity to visit and travel to seaside area or other republics of Soviet Union. This opportunity was unique because the level of service was quite good for that time and each had a right to go somewhere. This was a real social equality because no matter whether you were a director at the factory or an ordinary teacher, you had a real chance to go on vacation to a desired place (within Soviet Union of course or to other countries of the communist block such as Czechoslovakia). Also, working people were provided with special discounts and subsidized tourist vouchers. The decision on who would go where in a particular year was taken by a local labor union which existed in all organizations and state enterprises. Free medical service, minimal transportation fare and free education are among the achievements of the Soviet Union.

Such perceptions led some respondents, to indicate their belief and/or confidence in the system as well as the authorities:

I remember the elected delegates as being honest people, and we trusted the authorities completely. My parents never said anything against the authorities. We treated the authorities with loyalty, correctly, reasonably. If something was done, then it was because it should have been done.

Another respondent suggested similar ideas despite the fact that he was only five years old at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union:

Due to my young age I know about Soviet Union from stories told by elder people. ... For older generations Soviet Union was a country with honest, dedicated political authority which worked for the people, not for the purpose of self-enrichment.

Some respondents also indicated that during the Soviet era they had confidence in a better future. For one respondent there was “hope for the bright future” in the Soviet era. A few respondents indicated that people were “certain” about their future back then. As one respondent clearly stated:



I liked life in the Soviet Union, there was order, we were confident about our future and we believed that our leadership was on the right path. It was instilled into us from childhood by our families and in school that the ideology of the Soviet Union would provide a bright future for us.

Another respondent made similar comments:

[During the time of the] Soviet Union ... life was simple and easy. ... The state provided people with food and shelter. People were employed, salaries were sufficient to provide for a worker and his family. People did not question how they would live tomorrow, because they were sure that the status quo would remain. People were happy because they did not have to worry about tomorrow.

Even some of the younger respondents made similar points. According to one such respondent:

The Soviet Union was a great time for my parents. I was not lucky enough to be born in that time. My parents say that they were happy in the Soviet Union, they pursued their education, had a guaranteed job and a pension, believed in bright future. As for us, we do not even hope for a bright future.

Although such positive memories from the Soviet era were frequently mentioned, several other points were made about a variety of limitations that had existed during the same era. One basic theme on such limitations was about the general features of the political system. Some respondents described the Soviet system as a closed totalitarian and autocratic system under the monopoly of the Communist Party. For example according to one respondent, during the Soviet era:

... [there were] inadequate political leaders who used to tap (bang) a shoe on the table and conduct an aggressive foreign policy. Within the Soviet Union all economic spheres and media were under severe governmental control. There was no entrepreneurship, many initiatives were suppressed. Everything was administered by the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

According to one respondent, “the Soviet system rejected the principle of separation of powers and the legislative branch was above the executive and judicial branches;

in fact, the real political power was in the hands of Communist Party.” Another respondent described the Soviet system as follows:

One party system which decided all the questions of political, economic, social spheres; absence of political pluralism; decisions were coming from top; absence of freedom of expression, monopoly of one ideology.

Another respondent talked about a system of “total submission to the governing party [and] total control” in which “all activities [were] strictly within the rules put by Communist Party and those who did not oblige were punished.”

Some other respondents also talked about the limitations on freedom of expression. According to one respondent, for example, “there were restrictions on self-realization and self-expression.” Likewise, “Many people were afraid of expressing their political views.” In short, as expressed by one respondent, “There was stability but [there was] no democracy, [as] people could not freely express their opinion.”

However, some respondents mentioned that at the time people were not very much aware of these limitations. For example one respondent suggested that “Majority of people saw everything through rose-colored spectacles. They didn’t know the life in countries outside communist bloc.” Another respondent made the following comment:

When I look back and remember the Soviet Union, I understand that I lived in authoritarian country. There was a monopoly of Communist Party. But personally when I was young, I did not realize that we lived under the one-party rule. The system socialized citizens in a way that they did not question one-party rule. Living standards appeared just and equal to such an extent that there was no need to question the legitimacy and appropriateness of the Communist Party. So in general people were satisfied and calm.

Similar points were made as follows:

I lived in Soviet Union for short time. ... People were not aware of politics, state strategies, and policies. We were just said to do something, for example “collect cotton”, and we did it, without questioning why. We were said that it was for the welfare of the country.

One other related theme was about the fact that there was one ideology or as one respondent described, “one angle of view” that had been allowed in the country. According to another respondent, “the Soviet Union wasn’t a democratic state [as the] communist ideology was imposed.” As such, the Soviet system was “strictly regulated” and the people “had guaranteed job[s] and future[s] but only within the communist system.”

The following comment was made by yet another respondent about this feature of the Soviet regime:

I was born in 1934, and we were taught about the political system that existed in the Soviet Union. We were taught about right and wrong. We were not allowed to do anything other than what was taught. For example, there was no openness and no freedom of speech, and sometimes I would be dissatisfied with this situation, with this closeness, but because I worked within the system I could not express my dissatisfaction. Maybe the works of Karl Marx and Lenin were full of good ideas, but we were unable to apply them in real life. There was no freedom of expression.

Some other respondents focused on the mechanism of propaganda that was used to hide most of the problems in the country. For example one respondent suggested the following:

I remember the Soviet Union as a strong, mighty power with average level of life. [It] didn’t collaborate with any countries of non communist block. It was a self-sufficient, independent country which had many scientific and technological inventions. Even when the Soviet people had hard time, the world did not know about it because it was a closed country. The propaganda was that everything was going well in the Soviet Union. The problems were hidden. However, there were advantages as well, in its own politics, in its own system of administration.

Another respondent also made similar confusing statements:

I was small during the Soviet time, but ... I remember that people were having difficulties, life was hard, and there were a lot of alcohol-addicted people. I would not wish to live in the Soviet Union. Also when I remember the Soviet Union in the political sphere, what comes to my mind first is Stalin. *The biggest reforms were implemented during the Stalin era. For me Stalin was a reformer, he transformed the Soviet economy and made it*

*strong; he made the Soviet Union strong state and a great power. I could not live under a Stalin-like regime but I respect his achievements.*<sup>794</sup>

Another respondent made similar comments:

Before 1991, for me the Soviet Union was something bright, guaranteed, correct, because during the Soviet time the information provided [by the regime] was always positive; existing problems were hidden and they were not known by the ordinary citizens. Problems existed, but they were not discussed as if they did not exist. When I grew up, I realized that the situation in the world was completely different. Now I have my own opinion and I think that in the Soviet Union there was propaganda and mass totalitarian ideology. At present I support the principles of capitalism and consider this system fair. An individual belongs to himself; he must be able to survive. In the Soviet Union people counted on each other. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union we had instability, we had hard times. All this experience is useful for the people, people became stronger.

According to another respondent, “The life in the Soviet Union was propagated as being very good; however it was just a show. Negative aspects were not known to the outside world and were not allowed to be discussed within the Soviet Union.”

Some respondents also talked about limitations on the electoral process during the Soviet era. According to one respondent, there were not real elections in the Soviet Union, as “there was only one political party.” As another respondent said, during the elections, “Whatever was on agenda had already been decided, and people went to vote just as normal. The delegates at the Communist Party congress were already known.” Likewise, one respondent pointed out that elections were “unimportant because they were held within the same party. [They] were just a matter of routine.” For another respondent the elections meant “a show” because at the time “no one believed that going to the booth and casting a vote would make any difference.” According to another respondent, “All people voted” during the Soviet era because voting was “a norm” and people voted for one candidate.

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<sup>794</sup> Italics added.

One other interesting point that was made by some of the respondents was related to the perception that elections were seen as nice opportunities for social gatherings and to have some “fun.” As one respondent described:

During the Soviet Union the elections were a big party. It was a time when you could meet people and talk [with them]. There were even cases when in villages they used to set up sales vans (mobile shops). After you cast your vote, you could go and do more shopping.

Similar ideas were suggested by another respondent who suggested that “It was nice to go to elections at that time as we would be able to meet and be with people there.” Another respondent described the elections as such: “When the country went to elections, it was like a holiday for us; everybody was happy, we voted, we went to buy snacks that were on sale near the voting stations, and then we went home.” Similar comments were made as follows:

Election processes were solemn affairs, and election campaigns were on a high level, incorporating music. They were nice and neat. Election days were like a holiday and a cause for celebration. People would go to vote with their children, and they always came away with nice things because the best foods would be sold at the polling stations; we were all happy.

And according to another respondent, during the Soviet era the elections were “like a holiday” for the people:

The place of election commissions was situated so that public could gather, listen to music, and buy something with very attractive low prices. There was scarcity of some products, so people normally went to elections because they knew that products were being sold there.

When the perceptions of the Soviet experience in Kyrgyzstan are analyzed, one major factor that needs to be taken into account is the fact that a majority of the respondents (118 out of 140) evaluated this era with both its positive and negative sides. Only four respondents have indicated totally negative attitude toward the Soviet Union.<sup>795</sup> Similarly, a few respondents have indicated a totally positive

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<sup>795</sup> Three of them were 22-25 years old and one respondent was 60 years old. All are of various occupations.

attitude towards the Soviet Union.<sup>796</sup> Few other respondents have indicated that they had no idea about the living in the Soviet Union. These respondents are in the age group 19-30, so obviously some of them do not remember the Soviet Union at all. So it is possible to suggest that an overwhelming majority of the respondents had a more balanced and/or objective evaluation of the Soviet era, focusing on pros and cons of that period for Kyrgyzstan.

Another major factor is related to the perception of democracy that is, in some cases at least provides quite interesting clues. From some of the answers given to the Soviet era memories and/or perceptions, it is possible to suggest that democracy per se was not seen as important political issue and was described in different terms. In other words, rather than accepting democracy as a political regime, some of the respondents tended to see it as a method or as a way of dealing with their immediate everyday problems, that were not necessarily political in nature. For example, one respondent stated the following:

I remember the Soviet Union with nostalgia. It was a good time. There was order; the state cared for its people, helped people. I am a shepherd, for me that time was better than now, in a *so-called democracy*. I grew up in the Soviet Union; I was a communist, so my opinion about the Soviet Union remains positive. There was justice. We were given tasks, which we fulfilled and we were provided by the state. The state helped us, farmers and shepherds. *Now in democracy, things are different – one works as he wants. There is no state's support for farmers. Minimal allowances are given and they never reach the farmer. I live for almost 20 years in independent Kyrgyzstan and I see farmers do everything on their own. They cultivate land but are not sure that they would sell the harvest.*<sup>797</sup>

Another interesting point that needs to be discussed is how certain terms are used in conflicting or confusing ways. For example according to one respondent, “The Soviet Union was a *totalitarian* state in which *several democratic freedoms were preserved*. Some human rights also existed. For example, right to life, free education, etc.”<sup>798</sup> Another respondent said the following:

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<sup>796</sup> All respondents except one belong to 44 -70 age group. These are the people who have lived in the Soviet Union and saw its positives and its advantages. Occupations vary.

<sup>797</sup> Italics added.

<sup>798</sup> Italics added.

I remember Soviet Union as a well-organized totalitarian machine. State interfered in and controlled all spheres of human life. The youth committee (Komsomol) was a formal organization, there was order and discipline - order on the streets, at work place (rules of behavior). *I think it was an advantage, one party rule was everywhere. The Communist Party dictated how to live.*<sup>799</sup>

The statements made by one respondent are also striking:

During Soviet time I was a child, so I do not remember it clearly. However I can say that *there was very little freedom of speech*. However there was *a very correct ideology*: people were brothers, social policy was admirable, accommodation problem was solved, all people were provided place to live, and there were no homeless people in the Soviet Union.<sup>800</sup>

Other respondents also indicated that there may be more important issues than democracy. For example, according to one respondent during the Soviet era, there was “a stable political atmosphere [and] political rallies and protests were forbidden. The country was ruled by Communist Party, the *most important*<sup>801</sup> [thing] was peace.” Similar statements are made by another respondent who suggested: “We, ordinary citizens did not try to grasp the international politics. *For us the main criteria at the election of the chairmen of the Communist Party were peace and stability.*”<sup>802</sup>

As can be seen from these statements, in certain cases, what people have in mind when they think about democratic freedoms and the Soviet era conditions may be conflictual. Economic guarantees and social justice may be confused or equated with democracy, and political stability and domestic peace may emerge as priorities in a political system. Furthermore, as the quotation above indicates, there was also a perception that politics was not for “ordinary citizens.” As one respondent said:

[In those days] politics was so distant from the lives of the ordinary people. Being an ordinary citizen one was not supposed to be involved in politics. So

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<sup>799</sup> Italics added.

<sup>800</sup> Italics added.

<sup>801</sup> Italics added.

<sup>802</sup> Italics added.

we were kind of set into one task. For example, if you were a teacher you should only teach; if you were a guard you should only guard and not be involved in other spheres of life.

Similar statements were also made by another respondent:

I was not concerned with politics – who was elected and why; I did not even think about it. I remember the elected delegates as being honest people, and *we trusted the authorities completely*. My parents never said anything against the authorities. We treated the authorities with loyalty, correctly, reasonably. *If something was done, then it was because it should have been done.*<sup>803</sup>

Such responses may provide some hints to the post-Soviet perceptions of democracy among the Kyrgyz people and their democratic culture (or perhaps its absence) among them. As the above-mentioned responses indicate, for the Kyrgyz people, in the post-Soviet era, democracy emerged as a new term, taking many different meanings and connotations, sometimes in contradiction with each other.

It is clear that the responses focus on both positive and negative perceptions related to the Soviet era. The positive perceptions included notions such as the Soviet Union being a superpower and a strong state that could provide stability, an effective political system, order, and discipline, certainty in all spheres, good administration, and confidence and certainty in future. Strong state was perceived in terms of political, economic and military power of the Soviet Union in the international arena; and pride in being a citizen of such a state also contributed to the positive perception. Stability was explained through political predictability, steadiness, continuity and consistence. Furthermore, domestic stability was perceived as solidarity and social peace among the different nationalities of the Soviet Union in which ethnic violence did not exist. According to the respondents, communist ideology played a great role in this, as it promoted ideas like peace, harmony, friendship, mutual assistance, brotherhood, tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Another important positive perception included social equality and social justice. This factor was crucial for the respondents, as the Kyrgyz Republic was heavily subsidized during the Soviet era and there was no economic hardship. Low levels of crime and unemployment,

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<sup>803</sup> Italics added.



fairness, security were also mentioned among the positive perceptions. Confidence in authorities and in the system was highlighted, an argument that can be directly related to perceptions of legitimacy. In other words, due to these positive perceptions, the system was perceived to have at least some degree of legitimacy in the eyes of the respondents. It seemed as if legitimacy could exist without democracy. This confidence, as it will be shown later, is lacking at the present, and resulting in weak legitimacy of the post-Soviet leaders.

Among the negative aspects, respondents, especially the younger ones, indicated totalitarian and autocratic system of the Soviet era. Other negative aspects were widespread control of and total submission to the ruling party, no opportunity for entrepreneurship, absence of freedom of expression, the existence of only one ideology, lack of any real mechanism to express dissatisfaction and/or channels to criticize government, one-sided propaganda, and lack of real elections. Such negative perceptions gave way to hope for a new democratic system proclaimed by Askar Akaev in 1991. However, as will be analyzed in the sub-sections on perceptions of leadership of both Akaev and Bakiev, these expectations were not met, and the result was widespread apathy and frustration in the political system and the leaders.

The next part on the perceptions of the consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union actually connects the argument of the Soviet era perceptions by focusing on the post-Soviet conditions which are believed to bring both positive and negative consequences for Kyrgyzstan.

#### **4.2.2 The Consequences of the Disintegration of the Soviet Union**

This section analyzes how the Kyrgyz people viewed the disintegration of the Soviet system for their own country. As was the case with their perceptions on the Soviet system in general, here too, we see that both positive and negative consequences were mentioned.

The most frequently mentioned positive response on this issue was Kyrgyzstan's becoming an independent country. Almost half of all respondents from all oblasts, ages and occupations, believed this to be the major positive outcome of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As one respondent suggested, this was a "big advantage" for the country as Kyrgyzstan became an independent state without fighting for it. It was also pointed out by one of the respondents that Kyrgyzstan "showed that it was possible for a small country to become recognized in the international arena" as an independent state. For some respondents, it was a positive step that the country no longer had to consult Moscow on every issue. As one respondent suggested:

After the dissolution, Kyrgyzstan became more independent. The politicians and people involved in the administration of state started working in a new environment, in which they did not have to consult with Moscow. The state's administration moved to Bishkek, which was a positive change.

Similarly, one respondent said that after independence the Kyrgyz citizens started to elect their own president and parliament and that they "no longer had to refer to Moscow in decision making." According to another respondent regardless of the fact that Kyrgyzstan was "forced to become independent" this has turned out to be a positive development: "Previously we were dependent on Moscow and waited what Moscow would say us. After the dissolution, we got the opportunity to take our own decisions." One respondent also put an emphasis on independence, suggesting that the country now could "freely decide its own state affairs." According to another respondent, it was a good thing that they now had "Kyrgyz leaders, even if they make mistakes."

Few respondents indicated the importance of "state-building." As for a couple of respondents, having a national flag, national anthem, and a state emblem were also very important, as these would help revive Kyrgyz traditions, history and language. As one respondent suggested:

Majority of the people who lived during the Soviet [era] miss the Soviet Union and regret about [the dissolution], and they want to return those times; however dissolution was unavoidable. Sooner or later everything was going

to collapse. I think Kyrgyzstan was lucky. Kyrgyzstan could completely disappear as a nation and could be forgotten by all. After 1991 we have got a chance, we got freedom to preserve our language, our land, and our traditions. Many nations do not have their own state. Besides, our territory is situated on a land with large water resources. We must use our natural resources.

In addition to the major advantage of independence, “new opportunities” of the post-Soviet era were given as another positive development by some respondents. Among these, “access to new information, new knowledge” or “the openness and availability of the informational space” were given as one of the most important ones. Some respondents also focused on certain other freedoms, such as “the opportunity for self-expression and self-realization.”

This kind of positive perception indicates that the Kyrgyz people attach importance to the value of freedom in general as well as individual freedoms, even though the country is going through hard times in terms of economic decline and political instability.

One respondent, for example, talked about the political consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in Kyrgyzstan as follows:

After getting independence Kyrgyz politicians and policy-makers realized that there is another alternative, such as liberal democracy, and in the first years we were moving in that direction. Our orientation was the USA and Western countries.

There were also some people who emphasized the freedom of speech in Kyrgyzstan that came with independence. As one respondent expressed, in the post-Soviet era, “People have got an opportunity to freely express their opinion.”

There were other respondents who specifically focused on economic freedoms. According to one respondent, there was now “freedom and a wider range of job opportunities.” Another respondent made similar comments:

I evaluate the consequences [of the disintegration of the Soviet Union to be] positive. For example, I have got new opportunities for work and self-realization and my life has changed to better. Now we can freely go abroad,

set up business, enterprise, partnership etc, and buy and sell goods. We can set up goals and promote their realization.

According to one respondent, “One of consequences of dissolution of the Soviet Union is that people changed, became independent, motivated, have got a change to live as they want.” Similarly, another respondent suggested that:

[A]fter 1991 it was possible for capable, energetic and motivated people to do better than they had under the Soviet rule. These kinds of people had the opportunity to utilize their potential. ... Additionally, many people were able to start businesses and succeed in this era. This was something new for the Soviet people.

Another respondent also focused on this aspect by indicating that after two decades “people started using their entrepreneurial skills and take initiatives; they are motivated [and] a new system of stimulus has emerged.” Similar comment was made as follows:

My life has changed economically after the dissolution; my children managed to set up a business, and I am satisfied with the present state of affairs in our family. I believe those who work hard, can live well in any system.

One final positive attribute regarding the dissolution of the Soviet Union was about the freedom to travel abroad. As one respondent said, “[D]emocracy opened Kyrgyzstan to the world and now our citizens can go and travel to other countries. I think we have got freedom to live where we want to live and go where we want to go. It is a positive consequence. A few respondents focused on the opportunity to go study or work abroad as a positive development. One respondent made similar comments:

I think Kyrgyzstan has acquired more than it lost. Our kids can work and study abroad, we can also travel to other countries. Each family learnt to live according to its earnings and appreciate what they have. This is a law of nature. Nothing comes for free. As for problems, they are the problems of transitional period. There is no other way but to overcome them.

Although such positive results of the disintegration of the Soviet Union were indicated by many people, several negative aspects of this development were also mentioned. One of the most frequently emphasized negative consequence was about

the economic hardships that the disintegration process inflicted on the people. Almost half of all respondents from all regions, age groups and occupations have focused on this problem.

Some people described the disintegration of the Soviet Union with strong words such as “decay in all spheres,” “chaos,” “tragedy,” “disastrous” and “catastrophic.” According to one respondent, Kyrgyzstan has “lost” economically from the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Another respondent described the process as follows:

The dissolution of the Soviet Union was very hard for us. It was as if we have lost the foothold [and] became orphans. We were lost in the post-Soviet mess [and] ... from the change of power from the communists to the new Kyrgyz leadership we, citizens, did not win anything. On the contrary we lost.

One major reason why some respondents felt so strongly about the disintegration of the Soviet Union was related to the collapse of the all-Union economy that required a particular division of labor among the Soviet republics and “united Kyrgyzstan with other republics of the Soviet Union.” According to one respondent, just as the other Central Asian republics, Kyrgyzstan was a “raw materials appendage dependent on Moscow.” That made the country part of the whole Soviet economic system. However, as another respondent suggested:

[At that time] Kyrgyzstan used to get a lot of goods from the Soviet Union [and] produced only small parts for Soviet industry. As a result, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan became isolated in the economic sense. This created economic hardship and economic crisis.

Therefore, as one respondent suggested, “Kyrgyzstan lost its economic links and had to build everything from zero” and this created tremendous hardship for the people. One such hardship was related to the downfall in industrial production; as a few respondents indicated, industry came to a point of collapse. This was basically due to the fact that after the disintegration the factories “stopped their operation” and eventually went “bankrupt” or “faced the [threat of] bankruptcy.” As a result, as pointed out by a few respondents, unemployment increased. As one respondent said, many people “had to leave the country in order to find a job abroad” for example, in

Russia. Others, especially the unemployed ones in the rural areas also migrated to cities, particularly Bishkek.

Another major economic problem was about the deteriorating quality of life and declining living standards in the post-Soviet era, as pointed out by a few respondents. This problem was further exacerbated by the decline in the social services that had been provided by the state. As one respondent suggested, most people in the post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan are not “socially protected” as the “social security system almost does not guarantee anything” and “in spheres of public health, education and social security [people] ... do not feel state’s active involvement” anymore. Similar ideas were presented by another respondent:

The consequences [of disintegration] were hard for Kyrgyzstan. We were not ready for independence. ... Some people managed to adjust to new conditions. ... But as for socially unprotected families, they need state’s support. But the state is weak and cannot provide them [social services].

One respondent also suggested similar points:

Life has changed completely, for example, we have an opportunity to obtain higher education abroad, at the same time higher education now is not free for Kyrgyz citizens, so some do not have opportunity to pay for their education as state scholarships are limited. Medical service was also free [back then].

Some respondents pointed out the increase in social inequality in the post-Soviet era as one of the major negative consequences that emerged as a result of the above mentioned points. It was pointed out that a previously non-existing gap emerged between the rich and the poor and the Kyrgyz are now divided into two groups along these lines. As one respondent pointed out: “The rich live in palaces and the majority live in poverty.” As for a couple of respondents, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. As one respondent said:

I would prefer Kyrgyzstan to stay within the Soviet Union. We were a powerful big country. I would better continue living in the Soviet Union. The consequence of dissolution is a mess. Those who are able to snatch, grab, and take - do it. They do it the way they want. Some managed to enrich themselves and some lost everything. So the consequence is the emergence of two classes in Kyrgyzstan – the rich and the poor. Just 10-15 years ago we

did not have these two classes. We had a middle class. This is sad, because number of rich is minimal but number of poor is large.

Another respondent made similar comments:

At least people did not know poverty, social inequality, corruption and unemployment [during the Soviet era]. There were no homeless people in Kyrgyzstan and in the whole Soviet Union, as for now I see many homeless people and I am sorry about it.

One respondent pointed out that the dissolution of Soviet Union was hard for “ordinary people” and that they “did not even feel [themselves] as citizens of their country.” One other respondent, who was among the many old people who were hit hardest perhaps said the following:

I was working in the kindergarten and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, I lost my job. I had to look for another job. Now in order to get the same labor experience and seniority and in order to get a pension, I need to work 28 years at my new job. I lost my job, labor experience, and savings.

In addition to the negative economic consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, some respondents suggested that whether Kyrgyzstan is economically an independent state needs to be questioned.<sup>804</sup> Some respondents suggested that the country was “not ready for independence.” As one respondent indicated, “Kyrgyzstan became independent, but whether it was real ‘independence’ is [still] debatable.” Another respondent made a similar comment: “When we say independence, I wonder from whom and what kind of independence we gained.” One major reason is “economic dependence” of Kyrgyzstan to other countries such as Russia. Another reason is the challenge coming from the outside world. For example, one respondent mentioned that “it is hard to survive [as an independent country] in a world of capitalism without the protection of big world powers, so independence is relative.” Another respondent made another similar comment on the issue:

I would prefer Kyrgyzstan to stay within the Soviet Union. We were a powerful big country. ... As for the government, they say that now we are

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<sup>804</sup> Respondents suggested that a large foreign debt, weak economy undermine country’s independence. Kyrgyzstan’s external debt is approximately US \$2.5 billion according to a report on the 1996-2010 foreign debt structure, published by the Ministry of Finance (Carnegie Endowment, <http://kyrgyzstan.carnegieendowment.org/2010/08/kyrgyzstans-foreign-debt-reaches-almost-2-5-billion/>) Accessed on 11.12.2010

independent from Moscow and can take our own decisions. However, I question this independence. In the case of a war, for example, we will not be able even to protect our country. We do not possess a strong army, because we never felt a need to have one. We were united in the Soviet Union and were protected.

Another relevant theme is that independence made Kyrgyzstan more vulnerable to other countries, including not only the regional ones such as Russia and China but other global powers as well. As one respondent said:

[In the post-Soviet era] I think it was good that we could now elect our own deputies who would work here in Bishkek. However one problem was that we, as a small country, now had to solve our problems ourselves, and to stand in the international arena. Previously we had been under the protection of Moscow, but now we have to maneuver among strong world powers.

According to this, Kyrgyzstan was now a more dependent country as compared to the Soviet era: “We are dependent on superpowers politically and economically; we are dependent on world finance institutes such as IMF and World Bank; we are dependent on Russia in sphere of security and employment of our people who work in Russia.” Similar ideas were expressed by another respondent:

Everyone applauded and was happy when we got independence. ... Of course we got independence but it is very conditional. Maybe we got independence from the Soviet Union, but we are dependent now on neighboring countries, superpowers, like China, Russia, the USA.

One respondent considered the issue from another perspective and asked the following question: “[One thing] I do not understand is that we now have our currency – the *som*, but when we buy property, for example, a house, we pay in US dollars. If we are an independent country, why do we buy and sell in dollars?”

Other major negative consequences of the post-Soviet era that were related to each other were given as lack of good administration that resulted in disorder, lawlessness and corruption in the country. As one respondent pointed out, “in terms of government, management and administration, [Kyrgyzstan] is in a total chaos.” Another respondent is of the opinion that “The government is irresponsible and ... the country is not governed properly.” For yet another respondent, “state power is



ineffective and irrational use of state resources and economic assets ... resulted in the degradation of the Kyrgyz industry.” As a couple of respondents suggested “lack of rule of law” made things even worse. Likewise, “people can now [even] buy court decisions and political positions.” All these negative developments also resulted in high levels of corruption, as a few respondents mentioned.

One very important point was related to the fact that rule of law was lacking in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, a factor that is making people, especially those over the age of 40, who were used to live in a system with strict rules and enforced decisions, the post-independence chaos and is seen as unacceptable and very frustrating.

A few respondents also focused on the difficulties of traveling within the borders of the former Soviet republics due to the “closure of the borders and visa requirements.” According to one respondent, “Due to emergence of new borders it became difficult to communicate with friends and colleagues from other republics.” As another respondent explained:

I understand that we gained independence and sovereignty, but we lost many things. For example, we now have borders, and even visiting Russia or other former Soviet republics has become difficult, as we have to obtain a visa. Now we cannot live wherever we want ... we have to change citizenship. Now we can bear only single citizenship. In the Soviet era, as a Russian national, I could live in Moscow, Bishkek or any other city in the Soviet Union without changing my citizenship. Now I cannot. This is sad for me.

Such negative perceptions of the disintegration of the Soviet Union led some respondents to believe that today there are no guarantees or any certainty about tomorrow and certainly not much to hope for the future. As one respondent described, “The future is in a large smoky cloud.” Another respondent had similar ideas:

I guess I was shocked after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, because I lost that hope of a bright future. I did not know where I would work and what would happen to my children because the whole system had collapsed. I think the system in general turned for the worse, because now we are on our own, trying to survive. In the Soviet era, I could work for a guaranteed wage and a guaranteed pension when I retire, I knew that when my children graduated

they would also be able to find a job. Now, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, even though my son has a diploma he is unemployed. I am not working in my area of specialization, as I had to change my job, and I now work in a private company for a very low salary. Also I will not get a pension, because all that I accumulated while working for the state during the Soviet era will not be counted, and so I do not have a guaranteed retirement pension.

Another respondent had the same concern:

In the beginning I thought Kyrgyzstan has won from the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However now I do not have even hope for the bright future. Now we send our children to get their education, but we do not know whether they would find a job. We are not sure about the effectiveness of the educational system and the existing job market. Diploma does not guarantee employment. Our children cannot find job according to their specialization; because of this many young people go abroad. I think there is no future in Kyrgyzstan. I think as a result of dissolution of the Soviet Union Kyrgyzstan has mostly lost.<sup>805</sup>

One of the most striking results that can be inferred from the answers the respondents gave to the question on the consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union is that most of the respondents focused on economic hardships, as was the case for their responses given to the question on the perception of the Soviet era given earlier. Although some respondents focused on political consequences such as independence and increased freedoms, the main emphasis still seems to be on economic matters. Furthermore in some cases, expansion of freedoms may not necessarily mean much, or may not even be desirable. Some respondents openly declared that “it would be better for Kyrgyzstan to stay within the Soviet Union.” As for one respondent, freedom of expression, for example, was not a very positive development in itself:

After the dissolution [of the Soviet Union] *there was chaos, when anyone could say whatever they wanted*. People were able to express themselves in a way that had not been possible up until that time, and much of it was *out of place and inappropriate*. People of my age who had been educated in the Soviet era were not used to saying whatever they wanted due to their culture, while the younger people now are able to say everything. I would like the

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<sup>805</sup> One young respondent also believes that “the new generation – the youth has no goals and no hope for the future.”

young people to be culturally educated, intelligent, good-mannered. I do not like to see our young people becoming too speculative or saying dirty things.<sup>806</sup>

As it was the case with the answers given to the question on the Soviet era perceptions, some respondents sometimes also gave contradictory or paradoxical answers. For example, one respondent described his experience as follows:

Along with independence we have lost social and economic stability and peace of mind. *I am a person who is far from politics, who does not participate in political struggle but for whom social and economic guarantees are important: education, job, pension, social allowances.* At present I do not feel that power-holders *care* for people. They struggle for power.<sup>807</sup>

As the quotation indicates, the respondent is an apolitical person who has important expectations from the power-holders who have to “care for the people.” As such, he is not of the opinion that by being an active participant of political life, he may make his demands heard by the authorities. Instead however, he expects his demands to be automatically met by the power holders. In fact for him politics is a struggle for power not to serve the people and satisfy electorate’s demand, but a struggle for power for self-enrichment that does not imply “caring for the people”.

Another respondent suggested the following:

Independence is good. However after independence people have not fully realized how to live in an independent Kyrgyzstan. There is a whole range of new socio-economic relations in which private property, entrepreneurship, business, have a vital role. However people are not used to it and still some would never understand these new relationships. As a result we got economic decay, privatization in industrial sphere, disintegration of collective farms and state farms. *Government failed to preserve the existing economic system.*<sup>808</sup>

In this quotation, the respondent talks about the necessity of “fully realizing” the requirements of the new system on the one hand, and criticizes the government for not preserving the economic system on the other. These two quotations give

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<sup>806</sup> Italics added.

<sup>807</sup> Italics added.

<sup>808</sup> Italics added.

important clues on the confusion that some people may have in trying to adjust to the post-Soviet conditions.

But perhaps, one of the most striking observations about post-Soviet transition (that will further be elaborated in the next part) was given by one respondent:

I personally believe that our nation took the wrong course during its nation building process. *Instead of building its economy first, the leaders of the newly independent Kyrgyzstan began promoting democracy.* With this promotion and proclamation of Kyrgyzstan as an island of democracy, a huge flow of foreign aid began to flock the country. However, as we all know, nothing is for free, so with foreign aid also came advice on how to build our nation. I believe that the disintegration of the USSR had terrible consequences for Kyrgyzstan.

As it is evident in these comments, bad economic performance overshadows the democratic attempts, no matter how promising they may be, as the people experience harsh conditions in their personal lives every day, blaming the regime for its failure in providing economic development.

In general, it is possible to observe that the respondents answered the question on the consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union for Kyrgyzstan in a similar way, that is, by focusing on both positive and negative aspects. This question, in addition to contributing to a better understanding of how the respondents viewed the whole process of disintegration, also aimed to shed some light on perceptions of legitimacy of the leaders of the country in the post Soviet era.

Among the positive consequences, the most frequently mentioned one was independent statehood with its national flag, anthem, and state emblem, which for the first time in history became attributes of an independent Kyrgyz state. They were also seen as attributes to Kyrgyz traditions, history, and language. Another positive consequence was related to the emergence of new opportunities in the post-Soviet era, such as access to information, foreign and international technologies, means of self-expression and self-realization, freedom of speech, and new freedoms in economic life.

Several negative economic consequences were also mentioned by the respondents such as various hardships of the post-Soviet era that resulted in unemployment, inflation, increased prices and deterioration of living standards. As the state no longer performed its previous function as a “provider” of goods and jobs, as well as pensions, free education, and free medical assistance, social inequalities also emerged. In addition to such negative economic consequences, there were several problems in the political sphere: bad administration, disorder, lawlessness, and corruption in public institutions, further contributing to weakening of legitimacy for Akaev and Bakiev.

### **4.3 Perceptions of Democracy and Authoritarianism in General and in Terms of Their Everyday Practice in Kyrgyzstan**

The second major area in which the opinions of the respondents were evaluated is related to their perceptions of democracy and authoritarianism in general and their everyday practice in Kyrgyzstan in particular. In this part, first, perceptions of democracy and its practice in Kyrgyzstan are given (with a sub-section on the multi-party system); then their perceptions on authoritarianism and its practice in Kyrgyzstan are discussed (with a sub-section on the presidential system).

#### **4.3.1 Democracy in Kyrgyzstan**

When the asked about the general meaning of democracy for them, one thing that became very obvious was that with the exception of a few respondents, many people had several ideas and many positive perceptions about democracy. Out of 140 respondents, only two respondents (both old) did not say anything on the topic. Another two respondents both are middle-aged, had a totally negative view of democracy saying that democracy is a negative concept and Kyrgyzstan does not need democracy and nothing good comes from democracy. For one respondent, “democracy leads to chaos and fragmentation of society in many countries and it cannot [bring] prosperity to the country.” For the same respondent, democracy is to be “blamed” for the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As for another respondent,

democracy means “chaos in which there is no beginning and no end.” In addition to these people, a few respondents indicated that democracy was not meaningful and/or suitable for Kyrgyzstan.<sup>809</sup>

However, the overwhelming majority of respondents (127 out of 140), expressed a positive opinion of democracy. For one respondent democracy is associated with freedom, and some respondents called democracy a good form of government. Some respondents associated democracy with the word “freedom” without giving any further explanation. For one respondent, democracy is “all the freedoms listed in Universal Human Rights.” Other respondents were more specific about their explanations of democracy as freedom(s). The most commonly pointed out freedom was “freedom of speech” (34 respondents), followed by “freedom of choice” (16 respondents), “freedom of expression” (11 respondents) and “freedom of action” (10 respondents) and “freedom of opinion/thoughts/ideas” (8 respondents). Three respondents mentioned “freedom of movement” and another three named “freedom of press.” For a couple of respondents, democracy meant “freedom to decide their destiny” and for two others it was “freedom of consciousness.” One respondent, equated democracy with “freedom of economic activity” and for one respondent, it was “freedom of religion”. For another respondent, “freedom from pressure of security and enforcement agencies” was democracy.

When these answers are evaluated, it can be suggested that although none of the respondents gave an elaborate and detailed answer to the question on the general meaning of democracy, their answers indicated a heavy emphasis on associating it with various forms of freedoms (i.e. features of liberal democracy), therefore, some awareness on what democracy really is. It seems as if in explaining democracy, the people highlight issues such as accountability of the leader, political and economic stability, law and order. These things are wanted, as it is believed that they had existed during the Soviet era, and they are missed now. It seems as if for the

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<sup>809</sup> The responses of these people will be further elaborated on the part on authoritarianism. It must also be mentioned that for two respondents, democracy is related to economic well-being of the people. One other respondent gave a rather irrelevant definition of democracy: “Democracy means that civil servants know their responsibilities and perform their functions according to their sphere of competence. Each civil servant should be proud that he is working for a state. Civil servants must be dedicated to their work.”

respondents, democracy was associated with positive factors such as stability, various freedoms (such as freedom of speech, movement, expression, association, political organization, and economic activity) and an opportunity to criticize government without any pressure coming from state agencies. It was also suggested that, considering Central Asian history, in which many authoritarian leaders such as khans, played a major role, there emerged several problems in terms of transition to democracy. Interestingly, democracy was further seen as a regime that could contribute to economic development, as it allows an open market system and collaboration with other states. Another important point was related to the multi-ethnic structure of the Kyrgyz people who belonged to different tribes and regions. It was suggested that democratic means allowed political representation of these various groups. Democracy was also understood by the respondents as consultation and compromise, which was believed to be a part of Kyrgyz mentality. Another important expectation was related to participation of the people to the process of political decision-making alongside the leadership. As such, if a leader does not take into account general public opinion, he may lose his legitimacy.

When the respondents were asked whether they believe in the importance of democracy for Kyrgyzstan, a majority of the respondents (116 out of 140) indicated that they believed democracy to be important for their country and for the successful implementation of freedoms that they wanted in their everyday life, as democracy is a system that allows free expression of popular will for the citizens, and provides them the opportunity to “offer suggestions to state bodies.” Respondents also believed that democracy provided protection of human rights. According to one respondent, for example, only in a democracy, a person could “openly criticize the government and can be happy.” Another respondent highlighted democracy’s importance as the freedom of an individual “not to be pressured by the state.” A similar opinion was expressed as follows: “[d]emocracy is necessary if people are to protect themselves from the state.” In another answer it was stated that, democracy was important because it helped the Kyrgyz people to stay away from the authoritarianism of the Kyrgyz system which was “only a short step away from totalitarianism.” Another respondent believed that democracy was important as it

prevented “power usurpation” by the authorities and yet for another respondent democracy allowed people “to have public control over the power-holders.” As such, for a couple of respondents, democracy was “the best form of government” and “the best system” that “corresponded to the realities of contemporary society.” For one respondent, democracy made “politicians...learn to respect the choice of citizens, to provide transparent and open governing.”

It is clear that, the respondents believe that democracy could and indeed does bring accountability and constitutionalism, which must be respected. Although many people saw the potential positive aspects of a democratic system of government in Kyrgyzstan, they did not see democracy working properly in Kyrgyzstan, at least for the time being.

Some respondents indicated that democracy was important for the development of Kyrgyzstan as well as its people. According to one respondent, for example, “... without democracy we cannot move forward, cannot grow and develop. If we leave democratic way we will be in decay.” For some other respondents democracy contributed to the economic development of the country and prosperity of its people. Another few respondents believed that under democracy, people’s needs were addressed. A similar comment was made as follows:

...[as] the Kyrgyz society is composed of different groups on the basis of clan, tribe, region, etc. the voice and preferences of each group must be heard and they must be given chance to participate in decision making. All these can be done through democratic means, social agreement and elections.

For some other respondents, democracy was important because it was a regime that fitted within the general characteristics of the Kyrgyz people, who are democratic in nature. For example, according to one respondent democracy was important because:

in small communities ... even on a family pattern, you can see a lot of features of democracy. Generally the Kyrgyz families are set up through consultation and compromise, and so are the small communities. In that sense democracy is sitting inside the Kyrgyz social structure.



One respondent expressed a similar opinion:

Democracy and democratic attitude are characteristics of the Kyrgyz people. Kyrgyz people, who always decide the issues by taking into account the opinion of other people. However, this principle is reduced to consulting the family members and relatives.

For another respondent democracy was “fundamentally important for Kyrgyzstan, considering the fact that Kyrgyz people are freedom-loving people” and one respondent suggested that as the Kyrgyz people are “shy and modest” democracy may help them “to open up [and] to demand their rights.”<sup>810</sup>

For a few respondents, although democracy was important for their country, it should be adapted to Kyrgyzstan’s specific conditions and needs. For example, one respondent believed that the system in Kyrgyzstan should not necessarily be “a similar democratic system that exists in the USA.” For a few respondents democracy had to be “adjusted to the specific nature of the Kyrgyz society,” “to the mentality of Kyrgyz people,” and to the “cultural and national features of the local people.”

However, when it comes to the everyday practice of democracy in Kyrgyzstan, the respondents gave answers that reflected serious doubts about the existence of democracy in their country and criticized the democratic experience of Kyrgyzstan. As such, it seemed as if they had a clear demarcation in their minds about democracy in theory and its application on a daily basis in their own country.

One of the basic ideas expressed by almost half of all respondents was related to the perception that in Kyrgyzstan democracy is just a “show” and that there is no real democracy in the country. A couple of respondents also believed that in Kyrgyzstan “democracy exists on paper” and is “a fairy tale.”

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<sup>810</sup> There were certain other kinds of responses that gave specific reasons why democracy was important for Kyrgyzstan. For example, according to one respondent, democracy helps the “socially unprotected groups such as pensioners, disabled, and children who have a difficult life in Kyrgyzstan.” For one respondent, democracy “solves the problems of social and political isolation, ineffectiveness of public services, bad governance, and poor administration of resources.” For a couple of respondents, democracy makes Kyrgyzstan “open” to the outside world and allows people “to go and study or work abroad” or to meet with “foreign people [who] can also come and see the country.” Democracy and openness were also important for “successful integration [of Kyrgyzstan] into the world community.” For two other respondents democracy was important for Kyrgyzstan’s existence as an independent and sovereign state.

The major reasons of this perception seem to be related to the attitude of the leaders who "...under the banner of democracy, exercise power as they wish, almost unrestricted." According to one respondent, "democracy exists only for the elites, as [in our current system, only] their rights are protected, [whereas] others are treated undemocratically." According to another respondent:

... at present there is no democracy. Politicians and high rank bureaucrats are almost unconstrained by the laws, rules or media. They do and decide whatever they want. They are always right and correct. We need an arrangement (maybe in form of law) under which the state official and a common citizen would live under the same laws and rules.

For some other respondents, the leaders are reluctant in opening up channels for democratic participation for ordinary citizens and they "put pressure on the people" by "taking them to prison for dissent." As one respondent indicated, "In our country the rulers do not allow other political leaders to grow [and] democracy to develop. [They] do not want to share power." Similar ideas were expressed by another respondent, who suggested that in Kyrgyzstan the important political decisions "are taken without people's consent, without consultation with people and without learning their opinion on the issue." One respondent also made a parallel comment:

Democracy is rule by the people. It would be good if the people could rule in reality and make decisions, or at least participate in decision making, but currently the people and the decision makers are very far from each other.

The respondents seemed to be of the opinion that there is no democracy in Kyrgyzstan for the ordinary citizens, as "their rights are not protected" and that "there is no equality". As one respondent offered: "Our Kyrgyz democracy works for the family, head of regime, or clan." Therefore, a few respondents suggested that in Kyrgyzstan democracy is not understood well. According to one respondent the word democracy is "abused in the Kyrgyz context."

This rather pessimistic attitude convinced almost a half of all respondents that democracy will not be consolidated in their country, at least in the short run. Several

different reasons were presented, stemming from either the regime or the people. For some respondents, one major obstacle was the “absence of governmental responsibility and political equality” in Kyrgyzstan. There was a very high level of “corruption” that prevented the emergence of rule of law. Furthermore the leaders held too much power and there is “a movement towards patriarchal, tribal and feudal practices.” Some respondents focused on the “the spread of clan system, nepotism, and regionalism in political appointments (not professional qualities)” as the major obstacle in front of democratic consolidation.

For some other respondents, there were certain cultural factors that prevented further democratization in Kyrgyzstan. One respondent indicated the general “mentality of Kyrgyz people” as one such factor. The Kyrgyz people were portrayed by some respondents as being “politically uneducated” to give support to a democratic order. According to another respondent, the Kyrgyz people “do not have the experience of political struggle” in a political environment of “plurality of opinions” that is necessary for consolidation of democracy. Finally for some respondents, “poverty” was a basic reason why there is no real improvement in terms of democratic consolidation. As one respondent pointed out, in Kyrgyzstan “...people are too poor in order to think about politics.”

However, some respondents had a more optimistic attitude, indicating that in the longer run things may improve in the country and that eventually democracy will be consolidated. For a few respondents the new generation with a new political culture would help democratic consolidation. According to one respondent, for example, “The youth who grew up in independent Kyrgyzstan was influenced to some extent by the liberal-democratic values. This factor cannot be underestimated.” For some other respondents consolidation will be possible with emergence of a new leader. One respondent indicated that consolidation will be realized as a result of globalization as: “we live in globalizing world, and whether we want it or no, democratic forces will be taking its place in Kyrgyzstan sooner or later.”

### 4.3.2 Multi-Party System

One important area that needs to be focused in terms of how the Kyrgyz people perceive democracy in their country is the multi-party system. As was the case in the perception of democracy and its application in Kyrgyzstan, regarding the multi-party system, too, there seems to be a discrepancy between the concept as a meaningful term for democracy on the one hand, and its practice in Kyrgyzstan on the other.

One point that needs to be focused in how the respondents view democracy is that several of them (60 in total) indicated their support to the multi-party system in general. For almost half of all respondents, the multi-party system was a positive aspect of Kyrgyzstan's political system as it allowed plurality of opinions to be heard and represented. For one respondent, "plurality of opinions helps government to stay disciplined." According to another respondent, "...people have the right to express their views through different political parties ... [and] their opinions must be represented by many parties." It was also stated that, "...the emergence of different parties was a very positive phenomenon in the sense of looking at different angles of the development of a state."

For some other respondents since the multi-party system allows competition among political parties, it was a positive aspect, because "competition is a key to development." Political parties "should struggle [with each other] for the privilege of taking place in the minds of the people." According to one respondent, "Tougher competition stimulates better quality." As such, a couple of respondents suggested, this system offers alternative opinions to be heard.

Another related reason indicated by six respondents was that multi-party system provides a choice for voters to choose the one who would represent their interests. According to one respondent:

I think everybody has the right to choose whether they wish to belong to a particular political party or not. If an individual shares his political views with people holding similar beliefs, the interests of those people can be better

represented. Previously there was the Communist Party with its ideology, but it did not satisfy all the people and their interests. The current multi-party system is good.

It was also stated that, the emergence of several different political parties was a positive development as each party could now “represent and protect the interests of a certain group of people.” Some other respondents indicated that the multi-party system provided the opportunity to criticize both government and other political parties as it “creates a platform for criticism.” One respondent for example claimed that “Truth is born out of argumentation ... and opinion should not be a dogma. There should be an alternative opinion.”

Some other respondents also indicated that they support a multi-party system because multi-party system is related to democracy and is a *sine quo non* and/or a precondition of democratic development. Thus for one respondent “Emergence of multi party system is a step to the establishment of the democratic system” and for another respondent, “Formation of multi-party system is a condition of democratization of the country.” These respondents indicated that they supported the multi-party system and believed that it would contribute to the strengthening of democracy in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, a couple of respondents indicated that multi-party system benefits the people in this sense. For one respondent it contributes to democracy, as it helps to “restrain totalitarian and authoritarian trends.”

However, although many people indicated that although they generally believed in the advantages of a multi-party system,<sup>811</sup> there were several problems in terms of how such a system actually functions in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>812</sup> One major problem that several respondents indicated was related to the fact that there are too many inefficient parties in the country that are very similar to each other. However, this situation does not help the Kyrgyz people at all. As one respondent indicated:

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<sup>811</sup> Out of 140 respondents, only seven said that they were against this system.

<sup>812</sup> Out of 140 respondents, only two, indicated that multi-party does not work in Kyrgyzstan without giving any specific reasons. A couple of respondent just said, without further elaboration, that there was no real multi-party system in the country.

Since Kyrgyzstan's independence, too many political parties had been set up. Political parties cannot divide power and fight with each other. Parties try to attract people by promising material or other benefits. These promises are just empty words.

One respondent offered a similar opinion: "...In Kyrgyzstan so many parties have been created that people can barely remember their names, let alone their political policies and ideas." Another respondent pointed out the same idea in the form of a proverb, "When there are too many shepherds, the sheep does not survive."

Another related issue that was pointed out by a few respondents was the absence of any meaningful ideological difference among these political parties. One respondent further indicated that the programs of political parties are "vague and largely unknown to the public" similar to "water" for ordinary people [as] it is not clear what is written there." The political parties, according to such respondents represent personal, tribal or regional interests of their leaders. As one respondent evaluated:

We do not have multi-party system; [w]hat we have is a number of tribal organizations which are formed not on the basis of ideological principles but on the basis of popularity of a particular tribal leader. Ordinary citizen does not feel the plurality of alternative ideologies, ideas, opinions generated by parties. Our political parties do not perform the classical functions of political parties.

A similar opinion was expressed by one respondent who believed that political parties in Kyrgyzstan emerged on the basis of "family connections, not ideas or ideologies" and that their organization was "based on tribal and family rules, each party's leader behaving like a chief of a tribe." Another respondent also referred to the political struggle among political parties as a "struggle among tribes." A couple of respondents focused on the regional characteristics of these parties as an obstacle in the establishment of stronger, more representative parties. As one respondent suggested, "In Kyrgyzstan each party protects the interests of particular region. In other words political parties except the Communist Party are regional, and cannot assume the status of national parties."

Another respondent questioned the meaning of a multi-party system in Kyrgyzstan as follows:

What is the purpose of setting up a party especially in current conditions? Multi-party system in Kyrgyzstan is a kind of a show, it is not real. ... it is still a one-party system. ... In the beginning, perhaps the multi-party system was a right fit for Kyrgyzstan ... but eventually, we lost that notion, we lost it. The multi-party system is not working anymore... Parties are still associated with either the clan, or the territoriality.

Another frequently mentioned problem was related to the dominance of the presidential parties, leaving no room for others to have any real influence. As one respondent suggested:

Multi-party system is useless and meaningless in Kyrgyzstan. I do not see any competitiveness among the parties. It seems they are all together, they cooperate. Normally if there is a number of political parties conflicts, differences in views, debates take place. We do not see any debates.... Political parties do not decide anything. Only the ruling party's [the presidential party] inner circle makes decisions.

Another respondent made similar comments:

In fact we have only one party – the presidential *Ak Jol*. What kind of multi-party system exists in Kyrgyzstan? One-party has all power; others are pressurized, not even given chance to run in elections, to grow.

Some respondents also complained about the attitude of the political party leaders, who selfishly ran after power, without taking into consideration the real needs of the people. The only aim that these party leaders pursue was their own personal interests, such as personal self-enrichment. As one respondent indicated:

Our parties are built around a particular leader because of wrong economic relations. After independence, the privatization process made some people rich and now they have to protect their economic interests. So building a party (to look supported by people) and making it into the parliament became a means of protecting those economic interests. Because of such mentality behind the creation of political party, parties are not widespread or popular among ordinary people. Leader has money to do this. However people are not ready for democracy.

Therefore, some respondents said that political parties do not work for the benefit of the Kyrgyz people and do not represent their interests; as such they do not perform their main function. According to one respondent, "... the emergence of political parties can be explained by the selfish and conceited interests of the certain leaders who want power... they are not caring about common people." One respondent also noted: "Unfortunately, what we see is more populist slogans, speeches and an inability to help common people, as the parties are focused on protecting their own interests." As another respondent similarly suggested "Parties proclaim their intentions, but these remain unfulfilled, and are merely slogans."

Some other respondents put the blame on the general weakness of democracy in the country, indicating a kind of a vicious circle of failure. According to this, as democracy is weak, multi-party system does not work in Kyrgyzstan. As these respondents believe, a functioning democracy is a pre-condition for a real multi-party system. As one respondent said:

There is no multi-party system in Kyrgyzstan and if there will be one in the future, it is not the consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, rather it is the strength of democracy in the country.

According to some other respondents, the Kyrgyz people have no democratic culture and this is one major obstacle for the proper functioning of a multi-party system. One respondent suggested that this system is a "proclaimed" goal of Kyrgyzstan and "it is only natural [for the country] to have more than 50 political parties". However, since "conventional logic does not apply in Kyrgyzstan because of the mentality of the people" these parties still cannot unify into "a handful of stronger parties." Absence of a "democratic political culture" was explicitly stressed by a couple of respondents as an important impeding factor. According to one such respondent, "at present time, the people of Kyrgyzstan with their [undemocratic] mentality are not ready for a multi-party system. Political culture and mindset of the people are so that multi-party system does not work in Kyrgyzstan." This "mindset" was also reflected in the reluctant and passive attitude of the Kyrgyz people in political participation. As another respondent suggested:



[political parties] cannot play an important role in politics in Kyrgyzstan because our country is not so politicized. There is no single party that acts professionally (except for the Communist Party), and that is why we need experience.

One respondent also said that the Kyrgyz people do not have the necessary “political traditions concerning the role of political parties in the country,” resulting in their political inactivity. Likewise, “the effect of an emerging multi-party system in people’s minds is slow, and only now they are beginning to understand that parties may serve their interests.”

These responses to the questions on the applicability of the multi-party system in their country, suggest that even though the Kyrgyz people look at it positively, they do not believe that the system works properly in their country, just as the case for their general ideas about democracy. It can be contended on the basis of the responses, the multi-party system was supported in general, as it provided an opportunity for a plurality of opinions and different views to be represented, as well as opportunity for criticizing the government. Such a system is also seen as a precondition of a better governing and democratic development by restraining authoritarian tendencies on the part of the authorities. As for the actual functioning of the multi-party system in Kyrgyzstan, however, the respondents have identified several problems including inefficiency and similarity of many parties, their lack of a national program covering all areas of the country, not just particular regions, and dominance and power of presidential or pro-presidential parties. The respondents also pointed out the importance of the undemocratic political culture of the country as a result of their ineffectiveness.

In the next part, how the Kyrgyz people see authoritarianism in general and its Kyrgyz practice in particular are evaluated. That discussion is expected to shed some light also on the problems of democratic experience in the country.

### **4.3.3 Authoritarianism and the Kyrgyz Practice**

One very important theme that can be inferred from the answers of those respondents who approach democracy with some suspicion and prefer a more authoritarian rule was their association of democracy with some sort of anarchy or disorder, something that they are not used to, especially when compared with the political stability of the Soviet era. Some respondents seemed to understand democracy as lawlessness and indicated that democracy had to work “within logical constraints.” As such, even freedom of speech, which was one of the most frequently mentioned advantages of democracy for some respondents, was approached with some caution. For one respondent, for example, “ethical norms and morality” were critical in “constraining” freedom of speech from turning into total “permissiveness” as many people in Kyrgyzstan understand democracy as “a lack of discipline.” A couple of respondents also expressed their fear that freedom of speech in particular and other freedoms in general are interpreted as “permissiveness,” to which they indicated strongly dislike. For one respondent, “Permissiveness is making people hate democracy.”

In this general context, a few respondents seemed to prefer “discipline and order” over democracy. These respondents felt nostalgia to the old days in which there was no chaos. As one respondent expressed:

At least under Soviet rule there was order and control. People were careful, because they knew they could be checked, but now we have lost that order. Laws are not implemented, and rules are not followed.

In this general context, some respondents indicated that democracy is something that can be lived without, at least at certain times and under certain conditions. For example, according to one respondent, if the leader is “just and honest” and is ruling in a “fair manner” then “the Kyrgyz people can sacrifice democracy.” Another respondent gave another critical evaluation regarding democracy:

A society should live according to certain rules. Democracy denounces all the rules. Kyrgyzstan should give up democracy for the [sake of] future development and prosperity of the Kyrgyz people.

Some other respondents also suggested that democracy is not a term that the Kyrgyz people are familiar with. For one respondent: “Democracy is a job of demagogy [and] ... an alien concept for Kyrgyzstan.” It has been founded in other countries and therefore it cannot take root in the Kyrgyz context. According to another respondent:

Democracy is not acceptable in Kyrgyzstan in its ideal form or the form it is practiced in United States or in Europe. We are Eastern, Asian people with Muslim population. Besides we are nomadic people with a specific mindset.

Likewise, one respondent said that “Democracy is a system for the West, not for us. Historically and traditionally, the Kyrgyz people have lived according to different principles.” As another respondent also argued: “*We do not need democracy. Throughout history Kyrgyz people had one authoritarian ruler. We used to live without democracy and we do not need it now.*”<sup>813</sup>

What such ideas imply is that for the Kyrgyz people democracy is not a desirable system. As put forward by one respondent, “During the 19 years of so-called democratic existence, Kyrgyzstan got nothing good. It would be better to have a strict, just ruler.” A number of other respondents indicated that there is a need for a strong and strict leader, even if he is authoritarian. One respondent, for example, pointed at the need for a “responsible leader who would come up as a Father of Nation, with concrete ideology.” As for another respondent, what the country needs is “an authoritarian dictator who would conduct strict policies. Otherwise the people act like a crowd.” One respondent expressed similar ideas, “We do need an authoritarian leader, but only for the purpose of keeping people disciplined, maintaining order, and making sure everybody sticks to the rules.”

For some respondents democracy itself may not be objectionable, but for the time being at least the country is “not ready” for it. One major reason is given as the economic problems of the country which makes democracy not the top priority. As one respondent stated:

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<sup>813</sup> Italics added.

Yes democracy is important for Kyrgyzstan but not now. At present we need a dictator, even Stalinism, because we need an order and a strong leader to improve our economy. After that the democratic process can be started. Instead of being poor, indebted and pretending to be democratic, it would be better to have a strong economy and not have democracy at certain times.

A couple of respondents also pointed out the need for “a dictator” due to the urgent need for “order and a strong leader to improve [the] economy.” One respondent also put the priority on economy and said that “For economy to be developed I would even support authoritarian regime for a while.” Similar ideas were expressed by another respondent who suggested that with the “present level of economic development” it was too early for the country to be ready for democracy:

I do not support democracy. It is early for Kyrgyz people to build democracy. The present level of consciousness and economic development is not suitable for democracy. We need at least more 20-30 years in order to understand the meaning of democracy and make it work in our country.

In addition to the need for improving the economy before establishing a democratic order, some other respondents also pointed out that the mindset or “mentality” of the Kyrgyz people suited better for an authoritarian order. For one respondent “national traditions” such as the importance of “clan and family connections” are determinative for the people and “Until and unless the people’s mindset and their political culture changes, there cannot be democracy in Kyrgyzstan.” According to another respondent, “Political system of a state should be considered and chosen of the bases of mentality, culture and traditions of Kyrgyz people.” Likewise, it was stated that the Kyrgyz people still have “the Soviet mentality” that is why democracy is not suitable for Kyrgyzstan. Such ideas seem to indicate that for some respondents, an authoritarian order works better and authoritarianism in Kyrgyzstan with positive connotations and in terms of its effectiveness.

In the next part, presidential system is analyzed as an indication of the authoritarian tendencies in the context of Kyrgyzstan, by first looking at how the people evaluate this system in general, and then how they see its functioning in the specific context of their country.

#### 4.3.4 Presidential System

As was the case in the perceptions of democracy by the Kyrgyz people, how they view presidential system in general as well as its functioning in Kyrgyzstan also seemed to be two separate issues. In this part, first, how the Kyrgyz people see the presidential system in general and in terms of its functioning in Kyrgyzstan in particular are analyzed. Then how this system is evaluated as a reflection of authoritarian rule in the country is given.

When asked about their opinions on the presidential system in general, a total of 19 respondents did not give any answers or made any comments on this question, whereas a total of 15 respondents suggested that they supported this system, although they gave no specific reason or comprehensive explanation. For some other respondents the presidential system was a “normal choice” under the conditions of the time or it was simply the result of a particular “historical development” or “a logical process” or an “optimal decision.” Another group of respondents suggested that it was related to the fact that Kyrgyzstan got its independence along with the other 14 republics of the former Soviet Union, all of which were in the same transition wave. As such, “The introduction of the institute of president was just repetition of what other post-Soviet states did” and it was, as one respondent mentioned “very natural that countries accepted presidential system as a heritage of the Soviet Union.”<sup>814</sup> According to one respondent, the emergence of this system was “a kind of platitude (cliché) for the post Soviet countries. By having a president, [these] countries try to show that they are not worse than other states.”

Some respondents indicated that they supported this system because their country needed someone to represent Kyrgyzstan in the world. According to one respondent, presidential system was “a necessary development” because “somebody should represent the country on the international arena [and the] international community should see Kyrgyzstan’s leader.” Such ideas were also expressed by a couple of

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<sup>814</sup> Some other respondents also indicated the influence of other countries such as the United States.

respondents, who indicated that the presidential system was important as the president was representing their interests in world affairs.

According to some respondents, what really mattered was the expectations that people had from the president himself; it seemed as if these respondents did not have a clear idea or were not concerned about the general defining characteristics or proper functioning of the presidential system. For example, one respondent said the following:

I am far from politics, and so I guess it does not matter whether there is a president or a collective body. *The most important thing is that he cares about the people, about their well-being, their living standards, social services and public health, as long as he cares about these then let him be president, or give him any other title.* If this leader does not care about these matters then the state will not have a good future. People will emigrate.<sup>815</sup>

It seems as if these respondents emphasized the importance of “good qualities” of the leader rather than the structural arrangements of a presidential system, which was of secondary importance. For example one respondent indicated that he would support the presidential system “[i]f president has a concrete political program and a reliable team.” Thus, these respondents often described their expectations of the president as the leader of the country, rather than the system. According to another respondent, “Kyrgyzstan ... needs a president, a leader who would use country’s resources for the well-being of his people.” For yet another respondent, the president “should be really dedicated to his country.” As such, it was further stated that the president’s success was all that matters, not periodic elections or limited terms of office:

I believe the term of four years and possibility of two consecutive terms is not detrimental. *If we had a good president let him work more than two terms.* It is not principally important.<sup>816</sup>

It may be suggested that the general characteristics of the form of the executive itself (whether be presidential or parliamentary) may not be that important for the Kyrgyz

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<sup>815</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>816</sup> Emphasis added.

people, as long as the president and the government meet their expectations. According to one respondent, “Whatever the form of government, it should serve majority of people and satisfy their needs and demands.”

When asked specifically about the presidential system in Kyrgyzstan and the way in which this system works or is practiced in the country, 12 respondents chose not to give any answer to the question; whereas 12 others gave no meaningful or explanatory answer at all, avoiding the question with answers like “I am not interested in politics.” For some other respondents who indicated that they were in favor of, or satisfied with the presidential system in Kyrgyzstan, the answers were again not elaborate at all, they were just one or two words in favor of the system, such as “appropriate” and “suitable” with no further explanation.

However, one basic pattern that was observed was that almost half of all respondents were very critical on the issue. One of the most frequently expressed criticisms was about the excessive powers that the president possessed. Some respondents pointed out that the president “is standing above the three branches of power,” and that his “powers are almost unrestricted.” Such a system created “conditions for usurpation of power.” As one respondent further suggested, “The President is given too much power and controls, either directly or indirectly, too many spheres of life.” For some respondents, the president concentrates too much powers in his hands and by using these powers, he actually “abuses his office” by not being abided by laws. As one respondent said, “each president promotes the laws that suit him, not the people.” As for another respondent, “In [Kyrgyzstan] the head of the state ...cannot be checked by the other branches of power.” A few respondents also believed that presidential system in the country lacked the principle of checks and balances, and the Kyrgyz president is not checked by the parliament or any other body. As one respondent commented:

Frankly speaking I am terrified by the presidential system the way it exists now and the way it operates... I live in Osh and I can see that if one is not the member of presidential party *Ak Jol*, but of other oppositional party, he would be treated as an enemy of the state. I am critical and consider it wrong that the Constitution is re-made to suit one person – the ruler.

As such, some people indicated that the Kyrgyz presidents lack responsibility and accountability. According to one respondent, “the president appoints his people [to important positions of authority], but does not bear responsibility for failures.” According to another respondent, the Kyrgyz presidential system can be characterized as “more rights and less duties and responsibilities [for the president].”

Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that for some Kyrgyz respondents, due to the above mentioned problems, presidentialism in Kyrgyzstan is turning into autocracy. One respondent openly declared the following for the country: “I can see autocratic regime and absolute rule of one leader.” For another, the Kyrgyz presidential system was nothing but a “totalitarian regime mixed with Asian mentality and traditional mindset: tribalism, family rule, misinterpretation of Islamic dogma.” For one respondent, it was a “dictatorship”, for another respondent a “khanate”, and for a couple of respondents a “monarchy.” One respondent pointed out that “There is a tendency for the establishment of sultanate.” As it is seen, according to such respondents, presidentialism in Kyrgyzstan is anything but democratic.

One of the other most frequently suggested points about the malfunctioning of the presidential system in Kyrgyzstan was related to the dominance of the president’s family in the political system, which resulted in corrupt policies. According to one respondent, since the president “often has a big family and many relatives ... the presidential office is used for usurpation of power.” As such, for some respondents presidentialism was associated with the president pursuing the interests of his own family, rather than the people’s or the state’s interests. In other words, the president “satisfies his own ambitions” in Kyrgyzstan. As one respondent sarcastically pointed out, “We had the best presidents, both were *family man* and they ruled under the slogan ‘*everything goes to my family*’.”<sup>817</sup> A few respondents also stated that presidents allowed their families to interfere in politics, a pattern that could be observed in “appointments” that were made “within a narrow circle of alternative

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<sup>817</sup> Italics added.



candidates to fulfill the government and state apparatus.” Here the respondents highlighted the problem of nepotism, which was believed to undermine the legitimacy of high level officials appointed by the leader.

Another problem raised by some respondents was related to the importance of tribalism in the country. One respondent saw the Kyrgyz presidential system as the “continuation of [the rule of the] ‘tribal chief’” because the pre-Soviet political arrangements are still present and active in the current political system. Another respondent stressed the same problem by indicating that due to the Kyrgyz “mentality” the country “witnessed the revival of family-clan relations in politics.” Likewise, in the post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, “one clan rule is changed to the other clan rule.” Therefore the presidents, having the “old Soviet mentality” started “to surround themselves with relatives and close friends who in the end began to form a clan.” One respondent also made similar comments:

I think that the post and status of the president ... became the continuation of Soviet-type of leadership ... Just like during the Soviet era, chief executives in post-Soviet countries, including Kyrgyzstan concentrate power, allow their political allies and circle to interfere to the foreign and domestic policy.

A few more respondents made similar remarks, indicating that the post-Soviet presidents were new but had the same mentality and same method of rule. According to one respondent for example:

President as a political institution should be understood in the context of Soviet past. In fact president in post-Soviet states is a successor of Chief of Communist party, so the manner of governing was inherited from [our] undemocratic past.

According to another respondent, the presidential system in Kyrgyzstan will never work efficiently unless “the whole system of power distribution [and] political authority ... [is] changed.” This respondent further indicated that:

It does not matter to what extent the president is good or bad (even if he is very good he will be spoilt by the system). In Kyrgyzstan the president has to

provide for and protect his relatives, loyal supporters and this paves the way to nepotism, and favoritism.

When we evaluate the answers given to the questions on presidential system and its functioning in Kyrgyzstan, it seems as if the system itself is not very clear in the minds of the people in terms of its general characteristics as a model of political executive. For some respondents, the system was associated with the personal qualifications, shortcomings or mistakes of the incumbent president. For others, the system was evaluated by some of specific policies or developments that took place during the presidencies of Askar Akaev and Kurmanbek Bakiev. Some respondents blamed the presidential system for its ineffectiveness in solving the problems of the country; whereas for some other respondents, the presidential system was evaluated through their everyday life difficulties:

I am not satisfied with how the present system administrates, as I can see that people's lives have gotten worse on the whole, year by year. It gets harder to survive and to earn a living. Prices rise, so my opinion of the president, to his regime are not unequivocal.

It is also important to suggest that some respondents gave rather irrelevant and/or conflicting answers that further indicated their ignorance of and/or disinterest on the issue. For one respondent, the Kyrgyz people “do not scrutinize the presidential system, [as] they are concerned with more real issues of tariffs, food prices and unemployment.” As for another respondent, “the presidential system works fine; *the only thing lacking* is the principle of checks and balances.

Only a few respondents, were able to evaluate the presidential system with its own qualifications as a form of execution:

In theory any system (parliamentary or presidential) is good, but for a system to work there got to be rules and principles which must be strictly managed and strictly followed. If the rules are not abided than any system is bad. In my opinion parliamentary system would have been better. In post-Soviet history of Kyrgyzstan we have had two-three strong parliaments. Especially in early 1990s parliament tried to make president accountable and the principle of checks and balances

was working. But every time by means of referendum or Constitutional loopholes or other means presidential power became stronger and stronger. The Kyrgyz president is above the three branches of power. President abuses his powers.

In terms of the perceptions of the Kyrgyz people regarding the presidential system in Kyrgyzstan, there were some tendencies that reflected an authoritarian tendency in their minds. As was analyzed in the part on their perceptions of democracy, here too, there were some visible tendencies within the Kyrgyz context which seemed to indicate a preference and/or sympathy to a one-person strong rule. According to one respondent, the Kyrgyz people “do not need democracy” because throughout their history they had “one authoritarian ruler.” According to this respondent, the Kyrgyz were “used to live without democracy and [they] do not need it now.” Another perspective was offered by another respondent, who believed that due to factors such as “tribalism, clan system and regionalism” the most suitable system for Kyrgyzstan was the presidential one “in which power is concentrated in one person’s hands.” As can be seen from such responses, this type of rule is seen as how the presidential system should be implemented in the country. In other words, for a few respondents, presidential system in Kyrgyzstan is appropriate, because their country has an authoritarian past, going all the way back to the pre-Soviet era. As one respondent indicated:

In the East, historically we have had the autocracy or absolute rule of one leader. So the presidential system that emerged in Kyrgyzstan must be considered from this point of view.

One other respondent also shared a similar opinion: “We live in the East, where people recognize only one leader, the authoritarian one. ... Therefore presidential rule is appropriate for Kyrgyzstan.” Likewise, it was also stated that:

*Our presidential system is close to khanate, the powers of president and his rule are almost unrestricted and regime moves in direction of khanate. But only this form of rule is effective for our people.*<sup>818</sup>

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<sup>818</sup> Italics added.

A number of respondents further indicated that there was a need for a strong and strict leader. For example, one respondent pointed at the need for a “responsible leader who would come up as a Father of Nation, with concrete ideology”; likewise a couple of respondents talked about the same need even for a “dictator like Stalin” because with such a “strong leader” the economy would improve. One respondent also said that “For the economy to be developed I would even support authoritarian regime for a while.”

These findings rise up a dilemma for the respondents, who prefer authoritarianism (in the form of a strong leader) on the one hand, and are critical of the authoritarian practices of their presidents on the other. As it can be seen, only a few respondents made consistent comments on the presidential system. For others, presidentialism was reduced down to system in which the president would represent the country at the international arena and “care for the people.” Many respondents focused on the impossibility of holding the presidents responsible or accountable in Kyrgyzstan. As such, as indicated by the respondents, both presidents used their authority in an almost unconstrained manner, by initiating several constitutional amendments and referendums, as discussed in detail in the second and third chapters of the dissertation. One other most obvious factor regarding the actual practice of presidential system in Kyrgyzstan was the heavy involvement of the presidential families in all walks of public life.

#### **4.4 Perceptions of Leadership in general and Perceptions of Akaev and Bakiev leadership**

As one of basic research questions posed in this dissertation was related to the perception of political legitimacy of two former Kyrgyz presidents – Askar Akaev and Kurmanbek Bakiev, the respondents were also asked about their leadership qualities. To that end general opinions of the respondents about how they perceive a good leader was asked. As it was mentioned in the theoretical framework of the dissertation, the role of elites in the process of transition to democracy (the elite-led democratization approaches) seems to be useful in understanding Kyrgyz leadership

in post-Soviet era. Both of the presidents desired to remain in office as long as possible by personalizing their power. That is why the problem of political leadership is important.

This section aims to focus on the perceptions of the people about the qualities of a good political leader for Kyrgyzstan as well as the discrepancy between the general expectations on the one hand and the real life cases of Akaev and Bakiev, both of whom seemed to fail to meet these expectations. As was suggested before, a third category in which the respondents' answers would be evaluated was about their perceptions of leadership in general and perceptions of Akaev and Bakiev as the two post-Soviet leaders of Kyrgyzstan. In this part, first the expectations on the issue a good leader were analyzed. Then, how respondents evaluated Akaev and Bakiev leadership in perspective was evaluated.

In answering the question on the general characteristics of a good leader, the respondents indicated various personal and professional qualities. It must be noted that, a majority of the respondents gave a combination of different attributes, not just one or two. When the answers are analyzed, it is possible to see ten common qualities that the respondents expected most from a good leader. These qualities were patriotism, good education, honesty, professionalism, charisma, intelligence, responsibility, strength of character, service to the people and bravery. For all of these qualities, there were no significant variations in terms of *oblast*, age group, gender, and occupation.

The most frequently mentioned quality, by almost one third of all respondents, was patriotism. Some of these respondents simply mentioned that a leader should be a patriot, with no further elaboration, whereas some gave broader comments on this issue:

A good leader must have a clear objective, not an ambition but an objective on how to serve for his country and his people. ... Someone who has an objective, a clear goal to achieve, someone who will serve his country and not have his country serve him or her.

Education was the second most important quality for the respondents: one fourth of all respondents indicated the importance of good, even excellent, education. Some respondents were more specific, and they stated the need of at least “a university degree.”<sup>819</sup>

The third most important quality named by several respondents was “honesty.” One interesting opinion explaining “honesty” in Central Asian context was given by one respondent:

The good leader ... must possess the qualities mentioned by Yusuf Balasaghuni in *Kutadgu Bilig*. Honesty and justice are the main qualities of a good leader. A good leader must perform all his duties and he must be just to others. Moral qualities of a leader are very important. Just rule is the way of law abiding and fairness in society.

In this context, for a few respondents an honest leader must be able to “keep his promise” and must also be “decent.”

Some indicated that an ideal leader must be a professional politician or must have a professional experience in spheres related to government, administration, management and leadership. According to one respondent, a leader must be “experienced in politics and administration” and for another respondent, a leader must possess “professional experience ... going through all levels of public administration, starting from the lowest administrative post.” Some respondents along with the quality of being a professional politician indicated the need for being a “professional in at least one sphere.” As professionalism is acquired through experience, for some respondents a leader must be “professional, informed about the life in all provinces of Kyrgyzstan, [and] able to acquire objective information.” A related expectation mentioned by nine other respondents was the possession of administrative/managerial skills. As one respondent put it, “A good leader must be talented, able to govern, manage, organize, and motivate people.”

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<sup>819</sup> It must also be mentioned however, that the Russian word *obrazovannost* (education/erudition) used by some respondents implies not only good education but also good manners.

Several respondents indicated charisma as another basic quality of a good leader. Charisma speaks for itself but as understood by one respondent, it had repercussion on the leader who needed to earn the support of the people: “[A good] leader must possess charm and popularity, and should understand that it is the Kyrgyz people who are most powerful and so he should gain support and respect of the people. Another respondent expressed a similar opinion, “A leader should be charismatic, we should love our leader and he should earn people’s trust.” For one respondent, “A good leader must be charismatic. He must attract people and they must go after him.”

A number of respondents indicated importance of intelligence in a good leader. Most of these respondents did not elaborate further on this quality. Some respondents said that a good leader must be smart/clever and few respondents indicated that he must be wise. Knowledge in other fields, such as economy, was also mentioned by some respondents as one of the necessary qualities of a good leader. For a couple of respondents, a leader must also possess “entrepreneurial mind.” As one respondent suggested:

A good leader must understand not only the economic market, but also the political market. A leader should not have a “factory mindset” like Bakiev, he must be a strategist, an “entrepreneur-businessman.”

Another respondent expressed similar opinions, but in a rather optimistic way:

[A good leader] must have the mindset of an entrepreneur. Kyrgyzstan is a smaller version of Switzerland. If our leader is smart, hard-working and thinks of his people and his country (rather than how to steal for the good of his family and his grandchildren), Kyrgyzstan can become a very developed country.

Related to the same expectation, some respondents indicated the importance of a “strategic mind,” “strategic thinking” and “strategic vision.” For one respondent, for example, “The good leader must possess a strategy and a good team to push the country to progress, and if necessary enforce people abide the laws and work hard.” Likewise, a few other respondents indicated that a leader must possess “vision”.

Another quality mentioned by several respondents was responsibility. Though some respondents implied responsibility on the part of the leader for his or her deeds, others implied “the ability to take responsible decisions.” For example, for one respondent, a leader must be “responsible for everything that happens in the state”; for another respondent he must be “responsible for his country” and yet for another respondent he must be “responsible for what he promises.”

The next quality mentioned by some respondents was “strictness” or strength of character. This quality had varying connotations for the respondents. For example, for one respondent, a strong leader was the one who could “keep power in ... [his] hands”: “For development we need a strong leader. I always compare Nursultan Nazarbaev or Islam Karimov with our leaders. These two leaders are strong leaders who can keep power in their hands.” For one respondent, likewise, “strictness” implies the ability “to control the state of affairs.” Another respondent also said that “Under the present conditions of Kyrgyzstan, the President must be strict.” For a few respondents, this was the quality of the Soviet era leaders:

Decency, patriotism, working for welfare of the people... During the Soviet Union, there were people possessing such qualities. They exist even now, but they are not given a chance to work in the government.

For some other respondents, as an indicator of strength of character, a good leader must also be “decisive.” A couple of respondents further indicated that a leader must possess political will. Nine respondents indicated that a good leader must represent the interests of society and serve the people. For one respondent, for example, a leader must possess an “ability to competently accumulate and adequately represent the interests of society” whereas for another respondent, he or she must have the “ability to represent and protect national interests.” Concerning national interests, three other respondents further stated that a leader must put “national interests above his own.” In this context, the leader’s attitude to the people was also mentioned. For some respondents a leader “must be close to people,” “care for people,” “listen to the people,” “work for the people,” “work for the country,” “think of the people,” and “do his best for his people.”



Similar ideas have been expressed by other respondents as well. For example, according to few respondents, a leader must be “unselfish.” As one respondent stated “A good leader must think not of himself but of his people.” For another respondent, a leader should possess a “desire and commitment to work for the well-being of our country”; likewise for one respondents, he or she must “work towards the welfare of his people (create high standard of life, proper salaries, suitable credits for business, affordable prices).” A few respondents further indicated the importance of “clarity of aim” to that end, which, for one respondents was “a clear objective, not an ambition but an objective on how to serve for his country and his people.”

Some respondents, however, also expressed a pragmatic and realistic view in describing how a leader in the Kyrgyz context should work for the people, while at the same time not forgetting about his own interests:

A good leader must live for his people. Along with working for his own sake, a good leader must work for his country and people. I understand that president has his own family and he should also provide for his family but this should not be the only objective occupying presidential office. Our leaders don't think about the future of their people. They only think about themselves and today. In other words, they do not possess a vision. Today the mayor of Bishkek is not a bad person, he works for himself and at the same time he is developing the city. I wish we had a president similar to our mayor of Bishkek.

The final most frequently mentioned quality of a good leader indicated by a few respondents was courage. The meaning and content of courage however was given differently by the respondents. For some, it was an ability to go against the system; for others it was defined as “bravery in decision making”; and yet for others it was equated with “political bravery.” According to one respondent, “Given the inherent corruption in Kyrgyzstan, a leader must have the courage to go against the system. He must set an example for others.” Another connotation of courage was given by one respondent, for whom a leader “must be brave and be able to defend his point of view, be able to listen to criticism and make appropriate conclusions.”

In addition to these qualities, there were several others that were less frequently mentioned. For example, some respondents indicated that a leader must possess “good communicative skills.” This quality was mentioned to be important in both international and domestic affairs:

As the leader of the country it is his job to meet the leaders of other countries as the representative our country. Also, he must meet different people in our country, and so should be able to communicate well with all types of people. He should be able to attract the support of all these kinds of people.

For some other respondents, a leader must be able to “carry words into actions” and “able to distinguish empty words from real deeds.” A few respondents indicated that a leader must adhere to laws and/or respect laws and the constitution. Several other respondents indicated that a leader must be a “good orator.” A few more respondents indicated that a leader must be just, as his basic quality. For example, according to one respondent “Kyrgyzstan needs a leader similar to Stalin, who would be prepared [if necessary] to punish even his own children and not just his appointees.”<sup>820</sup> Other qualities of a good leader included being “morally-stable,” “talented,” “disciplined,” “objective,” “ambitious,” and being able “to find compromise.” A couple of respondents further indicated that a leader must know “the Kyrgyz traditions” and “the Kyrgyz mentality” and three respondents indicated that a leader must be “fluent in Kyrgyz language.” Likewise, it was also indicated that a good leader must enjoy respect at the international arena, and one respondent indicated that a good leader must enjoy such reputation. Some other rarely mentioned qualities included presence of “erudition,” “internal cohesiveness,” self-respect,” and “innovative approach.” Leader must also be “tolerant,” “married,” and “optimistic.”

Despite the fact that there are a variety of expectations from a good leader and that opinions are dispersed, it is still possible to observe a general pattern which is reflected in the ten most important qualities of a good leader for the respondents. The first quality, patriotism, is seen as lacking in the leaders of the country, and it is pointed out as the most important quality that people would like to see. Likewise,

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<sup>820</sup> This expression implied that a leader must be fair and impartial to such an extent that he would ignore his own feelings and punish even his own children, if they violate the law.

honesty, which according to some respondents, is again “the most important quality” reflecting the peoples’ wishes, who may be tired of dishonesty of politicians in terms of corruption, unfulfilled promises, and injustices existing in the society. Honest and respected leaders are seen as non-existent in the country and this seems to be the reason why people want to see such a leader. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, there are no sufficient mechanisms to keep a leader accountable and to prevent abuse of power and abuse of office. Therefore the respondents wish to see an honest leader whose consciousness would not allow him to abuse power.

One of the reasons of the frequent mentioning of professionalism could be that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as the Communist Party leadership was partially removed from office and some of the leading positions in government and administration were occupied by non-professionals who had never previously worked in the sphere of public administration. As these people turned out to be rather incompetent, professional politicians are missed by the people. Another reason can be related to the widespread method of appointments in Kyrgyzstan based not on merit, but rather on family/tribe/clan connections, further exacerbating the problem of unprofessionalism in government and administration. Therefore, the people wish to see a professional politician as a leader of the country.

As for the desire to see a responsible leader, it can be explained by the well-known examples of irresponsibility of the previous leaders in the post-Soviet era. There are many examples of irresponsible policies, decisions and action of leaders, such as allowing and actually encouraging electoral frauds, nepotistic appointments, using referendums to enhance their powers, so the people long to see a responsible leader. Also, as the mechanisms of holding the leaders responsible are either nonexistent or very vague, the respondents seem to expect a leader to be responsible as an internal quality of his or her character, morality and consciousness. Probably the explanation for a need to see a responsible leader is the absence in Kyrgyzstan of a mechanism that guarantees responsibility of a leader, particularly the president, to the public for his deeds and actions. Therefore the respondents seek to see a responsible leader, whose internal consciousness will not allow him to commit irresponsible actions.

As for the need for a strict (disciplined) leader, probably the reason behind is that the people are being used to be commanded, given tasks, and said what to do, so they still feel a necessity to get orders. A similar reflection of this attitude can be seen in the responses which suggest that a leader “must work for his people” and “provide for them.” This may be an indication that the people in Kyrgyzstan still continue to be taken care of and be provided by the state and/or a leader.

Perhaps quite understandably, few respondents indicated that a good leader must be “like Putin.” One respondent comprehensively elaborated on what it means to be like Putin:

The ideal leader is Putin. He is strong, brave, competent in many issues, professional in whatever he does, not indifferent to people’s problems, decisive and has cognitive style; responsible, patriot, hard-working and is completely devoted to his work and his country.

Probably such a desire to have a Putin-like leader can be explained by several reasons, including wide promotion of Putin in the Russian media, which is popularly followed in Kyrgyzstan. Secondly, Putin is also regarded successful in economic policies, contributing to his wide-spread image of success.

When these answers are further analyzed in terms of their relevance for or relation to democracy, it must be pointed out that only four respondents indicated that a leader must be “democratic.” The most comprehensive explanation of “democratic leader” was given by one respondent:

A good leader must be democratic; admitting the supremacy of the Constitution and respecting and adhering to human rights; desire and commitment to work for well-being of our country; sufficient command in few languages; providing total freedom to media, NGOs and business sector.<sup>821</sup>

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<sup>821</sup> Another respondent even said that a leader must be “authoritarian.”

It must be noted that even if the respondents did not directly state that a good leader must be democratic, it is clear that accountability, honesty, professionalism could also be linked to a notion of democratic leader.

There were only a couple of answers that focused on the tribal/family connections of a leader in a negative way as obstacles to democracy. According to a couple of respondents, a good leader must be “free from tribal and clan connections” and “free from clan and nepotism influences.” One respondent said that a leader should only have “a few relatives” so that they would not interfere in state affairs. According to another respondent, “In the Kyrgyz context a good leader must be somebody without family and relatives, because the Kyrgyz mentality presupposes helping and providing for family and relatives if you are better off.” Likewise, “the leader must also be able to consolidate the North and South” thereby prevent any possible conflict caused by clan ties.

Only a few respondents have mentioned the necessity of legitimacy of the leader. According to one respondent, “A leader must be legitimate; [meaning] elected through free and fair process.” For a few other respondents, a leader must enjoy “people’s support and confidence” and he must “be able to build and maintain public support”.

As the responses indicate, lack of professionalism, inability to keep their word and follow their previously declared policies and decisions seem to be the major deficiencies of the Kyrgyz leaders, jeopardizing their legitimacy. The respondents seemed to maintain their understanding of a good leader from the Soviet era, which is reflected in their perception of a leader as a strong figure who must work for the people.

It is further possible to suggest that the data regarding the perceptions of leadership is quite in line with the “subject culture” defined by Almond and Verba, in their classical study *The Civic Culture* (1963), in which the subject “is aware of specialized governmental authority, he is affectively oriented to it, perhaps disliking

it; and he evaluates it either as legitimate or not.”<sup>822</sup> Indeed, from the responses given to the questions about the perceptions of a good leader, the four characteristics of a subject culture are observed. Firstly, the respondents have certain feelings toward the system and they are not indifferent. They express worry, frustration and dissatisfaction; and yet they also wish to see a better Kyrgyzstan. Secondly, the knowledge of structures and roles, the various political elites and policy proposals are muted, unclear and generally dissatisfied. In other words, whatever decisions and policies come out of the system are accepted without much questioning and without public control. That is why people complain about lack of rule of law and order. The mechanisms under which a civil society would actively influence the political system, in the form of criticisms or suggestions are seen absent. Since they know that they cannot change much of anything, public dissatisfaction culminates in the form of leadership change. Third, respondents have high expectations from the regime, state institutions, and state system as well as the leader. This view can also be explained from the point of view of the Soviet past in which the state “cared” for the people via a network of social assistance and social guarantees. In the post-independence era, the state withdrew from many of such functions and the people, especially the old generation still prefers to see an old style state and leader. Finally, many respondents perceive themselves as inactive participants of the political system, they are apathetic and do not believe that they can bring about any real change. Furthermore, they distrust the system as being corrupt, unfair, enforcing and suppressive. The next part analyzes the perceptions of the respondents regarding the leadership qualities of Akaev and Bakiev, whether or not they possessed these idealized characteristics expected from a leader.

#### **4.4.1 Akaev as a Leader**

Once their perceptions on the necessary qualities of an ideal leader for Kyrgyzstan were asked, the next question directed at the respondents was, whether they thought Akaev possessed such qualities. When asked how they viewed Akaev as a leader as

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<sup>822</sup> Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1963, p.19

well as his rule, there were several different answers that portrayed both positive and negative qualities and/or characteristics of Akaev as well as his era. In this part, first the positive, then the negative perceptions of the respondents related to Akaev's leadership qualities are given.

When asked whether they believe Akaev had the qualities of an ideal leader, some of the respondents simply said either "yes" or "no" refraining from any further explanations. Only a few respondents indicated that Akaev possessed all the qualities of a good leader. They did not provide much explanation on why and how though, they simply indicated that he possessed all these qualities. Seven respondents made either no comment or said "It is difficult to answer." A few respondents indicated that Akaev partly possessed the qualities of a good leader or, as one respondent pointed out, he possessed those qualities only "to a certain extent." As for the negative answers, some respondents indicated that Akaev did not possess even one single quality of a good leader. In other words, for some respondents Akaev was "not a leader" at all or "not a good leader". An interesting answer was offered by one respondent who said that "Akaev was legitimate, but he was not a leader." Other responses mentioning Akaev's good qualities were still not sufficient to make him a leader include that of one respondent: "Yes, Akaev was well-educated, but he was not a good leader. He was elected because he did not belong directly to any tribal group; he grew up in an orphanage."

One respondent admitted that "Akaev is a good person but unfortunately ... not a politician." Another respondent also argued that although Akaev was cultured he was not "very appropriate to be a leader of the country."

For the majority of the rest of the respondents (110 out of 140 in totals), however, there were both positive and negative qualities of Akaev as a leader. In the following part, those attributes are given respectively.

#### **4.4.1.1 Positive Perceptions of Akaev**

Some respondents evaluated Akaev's regime as "positive" in general without any further explanation. But for others, some specific positive qualities were mentioned. One such positive perception regarding the Akaev era was related to the country's independence. A few respondents pointed out that Akaev deserved respect, simply because of the fact that he was the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan. Some other respondents indicated Akaev's contribution to Kyrgyzstan's independence and state-building process as the major positive attribute of his era. According to these respondents, under Akaev, their country had a national currency, a national anthem and a flag, and the Kyrgyz language became prominent. For a few respondents, the advantages of Akaev's regime included strengthening of Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty and independence, as he advocated "the correct policy of attributes of independence, wonderful flag, state symbol, anthem and national currency." As one respondent put:

...Akaev's period [w]as fruitful. The country got its independence. Kyrgyzstan was the first country among the post-Soviet states which had introduced its own currency...Akaev contributed into making Kyrgyzstan an independent state with its own emblem, flag, and anthem.

Similar responses regarding Akaev's contribution to independence were given by a few respondents who indicated factors such as "introduction of national currency," and by a couple of respondents who indicated "establishment of Kyrgyz statehood." One respondent emphasized "the organization of the anniversary of 2,200 years of Kyrgyz statehood." For another respondent, Akaev was "the founder of independent Kyrgyzstan."

For other respondents, Akaev was also considered successful in terms of Kyrgyzstan's recognition in the international arena; as such, Akaev was praised as having a successful foreign policy. For a few respondents Akaev's regime succeeded in making Kyrgyzstan recognizable at the international arena. For one respondent, in his era, "[t]he world learned about Kyrgyzstan as an island of democracy" and for another respondent Akaev "drew the attention of the foreign countries to a small Kyrgyzstan." As one respondent put it:



In the beginning there was hope, pride and optimism. We were proud of Kyrgyzstan being recognizable in the international arena. It was thanks to Akaev that the world became familiar with our small country.

As one other respondent suggested, “in general [Akaev’s] foreign policy was reasonable, and because of his leadership Kyrgyzstan is known in the world community.” Similar opinions were expressed as follows: “Akaev has done a lot to create an image of Kyrgyzstan as a good state.” Eight respondents also suggested that Akaev was a good diplomat. A couple of respondents acknowledged that Akaev was “respected at the international arena.”

Among his other similar achievements “establishment of relations with foreign countries” was portrayed as another important one. A couple of respondents indicated Akaev’s contribution to Kyrgyzstan by making the country a member of the Commonwealth of the Independent States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Foundation. One respondent indicated Akaev’s ability to “build relationships in foreign policy” as he succeeded in “presenting the country as an attractive destination for foreign investments.” According to another respondent:

Akaev could be the “face” of the country. He deserved to represent Kyrgyzstan in the international arena. We were not ashamed to show him as Kyrgyzstan’s leader and he was respected by the international community.

Another important positive aspect of Akaev as a leader and a politician<sup>823</sup> was given as his level of education. For almost half of all respondents Akaev was an educated, intellectual scientist, a major personal attribute that deserved him credit. Akaev was described as “a worthy, respectable, intelligent president,” a “well-bred, educated, open-minded leader” who had “a mild disposition.” Similar opinions were expressed by a few more respondents. Some respondents particularly mentioned Akaev’s academic status: “He is a distinguished professor of Moscow State University, New York Academy, [and] an academician of the Kyrgyz Academy of Science.” Some other respondents expressed their respect to Akaev “as a scientist, [and] a physicist”

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<sup>823</sup> One respondent called Akaev - “a prominent politician.”

and stated that Akaev “should have served as the minister of education.” For one respondent, “The only quality Akaev possessed was a good education. He was a physicist. Physics is an exact science. I respect him for being an educated person.” An interesting opinion in this context was expressed by another respondent:

Akaev is the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan. He was intellectual. Sometimes it seems to me that he would have been a good president in an established, democratic country. Akaev failed to build democracy though theoretically he was doing everything correctly.

For some respondents, as Akaev was an educated person it was only natural that he had a positive effect in the educational sphere. Some respondents indicated Akaev’s success and positive contribution to this sphere. A few respondents particularly indicated Akaev’s reforms in educational and cultural spheres. According to one respondent, for example, “The Akaev regime made a lot of improvements in education, and many students were able to pursue their education abroad.” Several respondents elaborated on how their interests were represented in the sphere of education. According to one respondent, thanks to Akaev, “with the signing of the Bologna Accord ... many of our students gained the opportunity to study abroad and obtain a scholarship.” Another respondent also pointed out that during Akaev’s era, “Education was affordable for many.” One respondent further stated that during Akaev’s era “there were presidential scholarships” for students. Another opinion was offered by a teacher, “Akaev encouraged us as teachers. He is a man of science and is from the education sector, so we felt his support.” Likewise, Akaev “paid attention to the development of culture and the level of culture of the people of Kyrgyzstan.”<sup>824</sup>

One respondent specifically referred to Akaev as an intellectual supporting arts, culture and cultural development of the people of Kyrgyzstan:

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<sup>824</sup> However, as one respondent pointed out, these reforms were made “in order to make the youth occupied” as Akaev “did not secure for their future employment by creating jobs for the new graduates.” One respondent expressed a more critical opinion: “Educational institutions were paid much attention. New institutions were established. However at the end of the day the result was over-production of specialists who could not find jobs, because there was an unbalance of needed workforce and the number of graduate people.”

There were many positive aspects of Akaev's term in office... They [the Akaev couple] were very intelligent people ... I attended many cultural events organized by the Akaev couple, and was happy to see so many great artists of culture, music, opera etc. visiting Kyrgyzstan and giving concerts. They came because they had been invited by the Akaev couple. I really enjoyed these events and was happy to see the Akaev couple there with their children. This showed that they paid attention to the development of culture and the level of culture of the people of Kyrgyzstan. These days I don't see Bakiev with his family attending concerts or other cultural event; and nor do I see famous artists in Kyrgyzstan visiting out of respect to Bakiev.

For some other respondents Akaev was a major reformer. According to one respondent, for example:

At that time, when Akaev first came to power, Kyrgyzstan led the other CIS countries in the area of reforms. For example, we were the first to adopt compulsory medical insurance; but unfortunately these reforms could not be fully implemented. Kyrgyzstan was the first to adopt a law on child protection. Reforms have begun, but could not yet be fully realized. The Akaev regime should have prepared people for reforms first, and then start implementing them.

For one respondent, "In the absence of Akaev's reforms we would not have a chance to become a civilized democratic state." Two other respondents indicated that Akaev was "a democrat." "Democratic reforms" and the legislative, economic, and administrative reforms introduced by Akaev were also emphasized. According to one respondent, "Akaev was a forerunner in the area of political and economic reforms in the country."

For a few respondents Akaev also contributed to the economic development of Kyrgyzstan. According to one respondent, for example, Akaev's "achievements included attraction of large investments to the Kyrgyz economy" as major amounts of "credits and grants were given to Akaev's leadership." It was also suggested that Akaev "contributed to some extent to the foundation of a market economy." Another respondent indicated "introduction of national currency, membership in WTO, attraction of foreign investments" as Akaev's major economic successes. For some other respondents, Akaev's contribution to the economic sphere was also realized

though social assistance in the hard transitional period. This included a wide range of factors from electricity tariffs and subsidized prices to retaining jobs in the public sector. One respondent indicated that life under Akaev was cheaper,<sup>825</sup> as Akaev “cared for his people [and] did not increase electricity and gas tariffs.” One other respondent indicated Akaev’s successful economic policies by giving examples from her everyday life:

During 15 years of Akaev period there were no electricity cuts. We had heating system and hot water and there was a proper program for the future development of the country. So I evaluate Akaev’s period as satisfactory.

A few respondents also emphasized “social insurance,” “social assistance,” and “public health” services. As one respondent mentioned, “...I am retired, and we saw a gradual increase in our pensions two or three times a year. I cannot say he [Akaev] had to give me this and that, but some social assistance was provided.”

A couple of respondents indicated that during Akaev era, their interests were preserved by the fact that they could “retain” their jobs during the hard transitional period. As one respondent said, “I had a job, and there were no job cuts in Akaev’s period. Though salaries were low at least people were employed in the public sector.” Three respondents also expressed their satisfaction, arguing that during Akaev’s period prices were “affordable and reasonable.” One respondent, asserting that his interests were protected in that era, said the following:

Yes, communal tariffs were affordable. In general prices (electricity, gas, petrol, coal) were low, subsidized. Though salaries were [also] low, people were not pressurized through unreasonable increases of tariffs, prices and high taxes.

For a few respondents, there was also “stability and peace” during the Akaev era. As such, few respondents mentioned “stability and persistence”, “peace and order”, “political stability” and “peace and social agreement.” According to one respondent, “Akaev managed to keep people united, not to divide [them] into South-North.”

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<sup>825</sup> Cheaper (affordable) here refers to commodity prices.

A few respondents indicated Akaev's contribution to the democratization of Kyrgyzstan. According to these respondents, Akaev's regime was associated with "relatively successful democratization of society" and the "start of the process of democratic state building." For these respondents especially Akaev's first term in office was associated with democratization: "The first years of Akaev's regime brought about many positive reforms for the establishment of Kyrgyz statehood [and] democratization." One respondent also stated the following, "In Akaev's first term there was a strong pro-democratic attitude; independent mass media had emerged... That time the government could be criticized openly." Another respondent emphasized similar points as follows:

I evaluate Akaev's regime positively. I think his regime was more democratic. *In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is a king.*<sup>826</sup> His initial ideas, strategies, policies were directed toward democratization of Kyrgyzstan. It is another matter to what extent those strategies were successful. During Akaev's regime, people felt more freedom, there was no such fear as we have now.

For one respondent, Akaev "did not suppress freedom of speech." For another respondent, he was "a very liberal and democratic president." For a couple of respondents Akaev contributed to the "introduction of democratic principles of governance." In addition to these qualities, there were some other positive qualities that were mentioned by a few respondents, such as decisiveness, flexibility, successful management of conflicts, sociability, and responsibility.

#### **4.4.1.2 Negative Perceptions of Akaev**

As was mentioned earlier, the respondents also focused on certain problems regarding Akaev's leadership. In this sense, the first negative aspect that many respondents pointed out was related to the immediate family and/or the political circle surrounding Akaev. According to one respondent, "During Akaev's period we

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<sup>826</sup> This is a Kyrgyz proverb.

ordinary people lived like mice, i.e. we saw and heard many things about the presidential family. ... Nothing was done for the country, for the people.”

A few respondents also indicated that Akaev had a bad political circle and an ineffective corrupt political team of advisors working under his command. For example, one respondent said that Akaev’s political circle consisted of “conceited, selfish people.” This political circle was blamed for his failures. As one respondent expressed:

I think that the obstacle to the success of the Akaev regime was his environment. He was let down by the people around him. He should have picked his advisors more carefully. He should have had wise advisors, but he didn’t. Even the change of prime minister every year was odd, and we came to expect a new prime minister every year. This shows that he had a bad team.

A couple of respondents further indicated that Akaev lacked a professional team. One respondent quoted a Kyrgyz proverb: “A good khan is when there is a good grand vizier. Askar Akaev did not have a good team.” As it is seen, several respondents did not call Akaev either as a good or bad leader, but rather focused on his political circle, which, in their opinion, negatively affected his rule: “He [Akaev] worked very well; his intensions were good, his plans and strategies were also correct. However his political circle advised him badly...” As some other respondents mentioned, Akaev was being “too much influenced” by his political circle. In this sense, one respondent said that Akaev “did not lead; rather he was led.” Another respondent indicated that Akaev was “spoiled by his political circle.”

A similar opinion indicating the influence of bad political circle on Akaev’s record as a leader of Kyrgyzstan was expressed as follows:

Akaev could be considered as a good leader in the beginning; but later, after he had been in power for a few years, his rule deteriorated. For example, Akaev’s regime was influenced by degraded political elite. Governing was characterized by enrichment of Akaev’s closest circle of friends and allies. Political process was criminalized. Akaev listened to what his advisors told him, and lost the respect of the people, along with their trust and support. When he ran for a third term in 2000, this was not what people wanted from

him, and so he missed the opportunity to leave office on time with the people's approval and respect. There is a saying "A clever man leaves a minute before he is not needed any more," and Akaev should have done this. If he had left in 2000, we would not be facing the conditions that we have now.

For some other respondents, Akaev's family was another major obstacle. One respondent, for example, stated that Akaev's "mistake was that he listened to others, especially his wife." Some other respondents also indicated the family rule as a negative aspect of Akaev's rule. For a few respondents Akaev's regime was unsatisfactory because of "family interference." Other few respondents also indicated that Akaev regime was unsatisfactory because of the "family rule." Likewise, for a couple of respondents, Akaev's rule was unsatisfactory because of the "family influence." One respondent indicated that "if his family did not interfere in politics, Akaev could have brought about more progress and development." Another respondent also suggested similar ideas and expressed that "the governing process was dominated by factors such as family connections, interference of family in state affairs, nepotism" and Akaev "could not stand up against family influence, nepotism." According to one respondent, "During 15 years the system worked for his family ... Akaev attracted foreign investments to Kyrgyzstan, [but] indebted Kyrgyzstan to such an extent that even our children will not be able to pay back that money..." Similar comments were made as follows:

In the beginning Akaev was governing the country, was a leader, a head of state. In his second term, his wife was governing, though unofficially. In his third term, his son started governing the country. This is how it ended.

One respondent also expressed a similar opinion, saying that "Akaev possessed all the qualities of a good leader; however at one point of time the voice of the people was drown by the voice of his family." "Nepotism" and working for the "family" were also mentioned as Akaev's main drawbacks. As one respondent indicated, "the family" was the main reason why people's interests were not represented during the Akaev era: "Akaev represented the interests of his friends and family, rather than the interests of the entire nation."

Another related issue that was indicated by a few respondents was Akaev's being a "weak leader." For one respondent, he was "not a proper leader" and for another respondent, he was "not a leader" at all. For yet another respondent, Akaev was a "bad politician without leadership qualities." For one respondent he was "too soft for a president," for another respondent "too kind" to be a leader. A couple of respondents blamed Akaev for being "indecisive." One respondent indicated that "Akaev was not a bad leader but he was crossed up. I respect Akaev as a scientist, physician, but as a president he was weak." According to another respondent:

[Akaev] was a good leader because he was open to listening others. ... [However] he was not a good leader because [although] he would listen, he would not push that into a decision. A good leader must be good evaluator of data to make a decision, and he should stick with this decision, see it to be implemented, and if the results are not good, then he should admit and say well, that was not a good decision.

Another negative aspect that some respondents indicated was Akaev's being a bad manager of state affairs. For these respondents, Akaev's regime was one in which there was bad governance. For one respondent, for example, Akaev "lacked managerial skills" and for another respondent, Akaev did not have "organizational and managerial experience [and] he was weak in economics and business." According to this respondent, the state was a "big household" and "Akaev failed to manage this household." Similar ideas were expressed by several other respondents who criticized Akaev as an unsuccessful manager of state affairs as he could not "control the implementation of policies [and] decisions" and "failed to prevent destruction of what was left of the Kyrgyz economy, assets, factories and industry." A more serious criticism was offered as follows, "Akaev failed in the area of state system. He failed to make the right appointments, to punish his appointees if they made mistakes. Economy also was not managed [properly] in Akaev's period."

Inability to implement good policies was also emphasized by one respondent:

I think Akaev's regime and its policies were correct and proper, because they were prepared together with experts from international organizations; however these policies could not be properly realized and implemented. The



people implementing the policies were not ready, either educationally or mentally, and that is why the policies failed.

Another disappointed respondent said that “Akaev treasured his people, but did nothing.” As such, Akaev was “good only in theories.” Another respondent expressed similar points of disappointment with Akaev’s failure to become a good leader:

He was educated, a scientist. He was full of ideas. He possessed ideological content. He was acceptable by both the North and the South. Akaev, to some degree, was a strategic thinker. He failed to implement many good ideas, policies that were developed under his regime. In general he was not a good leader.

Ill-conceived social policies were further emphasized by a couple of respondents as the reason why the interests of people were not represented. One respondent also pointed out that her interests were not represented because of “unprofessional implementation of policies.” As such, another respondent stated that “Closer to 2005, a lot of misbalanced policies and decisions were imposed, and it finished sadly.”

The next negative aspect indicated by a few respondents was the widespread corruption under Akaev. As one respondent pointed out:

...during the last years of his rule, starting from 2000, corruption entered all the spheres of public administration. Corruption is a result of low standard of life. State apparatus fails to control the bureaucrats; power is taken by one man...

Another respondent criticized Akaev for allowing the bureaucrats take bribes:

Bureaucrats responsible for the realization of ... programs enriched their pockets. Prime Minister Chyngyshev once said “Only lazy people do not steal”. Akaev did not prevent the mismanagement of credits and financial resources.

Another negative aspect was related to economic decay and bad economic policies of the Akaev regime. For some respondents economic policies of Akaev were unsuccessful. For others, everyday hardship and economic decay were seen as a

result of Akaev's unsuccessful economic policies. As one respondent suggested, "high taxes, closed factories, sold lands, unfair privatization, and misappropriation of state assets" were the major problems; for another respondent, "Kyrgyzstan was impoverished" under Akaev, for yet another respondent, the economy "was devastated" and the entrance to the WTO was "unprofitable." According to one respondent, "Akaev's regime was characterized as wide unemployment, decay in industrial sphere. Many people were drinking heavily, because they lost jobs." Another respondent stated that "Akaev squandered everything... the country was pushed into economic crisis."

For some other respondents, Akaev was also not successful in using the financial contributions given by the international donors so as to introduce economic reforms:

Akaev left the country in poverty; he mismanaged all the financial and other resources given to Kyrgyzstan by international donors and internal resources. If he had used those resources properly, then the mechanism of economic growth would have started to bring results. The results of his rule will be felt for many years to come.

Some other respondents further indicated that Akaev's regime was to blame for the "misappropriation of state assets" and "unsuccessful, unfair and mismanaged privatization" as a result of which many state resources such as land and gold were stolen from the people and were lost. For a couple of respondents, privatization was nothing but a "plunder." One respondent described her personal unfortunate experience with privatization as follows:

During Akaev's period I was retired and I observed the privatization process, which was conducted in an improper manner. Ordinary people did know what to do with privatization vouchers, and many were deceived and lost their savings. On the contrary, some people made their fortune on privatization vouchers. I am a retired engineer, and during Akaev period I had only material losses. I lost my savings because of change of currency and huge inflation during the first years of independence. For example, I retired in the Soviet time and my pension was 132 rubbles; I could buy 72 kg of meat with that money. At present my pension is 4100 som; I can buy 20,5 kg of meat.

A few respondents also blamed Akaev for mismanagement and misappropriation of state assets by privatization. For one respondent, privatization turned out to be “empty promises” and another respondent suggested that it could not “prevent the destruction of what was left of the Kyrgyz economy, assets, factories and industry.” For one respondent “Akaev ... privatized whatever could be sold to foreigners. Kyrgyzstan became an indebted poor state.” Another respondent indicated that Akaev “allowed embezzlement of state property” via privatization. Yet another respondent indicated that “national assets (resources, factories) were sold for nothing.” As one respondent concluded:

... the country was not ready for such fundamental reforms and therefore privatization was held in a fast and unwise manner. Many strategic objects were privatized and by unprofessional managers who were unable to make the enterprises successful.

For some other respondents, the national assets of Kyrgyzstan have been mismanaged so that not the Kyrgyz citizens, but others benefited from these assets.

As one respondent indicated:

Gold is also in the hands of foreign companies. Our budget gets tiny amount of gold revenues. Our leaders were not able and are still not able to manage properly our resources and whatever was left from the Soviet time.

Another area which was considered as a failure of the Akaev regime was about huge debts. One respondent for example criticized Akaev because in his era “...foreign debt increased largely because the Akaev administration took a lot of credits.”

For some other respondents, there were several political problems during the Akaev era as well. One of the most important issues was related to the violations of democratic principles and a shift to authoritarianism. One respondent indicated that Akaev violated the constitution “when he had run for a third presidential term.” Another respondent also added that Akaev “should not have stayed for the third term.” Some respondents have indicated that Akaev, especially during his second and third terms, usurped power and shifted the country to authoritarianism. Different respondents reflected upon the ways Akaev usurped power, for example, through

“changing the constitution,” and “destroying balance of power and increasing presidential powers.”

In this context, one respondent stated that during Akaev’s second term “there was a turnaround in policy, a move towards authoritarianism, and usurpation of power.” Another respondent also admitted that after the second term, Akaev “turned into a dictator” and “he attempted to hold power as other Central Asian leaders, such as Karimov and Turkmenbashi.” Other aspects of authoritarian practices of the Akaev regime were mentioned by one respondent, who said that Akaev “failed to find a compromise with opposition; [and] members of the opposition were arrested or killed.” For some respondents Akaev’s regime was unresponsive to the demands of the people and to public opinion, including the voice of opposition. Reflecting on Akaev’s authoritarian tendencies, one respondent argued that “Akaev did not want to go into dialog [with the opposition], to compromise [with them] and he did not want to leave power.” Another respondent stated that “Akaev’s regime was far from people, from their needs and moods. In other words, the link between state and society was lost at certain times.” One respondent indicated that “In the last years of his rule, he forgot all about his people.” According to another respondent, there was “restriction of freedom of speech” during Akaev’s regime. One respondent indicated that during Akaev era, he had always felt “pressure from state organs.” For another respondent, “Akaev was not a true democrat. He dashed aside from one model of development to the other.” For yet another respondent, “Akaev’s policies were not always democratic.” One respondent pointed out that the Akaev regime was “characterized by degradation.”

On the question of whether Akaev represented their interests, some respondents made no comment. Only 12 respondents indicated that Akaev represented all their interests in all spheres. In other words they were totally satisfied with his rule. Majority of these respondents provided no details, simply saying “yes, all.” For example, according to one respondent, “As a world-known scientist, he represented the citizens’ interests in all spheres.” Another respondent also admitted that “Akaev worked for the representation of all citizens’ interests; though it was a slow process, it was good for all.” One respondent indicated that “Akaev persuaded different sides

to work for a better Kyrgyzstan. It was for citizens' interests." A few respondents indicated that Akaev represented their interests in the cultural sphere. Other few respondents pointed out that Akaev represented their interests at the international arena. For several respondents their interests were represented only partially. One respondent said, "Akaev was a scientist, so in the sphere of science may be my interests were represented but again not always and not fully."

However, the interests of almost half of all respondents (67 in total) were not represented at all during the Akaev era. These respondents abstained from criticizing Akaev, just indicating that their interests were not represented. It must also be noted that these respondents did not consider Akaev's regime as total failure or only in negative terms. Nevertheless, when we look at these responses and compare them with the top ten qualities of a good leader described in the previous part, Akaev was indicated to possess only a few of those. A few respondents mentioned that among other qualities, he possessed charisma. Only three respondents out of 140, pointed that Akaev was a patriot (this quality being the most frequently cited one in terms of the qualities of an ideal leader for Kyrgyzstan). As it is seen from the answers, out of five most important qualities of an ideal leader mentioned earlier (patriotism, good education, honesty, professional politician, charisma) Akaev possessed only one, good education, and it seems that it was not enough to secure either public support or success in governing.

The respondents were asked two separate questions related to Akaev and his regime: 1) How do you evaluate Akaev's regime? and 2) Do you think Akaev possessed qualities of a good leader? As the responses indicated, for most respondents, Akaev was perceived neither as a totally positive nor as a totally negative leader. The positive and negative aspects reflected by the responses shows the mixed impression that Akaev's regime left in the minds of the people. At the time of the interviews, Akaev had been out of power for five years and as such, perhaps more objective, open and unconstrained evaluations could be given by the respondents. In other words, people did not feel afraid or hesitant to talk about him, and to some extent

could freely express what they had in their minds about Akaev and his era. This is clear from the way respondents spoke about Akaev and his leadership.

It must also be pointed out that for these two questions almost totally overlapping answers were received. It seems as if for the respondents, there was no specific distinction in their minds between the leader and the regime; the leader being the major, dominant figure determining the fate of the regime, rather than the political institutions and the legal framework. In other words, the regime, together with its rules and structures, was identified with the leader in the minds of the people. The same attitude can be observed in the questions asked to evaluate Akaev's regime: they were often simply describing Akaev's personal and professional qualities or the lack of certain such qualities. As the regime was often associated with one person, Akaev's own weaknesses were often to blame for the failures of the regime in various spheres. Likewise, when the respondents evaluated Akaev as a leader, they blamed the external and internal factors that could or could not be controlled by Akaev. For example, if the economy was facing difficulties immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union (a structural factor), and life standards deteriorated due to unemployment and prices increase, the blame was put basically on Akaev. It seems as if the people associated all their problems with Akaev's leadership, and not with the general negative conditions of the transitional era, which could have been faced by any leader, be it Akaev or someone else, under the conditions of the country at the time.

As these responses indicate, there are only few areas in which Akaev's leadership was appreciated and positively remembered: his contribution to the country's independence and state-building process, his role as the first president of the country, his successful foreign policy that made Kyrgyzstan recognized in the international arena, and his reforms. His personal attributes such as having a good education and being a respected scientist were also mentioned. However, family rule and nepotism, a corrupted political circle, an unprofessional team of advisors and officials, weak leadership will, ineffective governing and inefficient use of state resources and state assets were pointed out as problematic areas of Akaev's rule. He was further blamed

for inefficient economic policies that resulted in economic decay and deterioration of life standards as well as the shift to authoritarianism, and usurpation of power.

#### **4.4.2 Bakiev as a Leader**

Just as is the case with the answers given to the questions on Akaev, when asked about how they viewed Bakiev as a leader as well as his rule, the respondents emphasized both positive and negative aspects.

When asked about whether Bakiev had the qualities of a good leader, 15 respondents made no comment.<sup>827</sup> Likewise when asked how they evaluated Bakiev's regime, 13 respondents made no comment.<sup>828</sup> 15 respondents indicated that Bakiev was a good leader and that he possessed all the necessary qualities of a good leader. They, however, also did not make any further elaborations on the topic. A number of respondents mentioned some specific qualities of a good leader which they believed Bakiev possessed.<sup>829</sup> Three respondents indicated that Bakiev only "partly" possessed the qualities of a good leader, again without further elaborations.

For almost half of all respondents (42 in total) Bakiev had no positive quality of a good leader. These respondents, however, offered no explanation at all, by answering the question on whether Bakiev had the qualities of a good leader with a simple "no" or "none."<sup>830</sup> However, for many respondents, Bakiev was viewed in both positive and negative terms, as elaborated further in the following sections.

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<sup>827</sup> As the interviews were conducted just prior to the overthrow of Bakiev, in that stressful and unstable political environment, many respondents restrained their answers (probably being afraid to criticize Bakiev as he was still in power) or preferred not to make any comment. It must also be noted that in general the respondents were reluctant to openly criticize the Bakiev's era as well.

<sup>828</sup> It must be noted that when the respondents learned that questions would be about the incumbent president, some completely refused to be interviewed or fill *any* of the questions on the questionnaire, let alone answering the ones on Bakiev.

<sup>829</sup> 12 respondents indicated "managerial skills." Eight respondents mentioned his charisma. Eight respondents indicated that Bakiev was decisive.

<sup>830</sup> However some respondents were very explicitly critical on Bakiev: "I do not see any leadership qualities in Bakiev. He did not reveal his true nature or his abilities. If there would be an election tomorrow, I would not give him my vote; and if in 2005 I had known what he was like, I would not have given my vote at that time either. Never."

#### **4.4.2.1 Positive Perceptions of Bakiev**

Some respondents indicated that Bakiev's regime was positive in general, without giving any details or specific examples, simply stating that regime was "satisfactory" or "good." But for many others, some explanations were given. For example, for some respondents, who believed that Bakiev was "a legitimate president [as] he was elected by the people," certain justifications were given for some of the problematic areas of his rule. According to these respondents, when Bakiev came to power in 2005, both the economy and the political system were in a very bad condition. It was argued that as Akaev had left the country in crisis, and Bakiev had the very difficult task of improving the situation. Therefore before making any evaluations regarding his rule, it is necessary to keep this in mind. Some respondents evaluating the regime as partly satisfactory tried to justify Bakiev's performance as follows: "Bakiev ... tried as much as he could. It is wrong now to blame him for all failures." Another similar opinion was given by one respondent: "I evaluate Bakiev's period as a difficult period ... Akaev left the country with a ruined economy and a poor budget." For some respondents, due to the same reason, "Bakiev started well, but social problems and corruption were stronger, and his work was overshadowed by his failures." Likewise, one respondent said that:

Bakiev's first term had tendencies towards democratization. His second term indicates that people trust him, but he has inherited from the previous regime a weak, indebted economy. Therefore it is very hard to improve the political and economic situation.

For other respondents, one major positive aspect of Bakiev's rule was the general progress in the country. One respondent, for example, indicated "real improvement in the work of state bodies" because "wages of public servants were increased, [and] business structures were growing." Some respondents said that the name of Bakiev was "associated with movement to progress." For one respondent, Bakiev's regime "prepared a progressive developmental program" so that at a time of "world economic crisis our country has achieved a lot." Another respondent also said that "Under Bakiev there was some progress in economic and social spheres." For yet



another respondent, “Bakiev had changed peoples’ lives in a positive way.” One respondent gave a general positive evaluation of the Bakiev era as follows:

Kyrgyzstan has taken a short route, I mean whatever other countries had to achieve through centuries we have to accomplish in 10-20 years. Our change is slow, but there are good plans, strategies for the future. Comparing to the previous years, this year [2010, before Bakiev was ousted] I see real change and if we go on with this pace, having peace and social agreement, we will become a respectable country accepted by the international community.

For such respondents, Bakiev was evaluated as an influential political reformer and a pragmatic leader. According to one respondent for example:

Bakiev’s reforms and the change of Election Code, introduced a new provision that woman, different ethnic groups and young people would be represented in the Kyrgyz parliament. The elections of 2007 were conducted according to this new provision. Also the deputies are elected on a party-list basis.

A couple of respondents evaluated similar legislative initiatives of the Bakiev administration as positive developments, especially “the law protecting children” and “amendments to the election code” under which women, youth and ethnic minorities received a quota for seats in the parliament. A few respondents indicated support for “local governance,” support for youth and “support for civil servants.” According to one respondent:

Bakiev revealed himself as a more pragmatic politician ... His first years were not very fruitful; however after he was elected to the second term, his policies became sounder. He set up a party, *Ak Jol*, and through this party he solve[d] public problems.

Another positive aspect described by some of the respondents about Bakiev was related to some of the economic initiatives that he had taken. Among these respondents, there were some who indicated that Bakiev attempted to improve the economy and launched important economic projects. According to one respondent, there were important changes in the sphere of business because during Bakiev’s era, “small and medium enterprises [could be] set up, and their number grew. The suitable conditions for attraction of foreign investments were created.”

Some respondents indicated good and “efficient” economic performance of the Bakiev regime. These respondents also underlined Bakiev’s attempts “to increase industrial performance of the economy,” and to realize “economic growth [and an] increase in standard of life.” Likewise, some respondents indicated “progressive projects to eradicate poverty,” “correct economic decisions [like] investment programs,” “improvement of budget deficit,” “stimulation of business,” “positive results in the economic sphere” and “an obvious economic growth as Bakiev’s economic successes. According to one respondent:

I think during Bakiev’s era, those who could mobilize their abilities have achieved a lot. I think Bakiev’s era is a period of opportunities in economic sphere, business, entrepreneur activity etc. My family’s well-being has improved.

Likewise some people mentioned that in the economic sphere, certain developmental programs were put into action, support to business was given and jobs were created. One respondent pointed out the importance of a law issued by Bakiev that would check small and medium enterprises “only once or twice a year [so] private business [would be] given a chance to prosper.” For a few respondents, the building of *Kambarata 1* and *Kambarata 2* was another important positive economic development for Kyrgyzstan as this resulted in an increase in the state budget.<sup>831</sup> Finally few respondents indicated regional development as a priority of the Bakiev administration. According to one respondent, “Bakiev started to work in the Southern region, in Osh and Jalal-Abad oblasts. Farmers were motivated and stimulated.”

For some other respondents, Bakiev also implemented good social policies such as providing support to public servants and pensioners, allocating resources for “hot meals in public schools,” and “pension increases and additional payments to teachers for work experience.”<sup>832</sup> For one respondent, “Bakiev provided for the socially unprotected members of society through subsidies.” A couple of respondents both

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<sup>831</sup> *Kambarata 1* and *Kambarata 2* are large hydro-electricity power stations.

<sup>832</sup> One respondent also added “payment of wages and retirement pensions on-time” as a positive point as “during Akaev’s era, they were not [paid] on time.”

emphasized the increase in salaries, pensions and other social benefits as positive aspects of the Bakiev era. As one respondent further stated:

I think Bakiev has done a lot of work, for example many factories have been restored, lands have been distributed to the poor and pensions are slowly increasing. ... It would not be fair to say that everything got worse under Bakiev. Those who work hard can earn more. If one wishes to work, there are jobs available. In the Bakiev period, I think there are more employment opportunities.

One other major area was related to intentions to “revitalize the construction sector.” This last point was emphasized by many respondents, who pointed out the importance of initiating “the construction of new houses, including public houses” as an important success of Bakiev. One respondent also indicated similar points, “the invigoration of the construction sector was an achievement - schools and houses were built. In our village the kindergarten was built. New jobs were created in regions and new roads are being built.”

One respondent named several economic advantages introduced by Bakiev, including the developments in the construction sector and suggested that “new private companies have started building new houses. During the Akaev era the construction of houses had almost come to a halt. Under Bakiev I think there will be more rich people.” Another respondent also expressed her satisfaction as follows: “The new initiative of building houses for doctors, teachers and other civil servants in need of housing [was very beneficial]. I am a doctor, and so this initiative is good for me. I have heard of the construction of two or three multi-storey houses for socially disadvantaged people.” Yet another respondent also emphasized that “[n]ew houses for public servants (such as workers of public health system, culture, education) are being built, [albeit] slowly.”

#### **4.4.2.2 Negative Perceptions of Bakiev**

Among the 140 respondents there were very few respondents who evaluated the Bakiev regime as “unsatisfactory” or “negative” offering no further elaborations. Some other respondents, who evaluated the regime also as negative, gave short

explanations that described their perceptions. Some of these respondents associated the Bakiev era with “crisis and depression”, some with “crisis, chaos, decay, disorder, going backward”), some with “degradation” and some with absence of “positive results.” For other respondents, the Bakiev period is described by “political assassinations..., jobs [cuts] (as public sector is being shrank), and unemployment”; by “corruption, unprofessionalism, and total control by the enforcing agencies”; by “absence of rule of law”; by “deterioration of what was left after Akaev’s oust”, and by “impunity [and] bad governance”.

For most of the other respondents, however, just as was the case with Akaev, there were many answers with more elaborate explanations of the negative aspects. For a couple of respondents, for example, Bakiev was an illegitimate leader as “the way he came to power” was illegitimate. For some other respondents, Bakiev failed to meet peoples’ expectations. In fact many respondents complained that Bakiev failed to realize his promises. A few respondents indicated that Bakiev’s regime failed to “live up their hopes” and therefore, they were frustrated. As one respondent explained, “Bakiev failed to live up society’s expectations however I do not blame him. A nation deserves the ruler that it has. Society consists of us, we all have to change. Our society is unethical, immoral.”

The next negative aspect was related to Bakiev’s authoritarian practices. A few respondents indicated that initially they were optimistic about Bakiev’s leadership, but then, they lost their hope as he became more and more authoritarian. For example, one respondent suggested that “Bakiev’s regime started out well, where democratic values began to be implemented. ... [But later] freedom of speech [was suppressed]. Bakiev’s regime is [now] a dictatorship.” Ironically another respondent described Bakiev’s two terms as follows:

I would divide Bakiev’s period into two phases. The first phase I would call making use of what is left behind by Akaev. People had a lot of confidence in him. In the second stage, he lost that confidence. Now he is emerging to be real kind of a king. For Bakiev regime it is always politically driven and incentives are quite wrong.

Some respondents indicated Bakiev regime's authoritarian practices as a major negative factor. As a major negative factor few respondents pointed at "concentrated power" and one respondent at "usurpation of power." Respondents called Bakiev's regime as "dictatorial... [as] there was a strengthening of the role of instigators," and "authoritarian," characterized by "...feudalization of the country, khan habits in governing." Other authoritarian practices named were disrespect for the constitution, and absence of democratization. As one respondent noted, "Bakiev creates barriers so that people keep their thoughts secret – do not speak, do not deliberate, do not criticize. Those who do not comply, leave the country."

A few respondents have indicated limitation of freedom as a negative aspect of Bakiev regime. For example one respondent said the following:

In the sphere of human rights there is deterioration under Bakiev. There is less freedom now as compared to the Akaev's period. In the beginning of Bakiev's rule (2005-2007) we could come out to the streets and say whatever we want, criticize. Now we cannot. Media is not free.

Similar opinions were expressed as follows:

The political power is further consolidated and centralized. For example, our president appoints all the officials of central and provincial and municipal level, all the high bureaucrats, chief justices, heads of diplomatic missions etc. in other words by means of appointments president centralizes power.

For some other respondents, there were concerns regarding the freedom of speech and fraud elections under the Bakiev regime, especially with the formation of the presidential party *Ak Jol*, which according to a couple of respondents, won elections in an "unfair" way. According to one respondent:

One cannot say anything against the regime. If I say something criticizing the regime or the *Ak Jol* party I am called to the rector's office. There is strong pressure exercised during elections on civil servants, public servants and students of state universities. Constitution is re-shaped for the advantage of president.<sup>833</sup>

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<sup>833</sup> This respondent is a student.

The pressures on the media were also emphasized by some respondents. As for one respondent, the Bakiev regime:

openly attacks and suppresses oppositional media, oppositional parties using repressive methods ... Bakiev actively uses enforcement agencies in order to suppress opposition and civil society. He establishes new enforcement and security agencies which are given broad powers of control and punishment. For example, Financial Police, National Security Service, and Staffing Agency – they all are under control of the president.<sup>834</sup>

For few other respondents absence of rule of law under Bakiev was another major indicator of his authoritarian practices.

Another negative aspect, was tribalism, nepotism and family rule (also in the form of interference of Bakiev's family members infiltrating into the governing process). A few respondents indicated the spread of tribalism and nepotism. Referring to the family rule, one respondent stated that "The only thing [Bakiev] has done is self-enrichment and enrichment of his family and relatives." Other few respondents also indicated "family rule" and one respondent called the same phenomenon as "the family clan rule." These respondents did not elaborate on the topic, just named the existence of family rule as a negative aspect. Two respondents expressed disappointment with the fact that Bakiev did not keep his word concerning family rule, as he had earlier stated that "members of his family should not occupy high political positions in the country."

Several respondents indicated "interference of his family members into the governing and politics" as a major problem. For example, one respondent stated that "Bakiev did not rule the country effectively; he created Central Agency for Development, Investment, and Innovation and put his son to head this agency..." This agency "is like a second state budget of the country... [it] is not responsible to the parliament." One respondent added that "Bakiev also permitted his family members to plunder the country." Another respondent indicated that Bakiev was

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<sup>834</sup> This respondent used a proverb to explain what Bakiev had done as follows: "After a hero kills a dragon, he sometimes becomes a dragon himself."

“preparing a successor – his son Maksim, and that he has done this by re-shaping the legislative framework to support such a development.” Yet another respondent suggested that “we are moving in an opposite direction ... the Bakiev period reminds me of Stalin’s time when people were afraid of talking about him and his son.”

One respondent pointed out that in Bakiev’s team there were “very few professionals. Mainly he [was] surrounded by his family members, relatives, and fellow countrymen.” Another respondent, with a similar opinion, said the following:

With the fear of others to take over power, he began to surround himself with family and friends, thus forming a strong clan which eventually began to rule the country in their own interest rather than in the interest of its people.

According to one respondent, “Bakiev lacks a vision and strategic thinking. He is restricted by local, clannish ambitions, medieval practices and he cannot head his own family.” As another respondent further pointed out:

Under Bakiev tribalism reached its peak, it became a norm of life. Regionalism and family connections are also vital part of life and promotion for Kyrgyz society. Without support of family or tribesman or a powerful relative, one has minimal chance of finding a good job, or any other promotion. Government and political system operates on this basis. Bakiev has made some achievements but I see more negative aspects of his regime.

For one respondent, “Bakiev was a professional politician who worked under Akaev, occupied high administrative posts, [but] at the same time his political circle interfered into appointments, and distribution of benefits.” A couple of respondents pointed out Bakiev’s “narrow, regional mindset.” According to one respondent, “Bakiev was thinking too much locally, he was kind of small group brigadier. He was not thinking outside of this region, in perspective, globally.” Likewise according to another respondent, “Bakiev was a regional leader from Osh. He also lacked leadership skills as he had no authority even in his own family. The power was the hands of his sons and brothers.”

Another problematic issue for some respondents was Bakiev's recruitment policy and appointments. These respondents criticized Bakiev's appointment policy because they thought that "Bakiev's staffing policy is not appropriate" and "he appoints wrong people to the highest administrative positions. This negatively affects the governing process." One respondent made similar points:

It seems to me that Bakiev is an accidental person to occupy the presidential post because the way he rules a country can be characterized by unprofessionalism, incompetence, lack of experiences and bad policies. His team consists of the people recruited on the basis of loyalty to him (not on the basis of merit) ... Bakiev's period is characterized by political rallies, demonstrations, political instability.

Another respondent criticized Bakiev's staffing policy (appointments) calling it "questionable and doubtful" as follows:

[Bakiev] appoints to the main political positions people who are not popular among the people, who do not enjoy people's trust and support. Bakiev ignores public opinion completely. In fact his political circle is full of corrupted, criminal elements.

Likewise, according to one respondent:

Bakiev was elected because of his promises during elections campaign that he will improve the situation industrial and agricultural sector, that he will increase standard of life. It is a hard task. The only thing that he has done as a President is creation of an "army of bureaucrats" who serve him...

Another respondent also indicated the "deterioration of public administration" during Bakiev regime and "frequent change of ministers" as negative factors. One respondent offered a very pessimistic and subjective opinion:

There is no ruling, no governing; there is struggle for power, for chairs (posts and positions) with opposition and within the Bakiev regime. The impression is that situation is unclear and Bakiev has no reliable team.



Therefore, these respondents negatively evaluated Bakiev's recruitment policy because of his failure "to attract professionals on the basis of merit" as well as Bakiev's "inability to organize a good team".

Another negative aspect of the Bakiev regime was associated with bad policies and/or bad governing in various areas of domestic as well as international life. Few respondents pointed out the problems based on the unsuccessful and inconsistent foreign policy followed by Bakiev. For some other respondents, bad policies that Bakiev adopted in the electricity sector, was a major problem.<sup>835</sup> A few respondents associated Bakiev's regime with "price increase in the sphere of goods, electricity and gas tariffs." One respondent said the following:

Bakiev ... has made everything his property. He has bought *Sever Electro* company. He and his son also captured many enterprises. Sometimes important state monopolists such as giant electricity companies are privatized and people do not even know the new owner of the company. This is because they [the rulers] are afraid of people.

Some respondents directly blamed Bakiev for price increase, "Bakiev's policies resulted in state's refusal to perform its social functions. For example, electricity and other tariffs were increased, social allowances were cut in, and tax burden was increased."

For some other respondents, another major cause of resentment about Bakiev's regime was related to the management of the economy. Bakiev was blamed for "selling of strategic state corporations on a low price," "absence of socio-economic stability, unemployment, low salaries, high level of crime," "poor governing," "electricity cuts," and "devastation of the country." According to one respondent, "Bakiev sells everything; ... he is not a suitable person to occupy presidential post." Another respondent criticized Bakiev for ineffective use of state resources by suggesting that "the administration of national resources, (including natural resources) was ineffective [as these] resources were continuously stolen." One

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<sup>835</sup> Since 2007, most of the people in Kyrgyzstan had started facing long-time electricity cuts, and since 2009 there had also been a massive electricity tariff increase. Considering the fact that Kyrgyzstan is a rich country in hydro-electrical power, these cuts and price increases causes great resentment.

respondent further criticized Bakiev for not protecting the interests of the Kyrgyz people:

National interests are not protected; land and resources are sold to foreigners. The people are aware now of the dangers and threats coming from the current regime and the established form of government. There is absolute absence of rule of law and social justice.

Another respondent gave similar evaluation of the Bakiev era, “People’s lives further deteriorated. Mass unemployment and migration of young people to other countries, crazy increases of electricity and gas tariffs destroyed people’s trust in the president.”

For one respondent, Bakiev’s economic policies were “wrong” and for another respondent, they were “weak”. Few respondents indicated worsened social conditions especially “for retired people and for people working in public service” as major problems. A couple of respondents indicated unemployment as a negative aspect of the Bakiev regime. One respondent indicated worsened social and economic conditions, uncontrolled internal migration “with many people coming to Bishkek; as well as the external emigration, when many of Kyrgyzstan’s professional people emigrated with no plan to return.”

One other commonly pointed out criticism was related to Bakiev’s inability to fulfill his promises. For one respondent for example:

Bakiev often changes his position on a particular question or matter. He is not permanent in his views, principles. This is a weak side I guess. Sometimes he is arrogant. I guess he likes toadies. In my view he is not a good leader.

One respondent called Bakiev as an irresponsible person: “Bakiev says much, but does nothing. He is not accountable to anybody.” According to one respondent, Bakiev “is not the one who should lead Kyrgyzstan because his words and deeds are often in variance.”

Other negative aspects regarding Bakiev as a leader included “indecisiveness”, “incompetence”, and “lack of political experience”, “being a bad “orator”, absence of

“morals”, and lack of education and intelligence. One respondent went further and called Bakiev a “feudal” leader.<sup>836</sup>

When asked whether Bakiev regime represented their interests, some respondents, made no comment. Some other respondents indicated that Bakiev’s regime represented their interests, without specifying which interests and how or why. Spheres in which respondents’ interests were represented or protected include “educational sphere”, the sphere of social security and social assistance. Almost half of all respondents indicated that their interests were neither represented nor protected in any form under Bakiev.<sup>837</sup> These respondents did not give any detail or particular explanation. Some were very critical who said that “There were no wise and coherent policies in any sphere of social development.” One respondent expressed a rather frustrated opinion: “My interests do not play any role, because politicians will do everything as they want.”

Those dissatisfied respondents who indicated that their interests were not represented in the Bakiev era, shows that socio-economic hardship was one major reason of leadership change in April 2010. It must also be pointed out that the number of dissatisfied respondents (63 in total) could have been even higher, if the survey was conducted after Bakiev was ousted, because at the time he was still in office and this prevented many people from expressing their opinions freely, being afraid of consequences.

One respondent touched upon the electricity issue and privatization of previously state-owned electricity distributing company as cases of non-representation of peoples’ interests under Bakiev:

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<sup>836</sup> There was another opinion related to feudalism in the country and general apathy of the respondents: “The people of Kyrgyzstan, being tired of Akaev, became very passive and indifferent. They say: Let them do. The state reminds me of a feudal system.”

<sup>837</sup> This is understandable taking into consideration the fact that the people are used to see state as provider of everybody’s interests. Therefore, the respondents seem to be of the opinion that it is negativity for them to observe the state no longer performing many of the social services that it had regularly performed during the Soviet era.

... he [Bakiev] represents his own interests and the interests of people who are close to him. His decision to sell *Sever Elektro* for 3 million dollars is a good example of this, as the company brings in profit of 5 million dollars a month. This shows that his personal interests are a key for him; any businessman would not sell a company for less than the amount that it brings in monthly, not including the other assets that the company possesses if he did not receive other, personal gains from it.

According to some respondents their interests were not represented because “salaries were low,” “life had deteriorated,” “progress was too slow,” and there was “unemployment.” In other words, these people referred to general socio-economic problems, which the Bakiev regime failed to achieve any significant results, as main reasons of non-representation of their interests. As one respondent stated:

... if Bakiev did represent my interests, the salaries of the government employees would have been paid. ... He only made promises, but prices increased. Bakiev never talks openly to people and remains unaccountable to those who elected him. He never informs those who elected him to power of what has been done and what has not been done.

When we analyze responses given to the questions on Bakiev and his regime, one interesting point that needs to be mentioned is how, according to some respondents, nothing really had changed after Akaev’s oust from power. According to these respondents, the problems of the previous regime were still not solved. For a few respondents Bakiev kept repeating Akaev’s mistakes. As one respondent elaborated:

Bakiev had started not very bad. However after sometime it looked as if he was a copy of the previous president. He strived to have everything, including financial resources, in the country under a complete control. Bakiev lacked the political will to eradicate corruption.<sup>838</sup>

Some other respondents, when comparing the two leaders, focused specifically on the authoritarian practices of Bakiev:

I am upset that Bakiev is so fast in terms of political conservatism. Akaev at least in his first years attempted to be more or less liberal, and he managed to secure this course for few years. Bakiev almost immediately destroyed the

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<sup>838</sup> Insufficient desire to eradicate corruption was also mentioned by eight other respondents.

opposition, and occupied a privileged place in Kyrgyz politics. The Bakiev regime is pulling the country back to the undemocratic past ... I felt the pressure from Bakiev regime; many friends were under pressure from controlling state bodies, enforcement agencies; some were even arrested.

One respondent also made similar comments:

Bakiev strengthened his regime in a resourceful manner. He strengthened controlling and enforcing agencies (Police, Internal Affairs Ministry, National Security agency etc). Akaev was softer, he did not arrest, pressurized common people, as for Bakiev, he uses coercive methods openly and cruelly. Bakiev uses power like Karimov. That is why nobody asks whether he is legitimate leader or not. The reason is fear and because people know that they cannot change anything, so they do not care. Once I remember Bakiev went abroad and he was not in the country for a month, so nothing has changed. I guess his absence or presence does not change common people's life, I guess we do not need a president per se. People get on with their everyday life and do not care who steals from their taxes or credits.

For one respondent, "Bakiev revealed himself as a cunning and energetic politician. He learned Akaev's mistakes and used all resources to concentrate power and remove all opposition."<sup>839</sup> Another respondent suggested that under Bakiev "human rights are violated more than under Akaev." Likewise, Bakiev continued the methods of Akaev through "attacks on opposition, NGO, [and the] media." As such, "[d]uring Akaev the tribal and clan relations were slowly strengthened, during Bakiev they fully flourished." As one respondent further pointed out, "Kyrgyzstan is getting worse and worse. One dictator is changed by another dictator."

Some respondents focused on the similarities between the two leaders and suggested that Bakiev just like Akaev "also works for his family being under influence of his wife, sons and brothers." For one respondent: "Just like with Akaev's regime ... in the beginning of Bakiev's period we were hopeful for better governing but what we have is more obvious and open 'family rule,' rollback from democratic principles.

Therefore, according to a few respondents, the change of power from Akaev to Bakiev was useless. Some other respondents indicated that in the end nothing really changed as "there is no improvement in standard of life, huge food price increase,

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<sup>839</sup> This respondent also added that during Bakiev rule, "Members of the opposition were arrested or killed."

weak social policy; people are socially unprotected.” One respondent indicated that “not the regime but the name of regime has changed.”

Taking into account the fact that the respondents were asked to give their opinions in 2010 about the 2005 events, it is possible to suggest that their opinions might have changed over the course of the five years that Bakiev had been in power. As such some respondents indicated that in the beginning they supported the change of power from Akaev to Bakiev, but later they became frustrated and disappointed with the Bakiev regime. A couple of respondents indicated that as Bakiev did not live up to their expectations, they were frustrated in this change of power.

As it can be seen, there are not many positive aspects of the Bakiev regime that the respondents mentioned as compared to Akaev’ regime. Time had passed and perhaps peoples’ mindset and the way they perceived Bakiev and his rule had also changed. It is seen that respondents became more critical and unwilling to describe positive aspects as compared to the negative aspects. First of all, Bakiev was in power for five years, as compared to Akaev’s fifteen years. Secondly, Bakiev took office in 2005, after 15 years of independence when all euphoria and hopes were gone, and people became more realistic, more quickly leaving their hopes and expectations behind and looking at the regime more suspiciously, demanding faster results, such as immediate improvements in their standard of life. However Bakiev’s regime could not bring about these desired fast results. Thirdly, as it was clear during the interviews, Bakiev was still in power and the respondents were under the stress and uneasiness which existed in the society just before the April 2010 events which ousted Bakiev. This factor especially influenced the responses with regard to both positive and negative aspects. As it is seen, regardless of the reluctance of some respondents to comment on Bakiev’s regime at the time the interviews were conducted, many problematic areas were touched upon by the respondents, which reflected their discontent and frustration with the Bakiev regime.

When the top ten qualities of a good leader (patriotism, good education, honesty, professional politician, charisma, intelligence, responsibility, strength of character,

service to the people and bravery) that were given earlier are concerned, only a couple of respondents out of 140, indicated Bakiev as a patriot. Few respondents pointed out Bakiev's good education as a positive attribute. Only one respondent indicated him as an honest leader. Few respondents stated that Bakiev was a professional politician. Few other respondents indicated that Bakiev was intelligent. Only two respondents indicated that Bakiev was responsible. For a couple of respondents Bakiev was brave. Several respondents believed that Bakiev possessed a strong character, and indicated "political will" as one of his qualities. According to one respondent, Bakiev was "strict, commanding, man of decision, and he had a lot of qualities of good politician." As can be seen, there were very few qualities expected from a good leader that the respondents associated with Bakiev. Even if some respondents mentioned these qualities, their number is very low. Nobody indicated Bakiev as a just ruler.<sup>840</sup>

It can be argued that the indication of both positive and negative qualities of Bakiev as a leader, revealed the existence of not a one-sided, single-patterned opinion, but a varied and diversified perception of him on the part of the respondents. Interestingly, comparing the positive aspects of Akaev and Bakiev, one major common positive aspect for these leaders are related to their initiatives for political reforms and economic development, despite the fact that they were not seen as very successful in these initiatives. This shows that there is not much positive continuity and resemblance in how respondents see the two leaders. As for the negative aspects of Akaev and Bakiev as well as their regimes, there can be seen a steady continuance and even invigoration of practices and factors such as authoritarian practices, family rule, nepotism and tribalism, and unsuccessful policies in the field of economic reforms. These negative aspects were emphasized by the respondents both for the Akaev and the Bakiev regimes. Moreover, as compared with the Akaev era, the Bakiev era was challenged even more with the increased expectations on the promises he had given when he took office. It can be said that the respondents became more sensitive and impatient with their leader's policies and actions, as their reactions to Bakiev's appointment policy, for example, or policy of increasing the

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<sup>840</sup> However, some other positive qualities were also pointed out by some respondents, such as "effort and good intention", "diligence", "sociability", "democratic mindset", "strategic mind", and "tolerance."

tariffs showed. Therefore, if Akaev was judged mostly from the perspective of being the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan with all his failures, Bakiev was looked at more critically mostly due to these higher expectations. In other words, what people could bear for 15 years, they could not bear (and did not bear) in the five years of Bakiev's rule as his oust in April 2010 showed.

To conclude, one striking point in the answers given to the perceptions of the qualities of Bakiev as a leader is their variety. There seem to be too many different qualities indicated by several respondents. Unlike the case for Akaev, it is not possible to group these answers so as to infer any conclusion. However, as was the case in the answers given to the questions on Akaev, there exists a similar pattern: there is again no clear separation or distinction made between the leader and the regime. Bakiev again is considered as the major figure having major dominance in the system.

Overall, then, the respondents identified several positive aspects of Bakiev rule such as general progress, improvements in public administration, increase of wages of public servants, reforms in the election code, state support given to small and medium businesses, development of important projects in hydro-electric power sector, and the development of southern Kyrgyzstan, a region that was neglected during Akaev's era. The negative aspects were similar to those of Akaev, especially in terms of family rule and nepotism.

#### **4.5 Perceptions of Elections and Voting Participation**

It is important to look at elections and learn citizens' perceptions of elections because they reflect citizens' sentiments through the voting behavior, perception of electoral process and electoral outcomes. Moreover, elections can highlight the extreme measures that authoritarian incumbents feel are needed to stay in power.<sup>841</sup> Perception of elections also helps to see the process of transition and the quality of

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<sup>841</sup> Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik "Getting Real About "Real Causes" *Journal of Democracy*, 20(1), January 2009, p.71. Elections may also become sites of political change, as happened in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005 and April 2010.



political life as it is daily experienced by abused and aggrieved citizens. In this sense elections can be seen as a mode of democratic transition.

In this part, the answers provided by the respondents to the questions on elections are analyzed in three sub-sections: 1) in terms of voting behavior (frequency of voting and voting criteria), 2) in terms of the actual process of elections, and 3) in terms of importance and functions of elections. These questions are especially important as elections are seen as the basic means of participation for the people of Kyrgyzstan, therefore, their voting behavior can be an indicator of their view of the regime. Also these questions help to understand the basis of voting behavior. The actual process of elections is also important because the respondents are asked about fairness of elections, which is directly linked to the issue of legitimacy. As for the importance and functions of elections, the questions regarding the attitudes of the respondents regarding this most frequently used method of political participation had to be reflected upon, as the elections are still seen as ways of bringing solutions to the problems of the country.

#### **4.5.1 Voting Behavior**

In order to understand the general pattern behind the voting behavior of the respondents, first they were asked how frequently they voted in the presidential and parliamentary elections between 1991 and 2010, excluding the elections at the local level. As will be elaborated in more detail below, out of 140 respondents, considerable majority of respondents (96 in total) from all *oblasts*, occupations, age groups and gender said that they voted regularly in these elections. Almost half of all respondents (42 in total) said that they did not vote regularly or did not vote at all.<sup>842</sup> As the question only asked whether or not the respondents voted in both parliamentary and presidential elections, most of these answers were just brief yes/no type, although there were a few other responses that specifically mentioned voting only in presidential or parliamentary elections. Only two respondents gave no answer to the question.

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<sup>842</sup> Some did not vote because of age limitation, as they did not reach the voting age.

As for those respondents who indicated that they did not vote or did not vote regularly, one reason was the belief that the results of all elections were “predetermined” (a couple of respondents) so there was no real way that their vote could affect the results. Another reason mentioned by few respondents was that in the Kyrgyz context, the elections made no real difference. As one respondent said, “In the beginning I was enthusiastic about voting, later I understood that it was meaningless.” These unsatisfied responses reflect voters’ apathy, which was a direct result of disillusionment with the politicians, Akaev and Bakiev, as well as their regimes.

Some respondents said that they could not vote because of administrative obstacles or mismanagement. For example, they were registered in one place (region) and resided in another, so they did not get the bulletin. One respondent explained the reason of not being able to cast his vote as follows, “I went to vote in all elections, but on three occasions my name was not on the list. I complained, insisting that my name be added, but my complaints were unsuccessful.”

Yet another reason for few respondents was the absence of “worthy” candidates. Few respondents indicated that they did not trust the results. Some citizens did not take elections seriously: “I went only once to presidential elections. I do not go because politics does not interest me.” It is clear that most of the respondents did not see any ideological difference between political parties and candidates. In other words, they believed that there were no real alternatives to choose from, and nobody/no viable candidates to vote for. These responses indicate low levels of sense of political efficacy, and consequently a lack of faith in the political system.

On the other side, those few respondents who felt the need of specifying their reason of voting, mostly focused on “civil responsibility” and/or “civil duty” (three respondents), “civil right” (a couple of respondents) and “active civil position” (one respondent). One respondent stated: “It is my right; I try to use my right.”

The respondents were also asked in which elections they voted. Some respondents just mentioned that they voted in all elections from the year (age) that they earned the voting right. Since the respondents are of various age groups, not all of them had earned this right before 1991. Therefore, some young respondents answering this question indicated that they had been voting in all elections, since they got the right to vote.

Out of 140 respondents, considerable number of respondents (91 in total) indicated that they voted in all elections. Few respondents made no comment or answered “I do not remember.” Another few respondents indicated that they did not vote in all elections without specifying the reason. The remaining 33 respondents indicated that they voted in either presidential or parliamentary elections but not always and not in all, so it can be concluded that they showed rather unsteady voting behavior. There were also some respondents who indicated that they voted in all elections except the ones held in a particular year.<sup>843</sup>

Hence, there is quite an impressive voting activity among the respondents, as out of 140 respondents, considerable number of respondents (96 in total) voted regularly and 91 voted in all elections. However it must also be kept in mind that during the Soviet Union, it was a rule for everyone to go and vote in the elections. So perhaps voting became kind of a political habit for the people. In other words, going to the polling station and casting one’s vote without thinking much about the reason could still be observed among the respondents, as they did not explain why they voted.

However, when asked specifically about the criteria or the reasons for voting in parliamentary and presidential elections, considerable number of respondents (79 in total) out of 140 said that they voted for supporting the leader. Only some (22 in total) said that they voted in favor of a particular political party. 23 respondents indicated that both a leader and a party were detrimental to make their choice. Only

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<sup>843</sup> For example, one respondent indicated that she voted in all elections except the 2009 presidential elections. One other respondent indicated that he voted in all presidential elections except the one in 2000, and all parliamentary elections except the ones in 2005 and 2007. Another respondent indicated that she voted in all elections except the 1995 and 2000 presidential elections. One respondent also indicated that he voted in all presidential elections except the 2009 presidential elections and all parliamentary elections except the 2007 parliamentary elections.

few respondents made no comment on the reason why they voted. Some respondents gave more specific answers. For example, a couple of respondents expressed that in presidential elections they voted for the leader, and in parliamentary elections for a party.

As can be seen from this distribution, for most of the respondents, the leaders were more important than political parties in the elections. One respondent noted the reasons of voting for a leader as follows: “[I vote for] a leader, because whatever party exists and whatever program it has, everything depends on the leader.” A similar opinion indicating the dependence of political party on its leader was expressed by another respondent, who suggested that “In Kyrgyzstan party is nothing without its leader, and therefore the leader is more important.” Likewise, according to one respondent, “Our parties are not sufficiently developed and do not present their political platform sufficiently. Therefore, the leader is more important.”

As can be seen from such answers, for these respondents, political parties were not institutionalized political actors with their own principles and ideology. It the leader who set up a party, that came to be associated with his name. As such, “parties are not taken seriously,” they are “not active,” they are “weak,” and the whole idea of a party is a “vague” one. An interesting opinion reflecting total disappointment about the political parties in Kyrgyzstan was offered by one respondent who said that he casts his vote for a political party “on the basis of the lesser evil they pose.” Another disapproving opinion about the parties was given by one respondent:

I used to vote on the basis of political program, speeches, and political views of a candidate. But I saw how some candidates did not stick to their promises ... therefore the criteria must be party but there are no worthy parties.

One respondent gave the reasons of voting for a leader, rather than a party as follows:

I always vote for a leader rather than a party because if you think about all party programs, they are pretty much the same. However, it is in the leader that you begin to see what the party really stands for and what it wants to achieve.

Another respondent also made a similar comment:

Normally I vote for leaders, because all the parties in Kyrgyzstan are based on leader's personality. Parties do not have ideological basis (content) in Kyrgyzstan; parties attract their members due to personal qualities of a leader and ability to persuade. The reason is that we are in transitional period.

One respondent pointed out that "In theory it is necessary to vote for a party and its program, but I vote for a leader. We do not have [such a] political culture." Another respondent added the leader's professional experience as a determining factor in voting. According to this respondent:

We are all here, we know and see the people running for president's [office] and we consider what each potential candidate could do for the country. *I do not read the political programs of other candidates.*<sup>844</sup> I look at the leaders and their professional experience. For example I voted for Bakiev in the last presidential elections, because he followed a discipline and he had administrative experience from his previous posts in high governmental positions.

There were however some respondents, albeit few, who suggested that they voted by looking at the party, rather than to its leader, although they believed that leaders were also important. One respondent suggested that she voted for the party, as "what is important is the party's program and its previous activities." Another respondent also pointed out that he voted for a party rather than for the leader because he could not make up his mind about the leaders due to the fact that he did not "know them personally."

In order to further understand the voting behavior of the respondents in parliamentary elections, they were also asked about the main criteria, such as the political views, region, educational qualifications, and professional experiences of the candidates, which affected their vote. A few respondents made no comment on the question. But for many others, several such criteria were indicated. Out of 140 respondents, almost half of all respondents (49 in total) pointed out "professional experience" as the main criterion on the basis of which they voted in parliamentary

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<sup>844</sup> Emphasis added. Here, it is important to point out that for this respondent "political programs" are formed by individual leaders (or by hired experts who write programs for them) rather than parties as political organizations.

elections. Professional experience implied places in which a candidate worked during his career, the posts he occupied, his achievements and previous professional record. In this context, some respondents indicated that they look at the “biographies of the deputies” in order to decide whether to vote for that candidate or not.

Out of 140 respondents almost half of all respondents (42 in total) indicated political views of the candidate or the party as an important criterion, generally without further elaboration on the issue. Only one respondent specified “liberal” view as her major preference.

The next criterion indicated by 39 respondents was the educational quality and/or level of the candidates. Though the respondents were not specific about the issue, it can be assumed that a good education was seen as a requirement. It must also be noted that as most leaders and politicians were people educated during the Soviet era, with their diplomas acquired from the main prestigious Soviet institutions of that time such as the Moscow State University, this is still a valued qualification for the people in Kyrgyzstan. However, only two respondents specified the educational level a candidate should have in order to get their vote. For one respondent, “Bachelor or Master’s Degree was desirable” and for another respondent “Master or PhD level was desired.”

Several respondents indicated personal qualities of a candidate as an important criterion, again without specifying what specific qualities they were looking at. Only few respondents mentioned qualities such as “honesty”, “charisma”, “decency”, “professionalism”, “strictness”, and “diligence”.

For some respondents, political party itself was the main criterion. For example one respondent indicated that he voted for the party which had “the best program, including the strategy of realization of this program.” Likewise, some respondents mentioned the existence of a clear political program (of either the party or candidate) as a criterion. One respondent said the following: “I get the impression about the candidate from media [and] from what I hear from the environment. I also read the

program of the candidate.” Only six respondents have indicated ideas/ideology as a criterion.<sup>845</sup>

As for the professional qualities of the candidates, three respondents indicated that it was an important criterion, without further elaborating on the issue.<sup>846</sup> Some professional qualities were specified by some of the respondents, who focused on “the ability to implement policies/promises” as a criterion. One respondent mentioned the existence of a good team as a factor. A couple of respondents mentioned “speech habits” and five respondents indicated previous “achievements” as important criteria. There were some other respondents who mentioned “leadership skills,” “financial situation,” “respect among people/public support,” “desire to improve the situation in the country,” “reputation,” “knowledge of the Kyrgyz language,” “capacity for work,” “effectiveness,” and “fair attitude” as important personal qualifications of a presidential candidate.

Few respondents indicated that all the criteria mentioned in the question (political views, region, educational qualifications, and professional experience) were important. In addition to their criteria of voting in the parliamentary elections, the respondents were also asked about these criteria for the presidential elections. When asked about the main factors that affected their vote for a presidential candidate such as their political views, region, educational qualifications, and professional experience, only nine respondents out of 140 made no comment. For the remaining (almost all respondents) 131 respondents, mostly more than one criterion was indicated. Among those responses, almost half of all respondents (60 people) named professional experience as their most important qualification in a presidential candidate. Likewise few respondents indicated that they read the biographies of the candidates in order to learn more about their professional experience. For many

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<sup>845</sup> The question asked the criteria of the respondents for voting in parliamentary elections; sometimes these criteria are valid for a candidate and sometimes for a party. As was explained in the previous chapter in detail, in Kyrgyzstan the election system has undergone various changes, and at certain times the members of the parliament were elected on single mandate basis and sometimes on party-list basis. One interesting result was related to the fact that only two respondents indicated that origin/place of birth, region was important for them in deciding for whom to vote.

<sup>846</sup> There was only one respondent, expressed a contrary opinion: “Professional quality in Kyrgyzstan does not mean a lot, as many of the politicians have a lengthy experience, in which they have done very little to protect the interests of the people.”

respondents, what they meant by “professional experience” of the candidate was unclear, however, as they did not make any elaborations on the issue. However, few respondents were more specific in terms of their preferences. For a couple of respondents, for example, professional experience must be in the sphere of “administrative system, in public sector, and in politics.” For few other respondents, previous personal achievements of the candidate were important.

Almost half of all respondents (52 respondents) indicated the importance of political views of the presidential candidate, generally without elaborating on what kind of political views or orientation.

Another most popular criterion mentioned by almost half of all respondents (48 in total) was the educational level, although only two candidates did more than just naming it. Education must be “excellent” for one respondent, and a Master’s degree or a Ph.D. degree is “desired” for another respondent.

Some respondents indicated the need for professional qualifications of a candidate without specifying these qualifications further, with the exception of one respondent, who explained what he implied by professional qualifications: “a good manager [with a] strategic mind.” For several respondents, personal qualifications of a presidential candidate were important. Among the criteria that they named were “reputation,” “patriotism,” “potential [to rule the country],” “managerial skills,” “capacity for work,” “ideological orientation,” “vision,” “good manners,” “reliability and responsibility” are important qualities on the basis of which the respondents made their choice in voting for the president. Few other respondents indicated the importance of personal qualities of a presidential candidate in general. A number of respondents named specifically qualities such as “exemplary character,” “honesty,” “decency,” and “humanity.” No further comments were made.

For a few respondents the candidate also needed to be “a good orator.” Other few indicated the importance of leadership qualities, and a couple respondents were the only two respondents who pointed at the importance of age: “Normally there is not



much alternative. However, I vote for the young, energetic leader.” There was only one respondent, who indicated that “the candidate must be a Kyrgyz.” This respondent, together with one respondent, also indicated that a candidate must be fluent in the Kyrgyz language. Four respondents mentioned that they considered the region of origin of the candidates. For one respondent, that was the only criterion in the 2009 presidential elections: “In the 2009 elections, I voted for Atambaev, because he was from the village I worked in.” One respondent also stated that she voted on the basis of region, indicating that “South is preferable.”

Some respondents said that their criterion was the personal program or agenda of a candidate.<sup>847</sup> For example, one respondent indicated that he voted on the basis of the political party to which candidate belonged. For another respondent, if a candidate belonged to the Communist Party, she would vote for this candidate.<sup>848</sup>

It needs to be pointed out that these and similar types of answers which indicated significant dissatisfaction in the election process weaken the legitimacy of the regime and the leader who is associated with it. As people distrust the system with its institutions, they distrust the leader and vice-versa, resulting in further loss of the legitimacy of the leader.

#### **4.5.2 The Electoral Process**

As was explained in detail in the previous chapters of the dissertation, electoral process in Kyrgyzstan was often full of violations and frauds. Nevertheless, as elections continue to be the basic channel of citizen participation into the political processes in the country, it is important to understand the perceptions of the people in this regard. Furthermore, from the perspective of the leaders, elections are one of the

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<sup>847</sup> Once again, we see a similar pattern here when the respondents talk about the “political program of candidates” rather than the parties. This demonstrates the perceptions of leaders (politicians) as focal figures who stand above their parties.

<sup>848</sup> Again, just as with the criteria in electing a deputy, there were some quite apathetic responses, such as the one given by one respondent, who said that “if there were presidential elections tomorrow, I would not vote because I do not see any normal candidate.” Another respondent also noted that “In presidential elections, I rarely see a candidate who deserves my vote, and with no suitable alternative, I vote for the candidate whom I believe is the least bad.”

basic means through which they seem to claim legitimacy. This section analyzes the perceptions of the respondents regarding the process of elections. The answers that they gave to the questions regarding the quality (in the sense of fairness) of the elections, preferences for a better/improved electoral system and the means to achieve such a system are analyzed under three sections.

#### **4.5.2.1 Fairness of Elections<sup>849</sup>**

When asked whether the political parties were given equal conditions to compete in elections, 19 respondents made no comment. 21 respondents indicated that political parties were given equal conditions to compete in elections without any further elaborations. One respondent said that conditions were not always equal. Another respondent indicated that conditions were only partially equal. According to few respondents, parties enjoyed equal conditions only on paper, as it was written in law, but in practice there was no real such equality.

However, almost half of all respondents (62 out of 140) were of the opposite view, indicating that the conditions were neither equal nor fair. These respondents, however, mostly did not provide specific examples, simply answering “No” to the question “Do you believe that the political parties are given equal conditions to compete in the elections?” Those who provided examples as well as certain reasons of unequal conditions, include one respondent, who argued that “rules were not followed” in these elections. Three respondents further stated that conditions were not equal because the financial resources of the parties varied, so they could not campaign at the same level of intensity. As one respondent noted, “Some political parties have access to more financial resources, and so the conditions are not equal.

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<sup>849</sup> Elections are fair when they are administered by a neutral authority; when the electoral administration is sufficiently competent and resourceful to take specific precautions against fraud in the voting and vote counting; when the police, military, and courts treat competing candidates and parties impartially throughout the process; when contenders all have access to the public media; when electoral districts and rules do not systematically disadvantage the opposition; when independent monitoring of the voting and vote-counting is allowed at all locations; when the secrecy of the ballot is protected; when virtually all adults can vote; when the procedures for organizing and counting the vote are transparent and known to all; and when there are clear and impartial procedures for resolving complaints and disputes. (see Larry Jay Diamond “Thinking About Hybrid Regimes”, *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), April 2002, p.29 )

The better-financed parties promote themselves through better advertisements and election campaigns.”

Few respondents indicated that the conditions were not equal because the pro-presidential party always possessed more resources and advantages, therefore, dominating and/or suppressing other parties. One respondent indicated that “the governing party was given more time in debates.” For another respondent, “the right to be elected was given to candidates who are loyal to the regime.” Likewise for one respondent, “the pro-presidential party will always be advantageous so that president has a pocket parliament.” A couple of respondents also expressed respectively that “the ruling party had obvious advantages” and “only the incumbent’s party was given all priorities.”

As administrative resource<sup>850</sup> was often used by the regime, few respondents indicated it was a major factor responsible for the absence of equal conditions for political parties. One respondent offered an example related to the *Ak Jol*, the party of Bakiev that enjoyed these resources “with all their positive aspects including finances.” In this context, some respondents provided examples mostly related to the 2007 parliamentary elections in which there were many violations and political parties were deprived of equal conditions to compete. One respondent expressed doubts about the reliability of results of these elections. Likewise, another respondent stated that “In 2007 it was obvious that the conditions were not equal, as the presidential party *Ak Jol* quite obviously used administrative resources.” Again referring to the same elections, one respondent said the following: “only the pro-presidential *Ak Jol* was given resources to compete in the elections. I know that people working in governmental organizations were ordered to vote and persuade others to vote for a particular candidate.” Another respondent also noted that conditions were not equal as they were “created only for the *Ak Jol* party.” One respondent also talked about similar conditions:

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<sup>850</sup> Administrative resource is ability of political candidates to use their official positions or connections to government institutions to influence the outcome of elections.

In parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan, the deputy visits the district in which he is to run in, and promises many good things (roads, schools) in order to win. Vote-buying is widespread; and the practice of employers pressurizing staff to vote a certain way or lose their jobs is also common. For example, the chairman of our community committee pushed the members of the community to vote for a particular candidate. Even I was influenced by such practices. This practice is rife in governmental bodies and organizations.

For some other respondents, the conditions were not equal due to “the violations at the election booths.” One respondent told her experience as follows: “In one funny event, the chairman of an election committee jumped from a second floor window and disappeared with cast voting cards because he had to change the result.” Another respondent said that during the last presidential election in his hometown Tokmok “teachers were transformed from one school to another and voted at all polling stations several times. The same teachers cast their votes several times.” Another respondent shared his own observations as follows:

I was an observer at one of the elections, I saw how things are done there, and that is the reason why I do not go to vote. In our case, it is useless to have independent observers [or other such measures], in the end when you open the newspaper and look at the official results, you see falsified numbers. They just change the names. For example, if 80 percent of the voters had casted their votes for an oppositional candidate, they show that 80 percent of these votes were casted for the incumbent. Voters cannot change anything. I think violations are because of the system itself, the way it is functioning. The system should not depend on one person. The CEC should not depend on the president. It must be independent enough so that it will not represent/protect the incumbent or his party’s interests.

Likewise, according to one respondent, there were such violations during the last parliamentary elections [in 2007] in which “the *Ata-Meken* party got sufficient amount of votes but the official results considerably understated these real results.”

In addition to the question on the conditions of competition in the elections for the participating political parties, the respondents were also specifically asked about their evaluations regarding the election campaigns held during the parliamentary elections. 22 respondents made no comment on this issue or just said “I do not know.” Few respondents stated that campaigns were not always fair or only partly fair. One

respondent expressed his suspicion saying that “Sometimes violations take place during the election campaign but it can be provocation.” Only some respondents believed that elections campaigns were conducted in a fair manner. However, among these, some respondents referred only to the 2007 parliamentary elections, refraining from commenting on the previous ones. One respondent noted that the election campaign during these elections was conducted in a fair manner, as there were very few “minor violations.” For another respondent, they were fair “because there were many international observers.” One respondent indicated that “in 2005, the election campaign was free and fair.”

Several respondents indicated that election campaigns were not conducted in a fair manner without any further elaboration. Other respondents suggested different reasons why election campaigns, especially for the oppositional political parties, were not fair. For example, few respondents suggested that air time on TV was not distributed in equal manner. According to one respondent, “the opposition candidates and parties were not given the opportunity to campaign on an equal footing through the media.” Another respondent also stated that she “has not even heard of other political parties campaigns. Only the incumbent’s party was advertised on the TV.” One respondent explained similar ideas as follows: “On TV, only the so-called ‘pocket opposition’ was allowed to campaign. The real opposition was not allowed to campaign on TV or through mass media.”

The next reason about the unfair elections mentioned by few respondents was related to the “pro-Bakiev and/or pro-*Ak Jol* bias” observed during the 2007 election campaign. According to another respondent, “The electorate was forced to vote for *Ak Jol*.” Likewise, according to one respondent:

There were ... huge posters that were hanging all over the city depicting many people, and below these poster it was written “We are for *Ak Jol*”, or “We are For Bakiev.” Other parties were less heard, less promoted, less advertised.

Other respondents also mentioned similar problems. According to one such respondent for example:

Some parties were not given a real chance to hang their advertising billboards in the center of Bishkek. Furthermore, the KTR TV channel was used to promote [Bakiev's] regime. Independent TV channels also are not available in some provinces. So election campaigns cannot be fair.<sup>851</sup>

One respondent also shared his opinion by indicating that “If the opposition candidates put up posters on the streets, they would all disappear overnight.” Another respondent described the 2007 parliamentary elections as follows: “during the parliamentary elections too much attention was given to *Ak Jol*. Other parties have been under pressure.” Likewise, “*Ak Jol* was given more time on TV and bill boards.” According to another respondent, “Incumbent president [Bakiev] had more power [and] more financial resources, so his election campaign was the most sound.” Finally for one respondent, “In the 2007 parliamentary elections the president’s party won and all the other unfavorable parties had the carpet pulled out from beneath their feet.”

Some respondents were questioning the election process which they believed to be unfair: “As we know the result beforehand, our voice is not important.” According to one respondent:

Often we do not really have a choice to vote for a candidate we want. He is either removed from the race, or other obstacles prevent us to choose whom we want. And the only choice left is to vote for the incumbent president. This is how it was during 20 years of independence.

One respondent indicated that presidential elections remind him of “a show, in which different political technologies are used. Therefore there is almost no chance to choose a worthy candidate.”

As was the case in the answers given to the question on whether the political parties were given equal conditions to compete in elections, the respondents again mentioned administrative resources as an issue. Some respondents indicated the

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<sup>851</sup> This is the only channel that broadcasts on the whole territory of Kyrgyzstan and it is a governmental national TV channel. It belongs to the government and its broadcast is not objective.

heavy use of administrative resource in election campaigns. One respondent, for example, noted that “In our country we did not have a single free and fair election. Vote-buying and use of administrative resource is widespread.” Another respondent also admitted that “Administrative resource was used. I have heard of real orders coming from the regime on the matter who should be elected to parliament.” One respondent further reflected on how administrative resource was used as follows:

...during the 2009 presidential elections, Bakiev had become the presidential candidate without officially leaving his post (returning the seals) at the time of the campaign. So he had vast administrative resource that he could use. A provision must be put in the constitution so that the [incumbent] president leaves office at the time of his second running for the president’s post. Secondly, all the advertisement companies in Bishkek campaigned for Bakiev. When we asked about this at Bakiev’s election headquarters, we were told that these private companies were doing this on their own initiative. However, we knew that they did this because they did not want to be taxed or be pressured by the government. This must be prohibited. This is also how administrative resources are used.

The next problem mentioned by few respondents was vote-buying and similar other frauds. As one respondent stated, “We always have unfair elections. Bribes are always taking place.” Another respondent expressed a more critical opinion, saying that “Election campaigns are absent. The campaigns are limited to vote-buying.” Other violations were also mentioned by other respondents, as one of them said the following: “I have heard of the bulletin falsifications. The law is violated; the votes of those citizens who abstain from voting are used in favor of certain candidates.” One respondent also stated that “Election campaigns were conducted mostly in an unfair manner and they were not free. There were cases in which I was forced to vote in several booths several times.”

Another problem named by seven respondents concerned the amount of finances allocated by political parties to their election campaigns. All of these respondents believed that election campaigns were conducted in unfair manner, because they depended on money. For one respondent, “the candidate who had the highest amount of money is right and is the winner.” Other similar arguments were made by another respondent who suggested that “Money decides the result of elections” and by

another respondent who suggested that “If a candidate has money, his seat is secured.” Likewise, “Time has changed and now the one who has more money wins. The votes are openly bought and elections process is controlled by big money.”

Another related factor that prevented the fairness of the electoral process was corruption. As one respondent suggested “Elections and referendums cannot be clear and fair as long as corruption continues to take place.” Likewise for another respondent, election campaigns were unfair because “corruption was widespread.”

As can be seen from such responses, in general the election process is not considered as free or fair. Though many respondents were not specific in explaining their views on the issue, it is clear that there is a general distrust that makes people indifferent and creates apathy. Also a large number of “no comment” type of answers indicated that people did not want to talk about this issue openly. However, the fact that there are a substantial number of respondents who held that neither the elections nor the election campaigns were fair is an indicator of distrust to the system and its institutions. The outcomes of elections, therefore, are also seen as unreliable, so in fact, they become a mechanism of bringing “illegitimate people” to power. The use of administrative resources, dominance of pro-presidential *Ak Jol*, partial position of the CEC that is unable to prevent violations, are other factors that contribute to such a perception.

#### **4.5.2.2 Preferences for a Better/Improved Electoral System**

Another issue regarding the elections was related to the problems and/or deficiencies of the present election system in Kyrgyzstan as well as their possible solutions to make it better and fair. To that end, the people were asked about the necessary changes to in order to create a better/improved electoral system. On this question, only six respondents made no comment, and only 10 respondents answered the question with “I do not know.” One respondent stated that it was impossible to improve the electoral system in the country, without any further elaboration on why.



Answering this question, other respondents did not simply list their requirements, but also gave certain examples from the Kyrgyz electoral system, focusing on its problems and violations. In this sense, some respondents indicated transparency as a major requirement for a better election system, although they did not offer any further explanation on how to make the election process transparent. There were only a few respondents who suggested more, such as this respondent:

Transparency is a key and stopping international observers from participating in the elections is a massive blow to fair elections process. In addition, government employees should not be forced to give their vote to the government; they should have the freedom to vote for whomever they want.

One respondent also explained what he meant by transparency as follows, focusing on the role of the CEC:

Transparency can be secured through an electronic system of voting and counting. The counting process must be conducted by independent international experts. There must be arrangement under which CEC would count votes in the presence of experts and representatives of various international organizations.

Another problem that needed to be solved for a better election system was related to failure to enforce election laws. As one respondent stated:

In theory we have good laws, but [these] laws are not followed. The principles of transparency must be applied. Sticking to the rules is important. There are a lot of problems, the violators are never punished. Nothing can be changed because stakes are too high. Punishments are not enforced. The [whole] system must be blamed.

Another respondent referred to the role of both the citizens and the bureaucrats in this context:

CEC's members and members of local election commissions should abide laws and work within legislative framework. This will be possible only if power holders are honest.

Few respondents indicated that the existing legal framework, including the Election Code, the constitution and other election laws must be changed. However, these respondents did not specify what kinds of changes were necessary. Few respondents indicated that the Central Election Commission must be independent. These respondents did not elaborate on how to make it independent, except one respondent, who suggested the following:

I think the problem is that the president appoints half of the members of CEC. And the remaining half is elected by the parliament, so this makes the CEC dependent. We have to make it really independent. Its members must be elected transparently; civil society should also participate in this election. The President, by appointing half of the CEC members is automatically getting half of the votes. Moreover if he controls the parliament, he also gets his own people in the CEC. We need to minimize his influence.

Another respondent further noted that “To create a better election system we need to improve our human capital, for example, the values and consciousness of CEC members and bureaucrats.” One respondent expects to see “honesty of staff of central elections commission.” Another respondent criticized the CEC as follows:

The Election Commission is ineffective; and the supposed transparency is fictitious. We need to change people’s mindsets, starting with the elite in society. They should avoid using improper and unfair methods during elections.

A few respondents indicated that there was the need of introducing new technologies such as “e-voting”, “online voting”, and “electronic system of vote-counting.” According to one respondent, “we should use the experience of developed countries in the process of vote counting in order to prevent violations and cheating.” Another respondent also made similar comments and suggested the “introduction of computerized system of voting and vote-counting that would show the results immediately before they will be falsified.”

Another group of respondents reflected on a particular aspect that was not necessarily related to the system itself, but rather related to the people or the voters, who were believed to possess low levels of political culture, consciousness and

mindset, which resulted in the elections to be fraud and the results manipulated. So as another way of designing a better electoral system, several such respondents indicated that peoples' consciousness/mindset had to be changed. For example, one respondent indicated that "The principle must be: 'If not me, someone else will be decisive. If there will be violations, I will be one of the first people who would suffer.'" Another several respondents indicated that political culture must be improved. In this regard, one respondent noted the following:

I think it is not only the Central Election Commission that should be held accountable, there are deeper problems. For example, the political culture may also be at fault, and sometimes it is the people that allow the results to be manipulated. Some do not come to vote, and so their votes can be manipulated; while some mark their polling card "Against All."

What these respondents seem to imply is that as peoples' political culture is low; they do not believe their votes to be valuable and important. Such unawareness was emphasized by one respondent, who said the following: "I know cases when people have been unaware of their polling stations, places of registration, or even if their names are in the electoral list or not."

Another factor that had an impact on the consciousness of the people was the unfavorable socio-economic conditions (poverty, unemployment, low incomes), which according to five respondents had to be improved. It was believed that if the voters would be well off economically, they would not "sell" their votes. As one respondent suggested:

We need to improve the conditions of the people so that they do not have to sell their votes. People should not sell the future of their country. I have heard that in Talas, many people voted for Bakiev in exchange for a bottle of vodka. They knew that this president did not have their interests at heart, but still they voted for him. In fact people do not believe a change in leadership necessarily means an improvement in their situation. They have lost that hope, as they do not see an alternative.

For one respondent as well, the conditions of the people must be improved “so that they do not need to trade their votes for material goods.” Similarly, another respondent noted the following:

We need to improve economy and increase peoples’ standard of life. When the welfare of the people improves, they will care about politics and voting. When people start thinking about politics, they would know that it is them who elect the rulers.

Regarding the use of administrative resources, five respondents indicated that for a better electoral system, this practice should be stopped by a system that would prevent the use of these resources in electoral campaigns. One respondent even proposed that “During elections, the president should be deprived of his powers in order to restrict his influence on the election process.”

Few respondents saw the source of the fraud election system as the attitude of the leader. As put forward by one respondent:

The leader at the top should stop ordering lower-level civil servants to secure certain “voting results.” These lower-level civil servants are forced to obey orders from above, being in fear of losing their jobs.

Another respondent openly declared that it was necessary “to change leader of the country” [referring to Bakiev at the time] for any real improvement of the electoral system. One respondent offered a similar opinion:

As long as we have such a president [Bakiev], we will never have free and fair elections. President orders elections to be held in a particular way and they are conducted in that way. Under Akaev there were fewer violations during elections.

Some responses further suggested a need to “change the whole system” in order to improve the election system, showing that there was total dissatisfaction and frustration in how things generally work in the country. According to one respondent, “[t]he whole system should be changed, not only election system but also the political system.” Another respondent also noted the same thing and

suggested that the “administrative apparatus produced the desired results [in the elections].” It was also stated that the voters “could not change anything .... [as] the violations were dependent on the functioning of the system.”

Some respondents indicated a need to change the CEC system<sup>852</sup> in order to improve the whole election process. Very few respondents elaborated on the exact changes they would like to see in the CEC system. But as it was mentioned earlier, many want to see CEC as independent body in which honest people are performing their duties. According to one respondent, “Work of local election commissions and the CEC must be strengthened.” Some respondents offered possible changes to the CEC system as follows:

The members of CEC and election commissions must be constantly changed. In order to prevent the election fraud, the list of voters must be clearly defined.

One respondent emphasized the necessity of changes in local election commissions in which ballots are casted as well, in order to eradicate “vote-buying.” According to one respondent, “Local elections committees and *oblast* election committees must work in a united and professional manner.” Related to vote-buying and vote-selling, a couple of respondents indicated that corruption must be eradicated for a better election system.

Some respondents indicated that for a better election system there must be more control and supervision of the whole election process on the part of both authorities and international and domestic observers. One respondent suggested that “During elections the supervision of local election commissions and the central election commission must be appropriate, for example at local election video cameras can be used.” Few respondents further indicated that for a better election system strict independent observers were needed. Likewise, one respondent indicated that “more

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<sup>852</sup> CEC system included not only the CEC but also the election commissions at the regional (*oblast*), municipal and local levels.

observers” should be used in the elections, and another respondent said that these observers must also be “rule-abiding.”<sup>853</sup>

When the responses are analyzed, it is possible to see that lack of transparency, failure to enforce election laws, unfair laws, vague and complicated election code (which is frequently changed), impartiality of the Central Election Commission, vote-buying and manipulation of election results are seen as the major problems. As was mentioned before, the use of administrative resources is a direct way for the presidents to exert their influence on the whole election process. Some responses were so critical of this attitude that they even suggested the removal of the president from office, should he use these resources to influence the elections. Transparency was believed to be an important issue that could be provided via an electronic system of voting and counting. Furthermore, leaders had to be forced to implement the existing laws, rather than violating them, as Akaev did, when he ran for a third term, despite the fact that the Constitution allowed only for two terms. Such developments eroded the legitimacy of the leaders in the eyes of the people.

Another topic closely related to the views of the respondents of the whole process of elections and of their suggestions for a better electoral system, is how they actually perceived the importance and functions of elections in their country as a basic means of political participation and expression; this is the subject of the next section.

#### **4.5.2.3 The Importance and Functions of Elections**

In this part, the importance and functions of elections in their country from the perspective of the respondents is analyzed with a specific emphasis on whether they believe that the elections serve them in terms of their interests to be represented.

When asked whether they believed that their votes were counted or not in the elections, an overwhelming majority of the respondents said simply either “yes” or “no” or gave brief and unelaborated answers such as “I hope,” “not always,” and “I

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<sup>853</sup> Interestingly one respondent expressed a contrary opinion saying that “International observers have no role in the Kyrgyz elections; they cannot prevent violations in the process.”

do not know.” Out of 140 respondents, 18 respondents made no comment at all. Almost half of all respondents (54 in total) indicated their confidence that their vote was counted without further elaboration. 29 respondents indicated that they have their doubts, saying that probably their votes were counted, but not always and not in all elections. One such respondent stated the following: “I am not sure if my vote is counted for the candidate or party I really voted for.” Several respondents (34 in total) stated that their vote was not counted without providing any further explanations. An interesting respond concerning the counting of votes was given by one such respondent:

Two times I have checked myself. I applied to Central Election commission, and they answered that I should have applied to a local election commission. I did that, and I got a report that yes my vote was counted. It is a long procedure. Once, my name was not in the list, so I applied to the court and waited all day long until they included my name so that I would be able to cast my vote. Finally, I got my right to vote and was included in voting list.

When asked whether a party/candidate elected at the parliamentary elections represented their interests, eight respondents made no comment or simply said “I do not know.” Few respondents said that they were “not sure” if their interests were represented or not. Only 15 respondents answered positively, acknowledging that their interests were represented by a party or the deputies in the parliament. For some respondents only some deputies did represent their interests. One respondent stated that deputies represented her interests only “to some extent” some respondents suggested that their interests were partly represented from time to time, but not always.

One respondent pointed out that it was the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, which had a seat in the parliament (during the time of interviews) that “protect[ed] citizens’ interests according to party’s charter.” Another respondent indicated that his interests were represented but “there is not enough attention paid to regional problems.” Four respondents indicated that their interests were represented but ineffectively. One respondent expressed an opinion justifying the deputies and blaming inactive voters with low political culture: “I think deputies protect our interests insufficiently, they

don't have stimulus to work. Voters do not demand accountability reports because voters in general are not active.”

Those respondents (41 in total) who did not believe that their interests were being represented by the parties/deputies elected to the parliament, simply said “no” without providing examples when asked about whether parliamentarians represent their interests or not. However, some were very critical arguing that “in Kyrgyzstan not a single social/professional group’s interests are represented in parliament.” As one respondent also suggested, “the deputies do not remember whose interests they should protect.” For another respondent, “After being elected, deputies forget about their responsibilities and accountability to the voters” and for one respondent these deputies “do not protect peoples’ interests.”

Among the reasons for not being represented, respondents named only a few. One of them was stated by few respondents who argued that their interests were not represented because these interests did not coincide with those of the *Ak Jol* party. As one respondent suggested:

...the party I voted for is supported by a tiny minority. They can bark but nothing changes because the majority in parliament is in the hands of pro-presidential *Ak Jol*. This parliament is like a kindergarten, they cannot decide anything.

Another reason mentioned by 25 respondents was that deputies represented and protected only their own economic or political interests, and not the interest of the people who voted for them. For one respondent, deputies “sit in parliament not to protect people’s interests, but to protect their own businesses.” Another respondent also said: “as soon as they get into the parliament, they forget about their promises to their voters. They start working for their own interests or for their own businesses.” For yet another respondent, deputies “protect and represent only interests of political elite, regime and their own personal interest.” Likewise, “Deputies protect their businesses. For example, MP Damira Niyazalieva (from the Social-democratic Party) owns a chain of pharmacies. So she lobbies the interests of her business – discounts, etc.” Likewise, for one respondent, deputies “protect personal interests. Other



activities are just a show for the sake of accountability. They do not care about the people's problems." For another respondent "deputies think only about themselves" and for yet another respondent "during the period of their mandate [they] strive to fill their pockets for the whole life." As one respondent further stated: "Deputies during their term try to return the money they have invested into the election campaign. They never represent any interests except their own."

Several respondents further indicated that in addition to their own interests, the deputies also protect the interests of the regime and support the policies of the government, because in Kyrgyzstan the regime is associated with the leader, and the interests of the regime imply the interests of the leader as well as his immediate closest circle of family and supporters.

Certain respondents also expressed their discontent by referring to the "empty promises" given by the deputies. As one respondent noted:

I see that many candidates who run for a parliamentary seat promise many things, their campaigns are full of hopes for a better life [and a] better future but mostly their promises remain unfulfilled promises.

One respondent also made similar comments and suggested that the deputies "just promise many things during [their] election campaign and then after being elected, they fulfill the minimum of what was promised." Another respondent also blamed the deputies for being selfish. Four respondents called them "incompetent." As one respondent argued:

...the level of experience of the deputies is low. *Jogorku Kenesh* is very weak, both intellectually and politically. The deputies do not know why they were elected, and they are unsure of their responsibility to the public. The strongest Parliament was the one elected in 1990, as it was sincere, although inexperienced. Today's Parliament is not even aware of its purpose.

For another respondent, "a majority of deputies do not realize their mission and the honor to represent the people in the parliament."

Referring to the wide-spread nepotism, favoritism, clan and tribal connections, few respondents noted that if one had the necessary connections, his interests would be protected and represented. According to one respondent, “The system of tenders is so much corrupted that people’s interests could not be protected. Who has more money has protection of his interests.”

Some of the respondents were also of the opinion that their interests were not represented because in general “the deputies were elected in fraud elections” and those parties/deputies for whom the people had voted were not in the parliament, instead the parliament was filled with deputies who were not voted for, so who actually were occupying those seats illegally and illegitimately. So they could not be expected to protect the interests of the voters.

As is seen, a large number of respondents feel unrepresented and unprotected as far as their interests are concerned. This may indicate two things: first, if the parliament is filled with members of the pro-presidential party (as was the case with Bakiev’s *Ak Jol*), the respondents do not see that their interests are represented by such deputies, whose legitimacy and level of support are low. In such a context, the parliament also loses the peoples’ confidence. Secondly, in general, such large number of unrepresented respondents has increased apathy and creates frustration among the people.

When these responses are analyzed in terms of the importance and functions of presidential and/or parliamentary elections as meaningful ways of democratization, other comments can also be made. When asked which elections – presidential or parliamentary are more meaningful and critical, three respondents made no comment or said “I do not know” and some respondents answered “none.” For example, one respondent said, “[it] is not a matter in Kyrgyzstan as people do not believe that elections can change something in the policies. It never did. ... So it is useless to expect people to realize the importance of elections.”

Those who pointed out that neither presidential nor parliamentary election were important, did not approve the election process, suggesting that “The [whole] approach to the elections should change” as “both the presidential and parliamentary elections were unfair.” For one respondent, “the elections are just a method of power division among elites,” and for another only “open” elections are meaningful.<sup>854</sup> For few respondents, as only free elections would be meaningful, and as elections were not free in Kyrgyzstan, there was no point in discussing whether presidential or parliamentary elections were more important. One respondent claimed that “In our country elections are not important because power holders always secure the desired result.”

Some respondents indicated that parliamentary elections were more important in Kyrgyzstan because in these elections problems and decisions were discussed and made collectively. Furthermore, “the parliament contains more people; the president is only one man”, and in a parliamentary election “more people are competing for a seat”. For a couple of respondents, the parliament makes laws, and for one respondent, “the parliament is a collective body and deputies watch and control each other.”<sup>855</sup> According to one respondent, parliamentary elections are more important because “[t]he people of Kyrgyzstan are not well grounded in politics and parliamentary elections help “to understand [their] importance”.

However, a substantial number of respondents (63 in total) indicated that presidential elections were more important in Kyrgyzstan. Among those, almost half (32 in total) did not provide any elaboration on the topic, simply indicating these elections to be more important. For some other respondents, however, presidential elections were more important because the parliament was weak and dependent on the president. For one respondent, “Parliament’s powers are negligible in practice” and for another respondent “the parliament is powerless, passive, and useless; it only does whatever president says.” According to one respondent, presidential elections were more

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<sup>854</sup> However, this respondent noted that “Elections in Kyrgyzstan are [just a] show.”

<sup>855</sup> One respondent further noted that parliamentary elections are more critical because “it is very important for the president to have a loyal parliament with majority of deputies from his party or supporting him. If he loses such parliament there is no guarantee that he would get so many supporters in the next parliament.”

important because “there is no [real] parliament [in Kyrgyzstan and] ... if we abolish the parliament today nothing will change, we won’t lose anything, and instead we would gain money for the economy.” Few respondents further indicated that presidential elections were more vital because of the passiveness of deputies. For a couple of respondents, the parliament in Kyrgyzstan did not decide anything as it was “a puppet parliament.”

Some respondents indicated that presidential elections were more important due to the fact that the president has more power and “everything depends on him [the president] and his team.” According to one respondent:

Due to much of the power being centralized under the current regime, presidential elections are more meaningful. In addition, historically the president has continued to make more of the critical decisions and as a rule pro-government/president party wins the parliamentary elections.

Similar ideas were presented by one respondent who suggested the following, “The elected leader is very important for Kyrgyzstan, everything depends on him, and the parliament depends on him. If people elect a proper president, the parliament will be good as well.”

One respondent indicated sarcastically that “the person elected as a president would ‘elect’ the *Jogorku Kenesh*.” As for another respondent, “elected president creates a pocket parliament.” One respondent pointed out that presidential elections are more important because “Asian people do not recognize democracy; they prefer to believe in the power of one leader.” Another respondent gave a more elaborate explanation:

In theory both are important. Elections are the most important event in a country’s life, as the people choose a president or a party to rule. People entrust their future in the hands of an elected leader. However, in reality only presidential elections are important in Kyrgyzstan as many things depend on the president.

Justifying the importance of presidential elections, one respondent made the following similar argument: “We are used to be ruled and we like when somebody

rules us. We are not used to take decisions ourselves.” Another rather paradoxical opinion was given by another respondent who suggested that: “Presidency is a popularly elected post. The president must elect the parliament.”<sup>856</sup>

Several respondents indicated that both presidential and parliamentary elections were important, but only a few respondents explained why they believed so. A couple of respondents suggested that both were important as Kyrgyzstan had a mixed (presidential-parliamentary) system. As for one respondent:

Both, [are important] because these two branches of power are supposed to check and balance each other. Balance of power is very important, otherwise we would have either dictatorship of president or delay in the legislative process.

For one respondent too, both of these elections were important “because only in case of effective work of the president and the parliament a true democracy will be possible.” Explaining his general positive attitude, one respondent stated that “both [are important]; for the Kyrgyz people going to elections is a new hope for the better life ... [although] at the end they get nothing but frustration.” Another respondent also explained why both elections were vital as follows: “Presidential elections are important because he is given the power to represent peoples’ interests. Parliamentary elections are also vital, as the parliament is a legislative organ.” For yet another respondent, both were important “because both president and the parliament possess power as they are popularly elected bodies.”

As it can be inferred from the data, elections are seen as important tools for the respondents, though there is a very obvious dissatisfaction with the election process itself. The respondents focused heavily on the need for free and open elections. However, not a single respondent openly and clearly pointed out that elections are an important part of democracy and therefore they are vital. Perhaps the respondents inexplicitly considered elections as regular events happening periodically, which also

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<sup>856</sup> Five other respondents indicated that it was natural that presidential elections were more important as there was a presidential system in Kyrgyzstan.

was the case during the Soviet era. Another point is that there is an obvious tendency to regard the presidential elections more important than the parliamentary elections (63 respondents versus 20 respondents), despite the fact that a considerable number of people (37 in total) regarded both elections equally important. However, the importance given to the presidential elections can be explained by the dominant and critical position that the president occupies in the country and the powers that he has within the country's political system, especially as compared to the relative weakness of the parliament and the ineffectiveness of the political parties.

When the importance and functions of elections in terms of producing legitimate results are analyzed, 25 respondents made no comment or said "I do not know." Two respondents stated that they were not sure. Out of 140 respondents, only 11 indicated that they consider elections results as legitimate, though some respondents were reluctant to say so: "I trust them 90 percent. We have to believe ...". According to one respondent, "Though there are violations, in general results are legitimate." Another respondent said, "...yes, but [the elections] need improvement and transparency." One respondent considered the results legitimate, but noted that he was "not completely persuaded when they declared [results such as] 98 percent turnout." Next groups of respondents (81 in total) were those who did not consider elections results legitimate. These respondents did not think that official results were true and trustworthy. Not all of these respondents provided concrete examples or any elaboration on the topic, but some, such as one respondent did:

I definitely do not trust the election results. At the beginning of Akaev's term in office the results were less manipulated I suppose, but later I began to doubt the results; those indicating 96–98 percent of support do not look real to me.

Referring to the manipulations that are widespread in the Kyrgyz elections, another respondent said the following:

They say "It does not matter how people voted, it matters how the votes were counted". I heard that it is harder to manipulate elections now as there are different independent observers, but it would appear that they still manage to

manipulate the results. That is why I do not completely trust the official results.

As was the case in the answers given to the question on a better election system, on the question asking respondent to evaluate elections results, the respondents also mentioned role of the CEC as an issue. A few respondents indicated that for them the election results were not legitimate because they did not trust the CEC. According to one respondent, “CEC ... was under the influence of the regime.” Another respondent also stated that he did not trust the CEC because it was “corrupted.” One respondent further added that “CEC was a tool in the hands of regime. Some candidates were punished by the CEC; while some were protected.” Yet another respondent further indicated that she did not trust the CEC because “CEC is dependent on the president.”

Another reason of illegitimate election results was related to the interference of the authorities. As one respondent stated:

My personal opinion, the elections are illegitimate, however, the government has taken strong steps to legitimize the elections and to a certain extent have managed to legitimize the elections.

For one respondent, “those who are in power always win the elections.” Another respondent expressed a similar opinion, “I think the results are fudged on to what president wants.”

According to a few respondents election results were illegitimate because of the use of administrative resources. Many respondents indicated electoral fraud as the major reason why the elections produce illegitimate results. As one respondent stated, “In Kyrgyzstan the results of elections are not announced immediately after the counting is completed. Instead the results are announced after few dates. So there is possibility of election fraud.” Few other respondents also indicated that results of elections are illegitimate because of violations and falsifications. As one respondent stated, “I was an observer myself. We wrote reports and made complaints, but violations continued to take place.” According to another respondent, results were not legitimate because

“the violations and criticisms are not taken seriously either by the regime or by the international observers.”

As the question asked about all elections from 1991 to the time of interviews (February 2010-April 2010), some respondents who generally pointed out that the results were illegitimate, suggested that certain elections were exceptions. A few respondents indicated that all election results were illegitimate except the 2005 presidential elections. For one respondent “last presidential elections [2009] and the parliamentary elections of 2007 were illegitimate.” A number of respondents indicated that elections results could be “partly” legitimate. Eight respondents did not explain what they mean by “partly”. However as I noted, some respondents explained “partly” in form of assumed percentages. One respondent said:

I do not know but we have to trust the results, and consider them legitimate. We should talk about it in order to bring up a good next generation, to give them political culture. I am aware that sometimes the declared results (98 percent turnout) sound unreal and unbelievable. I think normally around 70 percent real vote. It cannot be more.<sup>857</sup>

Overall, a significantly small number of respondents conceived the election results as fair as more than half of the total 140 respondents did not believe that election results were legitimate, which could, in fact, be read as an indication of the fact that these people did not find the election process itself as legitimate due to irregularities and those factors which have intervened with the fairness of elections as mentioned above. The main reason appears to be the interference of the authorities and the absence of an independent CEC. Probably one of the explanations of such perceptions is the general apathy and distrust in authorities, whose promises often remain only promises, as the answers to the previous questions indicated. Another explanation is a general perception of the state with its institutions, including the CEC which in the case with legitimate results plays very important role, as a

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<sup>857</sup> Another group of such responses specifically gave certain “percentages.” In this regard for example, for one respondent, “Less than 50 percent of results are legitimate.” For another respondent “20-30 percent of results are legitimate.” For one respondent “50 percent of results can be legitimate,” for another respondent “40 percent of results are legitimate,” for yet another respondent “20-30 percent of results are legitimate,” for one respondent “70 percent are legitimate,” and for one more respondent “50/50.”



“machine” that is totally under control of the leader and his regime. Thus, the perception is such that whatever result the leader prefers to see is achieved, using whatever methods available. And there is no way to escape such a scenario, because there is no “state” independent from the regime, and its leader in the eyes of the respondents. Such a perception at the same time indicates that leaders elected in illegitimate elections lack both legitimacy and real public support.<sup>858</sup> Moreover, there is a feeling that one vote does not make much of a difference. This again contributes to apathy.

#### **4.6 Perceptions of and Participation in the Referendums**

In addition to elections, referendums were also very important ways of political participation in Kyrgyzstan, which were initiated by the leaders mostly for constitutional amendments and as means of legitimizing various decisions. As such, their role and importance as seen by the respondents and their general attitude toward them also need to be analyzed. In this part, the answers given to the questions on referendums are analyzed in four sub-sections: 1) in terms of participations to referendums, 2) in terms of the awareness of the issues put on the agenda, 3) in terms of the relationship between referendums and democratization, and 4) in terms of the importance of referendums for the ordinary citizens.

##### **4.6.1 Participation in the Referendums**

When asked about whether they participated to the referendums, out of 140 respondents, only four respondents made no comment. More than half respondents (82 in total) indicated that they voted in referendums regularly. Majority of these respondents did not elaborate on their reasons of voting, answering briefly “yes” to the question, although some provided such reasons. For example, for few respondents, it was a civil duty; an opportunity to express their opinion on a particular issue; a political right to vote in referendums. One respondent said that he voted in referendums because it was an “important process.” Another respondent

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<sup>858</sup> Only one respondent mentioned tribalism as a factor preventing fair election campaigns. Other rare reasons mentioned by respondents include election fraud, disrespect for laws in general, absence of transparency.

indicated that he voted because he hoped that “his vote would be heard and it could change something.”

Almost half of all respondents indicated that they did not vote regularly in referendums. Out of this half, 35 did not provide any explanation. Among those who provided explanations, there were different reasons. For example, one respondent said “my vote was useless. I am frustrated in elections and I do not vote anymore.” Few respondents did not vote because for them their vote “means nothing.” Similarly, for one respondent, “everything is already decided, and questions are formulated in a stupid manner.” As for the questions put on referendums, a couple of respondents noted respectively that “questions are put incorrectly”<sup>859</sup> and “vaguely,” So there was not much point to vote. Again concerning the issues put on referendums, one respondent said “I intentionally did not vote, as the issues put on referendum were not representing the interests of the people.” For another respondent, “power-holders would push through their law anyway,” so it was not very meaningful to vote in a referendum. Another such opinion was given by one respondent who said that she did not want to vote as she knew that her vote “would not change anything.” One respondent indicated that he did not vote because “the referendum was a process that could be influenced [and] manipulated easier than elections.” For another respondent, the reason for not voting was a belief that the process was conducted in an “unfair” manner. Another respondent further suggested that “people lost hope in free and fair referendums.” For one respondent, voting is “just formality.” Few respondents did not vote because they believed that the results were already “predetermined.” One respondent did not vote because she did not trust the CEC and another respondent said she did not trust the regime. Another respondent expressed an interesting opinion regarding the whole process:

I think referendums are useless. It would be better if authorities use the public money spent for referendums, for the increase of retirement pensions.

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<sup>859</sup> As was described in the chapters on Akaev and Bakiev eras, the questions put on referendums were often confusing the voters. For example, several separate and independent issues with different nature and importance were put on the agenda of a single referendum and the voters were expected to say either “yes” or “no” on all these issues.

When one looks at the high levels of participation to referendums, it is possible to suggest that voting is a conventional or perhaps even a mechanical process that the respondents were used to from the Soviet era, despite the fact that for some respondents there was a feeling that their vote cannot make any difference, given that everything is already decided. Indeed, as was discussed in detail in the earlier chapters of the dissertation, all of the post-Soviet era referendums produced high rates of approval.

#### **4.6.2 Awareness of the Issues Raised in the Agenda**

When asked about whether they know the issue/issues put on the agenda of the referendums, only nine respondents made no comment.<sup>860</sup> As for the remaining respondents, many of them did not elaborate on the question, simply answering it with a single “yes,” “no” or “sometimes.”

Less than half (60 in total) indicated that they knew the issue/s. Many of these respondents said that they read about them and followed the political news about the process. One respondent stated that “Normally it was widely discussed in society.” Another respondent stated that the people looked at “the leaflets with amendments [written on them]” and yet another respondent suggested that the issues were learned from “the TV, radio and newspapers.” One respondent emphasized the availability of information put on the referendums saying that “it was easy to find [them] out from the mass media.” One respondent noted that she always knew the issue put on referendum and those issues never represented people’s interests.<sup>861</sup>

Almost half of all respondents, however, indicated that they did not know the issues put on the referendums when they went to vote. These respondents did not provide explanations on the topic, except a few. For one respondent “Sometimes people do

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<sup>860</sup> While asking this question, I intentionally showed a table of all referendums that were held in Kyrgyzstan since independence as well as the main issues of those referendums so that the respondents would be able to remember and decide if they had known these issues. It helped, as the respondents by looking at the table, either remembered the issues, or in some cases actually learned them!

<sup>861</sup> A kind of sarcastic opinion was expressed by one respondent: “Normally we know the issue and we know the result before referendum is conducted.”

not understand main point of questions in referendums.” One interesting opinion regarding this issue was described by another respondent as follows:

The regime has more instruments to influence referendum in comparison to civil society which could not stand against the authorities. Authorities have access to TV media channels, so they can agitate people to support the issues of referendum and people are persuaded, and they go and vote for these issues. People cannot know the details, loopholes and all subtleties of the issue put on referendum.

Another respondent explaining the reason of not knowing the issue of the referendum argued that “Normally the regime and the government does not inform us about their aims and what they want to decide through referendum.” A couple of respondents declared that they did not know the issues because they were not interested in referendums. For some other respondents, in Kyrgyzstan the referendums were mainly about the amendments to the constitution or the election code, and therefore not all citizens had a chance or the capability to scrutinize such a document. As one answer suggested, “mainly people are unaware about these questions. That is why it is easy to falsify results of referendums and elections.”

To conclude, it can be suggested that the respondents who responded positively to this question were those who constantly followed the political issues, and they were mostly politically active citizens, working in governmental organizations and state institutions as public servants. For others, issues put on the agenda of referendums seemed to be complicated. Less than half of the respondents had real awareness of the issues put on referendums, despite the fact that the government did inform the general public about these issues in order to raise the turnout. However, the independent media and the opposition had less opportunity to present an alternative point of view. Also, as the referendums were mainly about constitutional amendments related to balance of power between the executive and the legislature, many citizens were either not interested or not experts in the area to understand the issues.

### 4.6.3 The Relationships between Referendums and Democratization

In order to understand the perceptions of the respondents on the relationship between referendums and democratization, two questions were asked: “How do you evaluate the role of referendums in the process of democratization?” and “Do you think that referendums are important in order to strengthen presidential power?”

When asked to evaluate the role of referendums in the process of democratization, nine respondents made no comment and 23 respondents said “I do not know.”<sup>862</sup> One respondent noted “I cannot evaluate this issue because I do not possess enough knowledge on this issue.” Another respondent made an interesting comment and said the following: “I do not know. When we have poverty, it is not easy to have a debate on democratization.”

This attitude once again shows a similar tendency mentioned earlier: for ordinary citizens it was difficult to make evaluations on such important topics, and that referendums were not seen as directly related to or affecting the democratization process. Also, it can be suggested from the answers that people were basically pre-occupied with their everyday problems of socio-economic nature, so they expect mainly stability, development of job opportunities, increase in pensions and salaries that are seen as priorities for them at the moment.

Out of 140 respondents only about one-fourth indicated that referendums had a positive role in the process of democratization. For one respondent a referendum “was an instrument of implementation of democracy” and for another respondent “the fact of holding referendums was an indicator of democracy.” As such, the positive effect of referendums was related to their conceptualization as “tools” of democracy. According to one respondent, “referendums helped in the democratization of Kyrgyzstan because people understood that they were able to

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<sup>862</sup> The role of referendums in democratization was a complex question for the respondents to understand. The target group was the ordinary citizens and not the experts in political issues, so sometimes I had to explain what I meant by this question. Seven respondents provided rather unclear or indirect answers. For example, when asked about the role of referendums on a democratization process, one respondent said: “Is there any process of democratization?”

influence the decision-making process and policies ... [and] able to express their will.” A similar opinion was expressed by one respondent who suggested the following: “Democracy is voice of the people [and] referendum is the instrument of democracy.” Another respondent also noted that “During the referendums people express their will. This has to do with democracy.” Another type of explanation of the positive effect of referendums for democratization was expressed by one respondent: “Even if the power holders ‘secure’ the desired result, at least they know the real percentage, and to what extent people support the regime through votes in such referendums.”

Few respondents indicated that the role of referendums would be positive in the process of democratization in the country, only if they were conducted in a free and fair manner, which however, was not the case in Kyrgyzstan. According to one respondent for example:

referendums should be held, citizens should express their opinion on referendums. But referendums must be held in a free and fair manner. Only in that case democracy will be developing in Kyrgyzstan.

Another respondent further indicated that “If the question put on the referendum concerns the well-being of the people, then the role of referendum [in democratization] is positive.”

Several people indicated that referendums had no positive role or “no place” in the process of democratization and had rather a negative effect. These respondents provided various explanations. For one respondent, “Similar to other elections in the country, referendums are planned, thus they do not play a great role in democratization of the Kyrgyz Republic.” For another respondent, “Democratization process should take place through fundamental changes in the country, not through referendums. ... The referendums did not help democratization of the country.” A couple of respondents indicated that referendums were a “show” exhibiting the existence of democracy, but just for the sake of “looking democratic” and in fact not

being so.<sup>863</sup> Some respondents indicated that holding a referendum in Kyrgyzstan is “a waste of public money.” As one respondent noted:

In general referendums play a very important role in democratization, but in Kyrgyzstan referendums do not play any role as the result is predetermined, it is just waste of budget money, money of tax payers.

Another respondent also suggested that “In many cases there was no need to organize (spend a lot of public money) and conduct referendum because the result was obvious.”

Several other respondents referred to the referendums as convenient tools at the hand of the leaders who wanted to legitimize their regime. One respondent said that in theory the role of referendums was positive, unless “they become a method of legitimization of political decisions.” Theme of legitimacy was also touched upon by a couple of respondents, who respectively suggested that “Referendum is a method used by power holders to legitimize political decisions” and referendums are conducted “for a particular interest, not people’s interest.” One respondent also stated the following on the issue:

The Kyrgyz experience shows that whenever authorities organized a referendum, they legitimized their already taken decision. Moreover, every referendum expanded presidential powers. Therefore, they did not help us to democratize.

Likewise for a couple of respondents respectively, “referendums were used to legitimize political decisions” and they are simply means of “popular voting to legitimize any decision” of the leaders. Similarly for one respondent, “the results of referendum were useful only for the ruling elites [although] the process of referendum was useful for Kyrgyz citizens as an experience and indicator of misuse of referendum.” For another respondent “The role of referendums could have been very important for democratization of Kyrgyzstan, but in Kyrgyzstan a referendum is

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<sup>863</sup> As the results of referendums can be manipulated as well, they are no help in the democratization of the country.

[just] a farce, a solution to a problem of one person [that is, the leader].” Some respondents, such as this respondent, also stated that instead of helping the democratization process, referendums negatively influenced the democratization process as they were “used as tools to strengthen the president.”

One respondent evaluated referendums as follows: “I think in Kyrgyzstan people are not given chance to understand the proposed change and they vote blindly for a particular issue, therefore the role of referendums [in democratization] is negative.” Another respondent evaluated the referendum as “very unsatisfactory” because “[t]he question being put on the agenda of the referendum is always formulated in such a way that answering either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ will result in the desired outcome for the government.” Few respondents indicated that role of referendums in the democratization process was insignificant, without giving any explanation. For some other respondents, referendums had zero effect on democratization of the country. For example, one respondent stated that “Referendums play no role in democratization, as the regime legitimizes whatever decisions they want to legitimize.” Another respondent also admitting the absence of any effect of the referendums on the democratization process, suggested that “Referendums in Kyrgyzstan are always used to promote the interests of one person or his party.” Yet another respondent admitted that “Referendums do not play any role because there is no democracy.” likewise, “Referendums are being held, results are announced, but people’s needs and demands are not satisfied. So the role of referendums is useless.”

As was mentioned above, the second question on the relationship between referendums and democratization aimed at finding out whether the respondents believed that referendums were influential in strengthening the presidential power. Here, 24 respondents made no comment or said “I do not know.”<sup>864</sup> Nine respondents indicated that they were not sure. For example, one respondent suggested, “I am not sure. What I think is that people vote for something, but those in power twist it to suit

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<sup>864</sup> As I mentioned earlier, one the problems that I had faced during interviews, was the reluctance of the people to deliberate on their answers, mostly due to the unstable political atmosphere that existed just prior to the events of 7 April 2010, which resulted in ousting of Kurmanbek Bakiev. In general, there were not so many respondents who expressed their opinion on the questions in an elaborate manner.



their interests.” Another respondent also provided a similar answer: “Unfortunately in our country referendums are used for purposes having nothing common with peoples’ problems.”

Out of 140 respondents, more than half of all respondents (75 in total) indicated that referendums helped to strengthen the presidential power. The majority of these respondents who believed that referendums strengthened presidential power offered various explanations about how the presidents used referendums in order to strengthen their position. One such explanation was given by one respondent:

...through referendum the president creates an impression that citizens participate in decision-making. So the popularity of the president increases, his support base increases and citizens start believing that this president is really democratic and good.

Another condition used by the Kyrgyz presidents was noted by one respondent, who said that “People of Kyrgyzstan didn’t understand the meaning of referendum” so, by abusing this ignorance, the presidents could succeed to pass many issues to their benefits.

Some respondents suggested that “after each referendum the President makes his rule absolute and endless.” Similar opinions were expressed by the following answers: “We vote for a President, and whatever is done afterwards (referendums or policies) is done with the interest of the leadership in mind;” “Referendums are conducted to strengthen presidential power ... [and] are used exactly for this purpose;” “All referendums were conducted in order to strengthen and centralize the presidential power. The constitution was amended for this purpose;” “Referendums allowed the President not to be responsible judicially;” “With the help of referendums the president can say [the issue] was the choice of the people;” “The referendum is an opportunity to re-make the constitution to suit his [the president’s] interests.” Another respondent shared a similar view by using a proverb, indicating that the referendum is “a big play which is seen by one viewer (President), and the actors (citizens) know the end of this play.” One other respondent also stated that “Referendum is a big play like in the theater.” One respondent said that “The

president strengthened his powers to the extent that he does not need a referendum anymore.” For some other respondents, the referendums were useless, for others, they were associated with “falsity, brainwashing and fraud for the purpose of usurpation of power.” One respondent expressed his criticism as follows:

People were cheated; both regimes stated that referendums were held for the purpose of amendment of constitution, and that these amendments were necessary for constitutional reform. As a result, [however] the presidents got more and more powers, and democratization became questionable.

One other respondent described referendums in a sarcastic way, saying that “At present the role of referendums is mostly anti-democratic.”

For some respondents, however, referendums did not strengthen the powers of the president. Majority of these respondents did not provide any sound explanation of why referendums did not strengthen presidential power. However a few did. According to one respondent, “referendums were there to strengthen the power of the people rather than the president because through referendums, people can block the policies of the President or the parliament.” For a couple of respondents, by holding referendums, the president gets the opportunity to learn the real opinion of the people on a particular issue. As for a few other respondents, each referendum must be analyzed separately and it is wrong to generalize about all referendums which took place in independent Kyrgyzstan. According to these respondents, not all referendums were oriented toward strengthening of the presidential power, if one closely analyzes the issues in a referendum. As one respondent stated, for example, “If the issue would be related to the introduction of an unlimited number of terms for a president, then yes. I would vote against such an amendment.”

As was mentioned in the part on perceptions of democracy, relationship between referendums and democratization was perceived positively only by a small number of respondents. The main reason behind this was the idea that a link between the two is rather weak in Kyrgyzstan. Likewise, the absence of free and fair conduct of referendums was highlighted as a significant problem, making them less than real

tools of democracy and a method of direct expression of popular opinion. In fact one-third of the respondents saw no link between democracy and referendums, and even a negative effect of the democratization process, as they served mostly as ways of increasing presidential powers.

#### **4.6.4 The Importance of Referendums for the Ordinary Citizen**

In order to understand the importance of referendums for the respondents, they were asked two questions: “Do you think that it is meaningful to vote in a referendum?” and “Do you think that referendums are useful tools for the representation of your interests?”

When asked if it is meaningful to vote in referendums, out of 140 respondents, four respondents indicated that they are not sure or have doubts. Four more respondents made no comment. Half of all respondents indicated that it was meaningful to vote in referendums. Out of this half, 46 did not elaborate on the topic, just saying “yes.” For the others, there were some specific arguments. According to one respondent, for example, “through referendums we can show our view on government plans.” Six respondents indicated that through referendums they expressed their opinion (even negative opinion) on issues and it was important. As one respondent suggested, “... for [realizing] change people should go and vote. If they are politically inactive, they should not complain that nothing is changing. Each vote is important. The more votes are cast, the better our chances are.”

One respondent also said that it was meaningful to vote because there was a possibility that “maybe” her vote would be decisive. Another respondent suggested that an opinion must be expressed, even in the form of protest by “spoiling the bulletin.” It was further noted that “it is meaningful to vote in a referendum so that the power-holders know the real situation, whether the public supports them or not and how many people really come to cast their vote.” Another respondent said that “the more people go and vote, the lesser the chance for the incumbent regime to rig elections or referendum.” A few respondents indicated that it was meaningful to vote

because the future of the country was decided through decisions taken in referendums. As one respondent explained, a referendum “defines the future orientations for the development of the country.” Necessity to vote was stressed by one respondent as follows: “if everybody votes, then results would have an effect and reflect the interests of the people.” For another respondent, it is meaningful to vote as it helps to “feel a citizen of this country.” One respondent made similar comments:

First of all, it is the responsibility of every citizen to fulfill his civic duty. There is a possibility to influence the results of elections; but even if there are falsifications in the vote, they will be exposed in the future.

One respondent also expressed a similar opinion:

Normally people do not consider it meaningful to vote at referendums. They say that the result is already predetermined. This is not true, we should actively participate; and then the falsifications will be obvious.

As another respondent also suggested, “the more people go to cast a vote, the less are the chances for vote manipulation.”

Almost half of all respondents indicated that it was not meaningful to vote in referendums. Out of this half, an overwhelming majority (42 in total) did not elaborate on the topic, although some respondents provided their reasons. For a couple of respondents, it was not meaningful as the results would be falsified and for a few more respondents everything would be already decided and the “results would be predetermined.” The tendency to think that voting does not have any effect is also emphasized by one respondent, who believed that the government will make “its own decision” anyway. Another opinion related to role of regime in referendums was given by one respondent: “The initiative to organize a referendum is artificially created by the government. The referendum does not correspond to free expression of the elector’s will.” Another important reason of not-voting was manipulations. For another respondent it is not meaningful to vote because votes “will be manipulated. During the Akaev era it was [more] meaningful, because manipulations were carried

out to a lesser extent. Now it is 100 percent falsifications.” A related criticism of referendums was offered as follows:

...referendums are organized by those who want their issue (interest) to be promoted. I think yes, at least I would go and vote ‘no’. There is no meaning. Referendum is held by authorities just for the purpose to blame the people afterwards saying “Look you have voted for this!”

According to one respondent it was not meaningful to vote in referendums as “referendums do not have any influence on the political situation in Kyrgyzstan.” For one respondent, “there is no justice, no equality before the law, so it is not necessary to vote.” Another respondent suggested that voting in referendums would be meaningful “when all citizens would go and vote and there will be the opportunity to check if your vote was counted correctly.” For this respondent, the falsifications of votes should also be “punished severely.”

It was also pointed out that, since the citizens were normally unaware or misinformed about the issues put on the agenda of the referendums, “[b]y voting in the referendum, we often sign a death penalty. Recently, referendums became a part of political games.”

As it is clear from the answers given to this question, the respondents generally believe that voting in referendums can be meaningful, if there are no falsifications and violations, which make the results of referendums untrustworthy and illegitimate. The unreliable results seem to be the main reason of abstaining from voting for many respondents, as they try to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the way power-holders approach the referendums.

When asked whether the referendums were useful tools for representation of their interests, 16 respondents made no comment. Some respondents indicated that they were not sure or answered “maybe.” Out of 140 respondents, only several respondents indicated referendums as useful tools for representation of their interests: for three respondents, a referendum was a good instrument for citizens to express their own point of view; for one respondent, a referendum “is a very good

instrument which should be used by all citizens to change something in our country;” and for another respondent “Referendums [only] expressed her views when she voted in favor of the issue.” A few respondents indicated that referendum could serve as a tool for interest representation but only under certain conditions. For one respondent, “if the referendums are utilized properly, they are good ways of representation of the interest of the majority of the people.” For another respondent, they could represent people’s interests, if they are conducted in a free and fair manner, and for yet another respondent “if they are conducted “openly and according to law.”<sup>865</sup> One respondent further, “Referendums do not express my interests because everything is known before results are announced.” For one respondent the argument is “the offered changes do not represent the interests of the people.”

As it is seen, many respondents expressed the opinion that referendums would express their interests only if the results would be reliable. It can be concluded that though they are not against referendums in general, they do not trust the official results. Those respondents (70 in total) who asserted that referendums do not represent their interests believe that they often express interests of one person (the president) and other top level elites. A couple of respondents indicated that referendums represent their interests only in theory. One respondent expressed his opinion on the issue as follows: “The issue put on the referendum is always initiated by the regime, and it is conducted for enhancing the interests of the power holders. Again several respondents suggested that referendums are used as a tool to represent not citizens’ interests but rather the interests of a small group of people (the president, his immediate circle, and other top-level power-holders) or elite group’s interests. Therefore, people seem to be generally suspicious of the referendums as they did not improve the lives of the ordinary people. As such, every new initiative to start a referendum is seen as a new technique used by the leaders to advance their own interests, rather than the peoples’ interests. So, the respondents suggested that in theory a referendum is supposed to represent the people’s interests, but in Kyrgyzstan it does not.

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<sup>865</sup> This respondent sarcastically asked, “Yes, but whose interests?”

These responses indicated that a significantly low number of the respondents believed that referendums were helpful on the road to democratize the country. In other words, the respondents did not necessarily see a strong relationship correlating between holding referendums and democratization, as such; rather, the relationship between the two was evaluated as a weak one. The respondents who looked at referendums as tools of democracy, as methods of influencing decision-making, and as ways in which people could make their voices being heard, also pointed out that the necessity of the referendums to be conducted in a free and fair manner. Furthermore, according to these respondents, even if the results were manipulated, they could still be methods of letting the regime learn the opinion of the people, as they would know the “real results” before announcing them to the public in a distorted manner.

Overall, the respondents saw the referendums not being held for their own well-being, but for the benefit of the power-holders, as the decisions taken at the referendums were often not clearly explained to the public (though some respondents did not believe this was the case), and did not promote their aims of socio-economic development. It seems as if when the people do not see socio-economic development and improvement directly affecting their own lives, they do not care much about democratization, as long as their immediate needs are not being satisfied.

In general it can be said that some respondents considered referendums an indicator of democracy (as referendum is a tool of direct democracy), though some were quite skeptical about the link between the two. The overall opinion of those who were skeptical was that the authorities used referendums as a tool to legitimize their own decisions that were not in the interest of the people. Therefore, some respondents expressed lack of interest in referendums. In many interviews, only after I told my own opinion on how a referendum could be used as a tool of direct democracy, people accepted the idea that there could be such a link between democratization and referendums. In some other cases, however, people did not accept this idea at all. So it can be concluded that only less than one third of the respondents (35 in total) believed that referendums helped Kyrgyzstan to democratize. In general, there

seemed to be apathy about the referendums and an absence of any belief in their real contribution to democracy in the Kyrgyz context.

More than half of respondents believed that it was meaningful to vote in referendums. There were few reasons: expression of opinion, an opportunity to change something by voting in referendum. However as half of respondents who indicated that it was meaningful to vote in referendums abstained from explaining the reason, shows that probably they do not see the sound reason. Also voting was seen as a means of prevention of vote-manipulation. Almost half of respondents were of opposite opinion. Main reason named – falsification of results and predetermined results. Another important point made was that lack of awareness of the issues put on referendums, indicated by many respondents, may serve as a tool for regime to get a desired result. Therefore abstaining from voting seemed to be a lesser evil than going and voting for something you do not have expertise in. Also less than one third of respondents believed that referendums were a useful tool for representation of their interests.

This chapter looked into the responses under five related sections. In the first section the perceptions of Soviet experience in Kyrgyzstan and the consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the country was analyzed. The second looked at the perceptions of democracy and authoritarianism in terms of both their general meanings and in terms of their everyday practice in Kyrgyzstan. The third section was about the perceptions of leadership in general and perceptions of Akaev's and Bakiev's leadership qualities in particular. The fourth section analyzed the perceptions of and participation to elections (voting) and their role, importance and characteristics in Kyrgyzstan. The final section evaluated the perceptions of and participation to referendums and their role, importance and characteristics in Kyrgyzstan. In the Conclusion of the study these responses will be further analyzed from the perspective of the theoretical framework introduced in the Introduction.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This dissertation analyzed the failure of post-Soviet democratization in Kyrgyzstan by taking a comparative look at the periods of Askar Akaev (1991–2005) and Kurmanbek Bakiev (2005–2010), with a specific emphasis on how both leaders attempted to construct democratic legitimacy through the electoral process and how they were perceived by the Kyrgyz people based on the qualitative analysis of the field research conducted in the country. In this context the following questions were asked: (1) How did Akaev and Bakiev sought to legitimize their regimes? (2) How were the Akaev and Bakiev eras perceived by the citizens in terms of political legitimacy? (3) Which factors have been important in the citizens' perceptions of legitimacy regarding these two leaders and their policies? These questions are significant because political legitimacy is closely related to citizens' perceptions of their government's daily operations. Poor legitimacy contributes to fragility of regime and fragility of a state. Regular, free and fair elections (as well as referendums in the Kyrgyz case) can be considered essential for political legitimacy, within the framework of procedural (minimalist) definition of democracy, in which voters choose their representatives in free elections. I studied parliamentary and presidential elections as well as referendums assuming that these are the only routes to political participation in Kyrgyzstan for the majority of people. The analysis was made in five general parts: 1) Perceptions of the Soviet experience in Kyrgyzstan and the consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the country; 2) Perceptions of democracy and authoritarianism in terms of both their general meanings and in terms of their everyday practice in Kyrgyzstan; 3) Perceptions of leadership in general and perceptions of Akaev's and Bakiev's leadership qualities in particular; 4) Perceptions of and participation to elections (voting) and their role, importance and characteristics in Kyrgyzstan; 5) Perceptions of and participation to referendums and their role, importance and characteristics in Kyrgyzstan.

The presidencies of Askar Akaev and Kurmanbek Bakiev were analyzed in Chapter II and Chapter III respectively, by exploring the referendums and the parliamentary and presidential elections held during these periods. Both referendums and elections were among the necessary (albeit not sufficient) conditions of a formal or minimalist democracy on the one hand, and first steps of democratic transition that would initiate a process of development of democracy ending in consolidation on the other. However, as was elaborated in these chapters, in the case of Kyrgyzstan neither referendums, nor parliamentary and presidential elections did serve as real mechanisms of democratic development. Instead of being the first steps of democratic transition resulting in consolidation of democracy, they mostly served as tools of increasing presidential powers, curtailing the scope of parliamentary action and contributing to a shift toward authoritarian rule. In Chapter II, first, a brief description of the events that led to the adoption of the 1993 Constitution as well as the basic characteristics of this constitution were given. Then, several referendums that introduced a variety of changes to the original text of the 1993 Constitution and the parliamentary and presidential elections held during Akaev's presidency were described. In Chapter III, referendums and the parliamentary and presidential elections held during the Bakiev era were analyzed and then comparison and discussion of two presidencies was provided. It is shown that the referendums as well as the parliamentary and presidential elections held during the Akaev and Bakiev eras in general did not contribute to the development of democracy and/or legitimate political rule in Kyrgyzstan. Instead they contributed to the emergence of a particular type of "hybrid regime" that is "competitive authoritarianism" in which "formal democratic institutes are widely viewed as the principle means of obtaining and exercising political authority."<sup>866</sup>

When we analyze the Kyrgyz case within the context of the relevant literature and the theoretical framework of the study, it is possible to suggest that certain concepts and arguments drawn from this literature are useful to analyze and understand the

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<sup>866</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism", *Ibid.*, p. 52; Larry Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes" *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), April 2002, pp. 21-35; Daniel Calingaert, "Election Rigging and How to Fight It", *Journal of Democracy*, 17(3), July 2006, p. 138.

Kyrgyz case. In this context three highly interrelated conceptual frameworks can be linked to the Kyrgyz case: 1) the importance given by the transition literature to elections and formal institutions; 2) the debate on the issue of political legitimacy; 3) the importance of elites in the process of democratic transition. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, all of the three frameworks are interconnected with each other, that is, they are influenced by each other.

One of the major themes of the transition literature is about the key role that electoral processes play in democratization of a country. It is suggested that one of the major conditions of a real democracy is having free and fair elections. In other words, for democratic transition to be complete, governments must come to power as a result of free and popular vote. However coming to power through democratic means is not the end of transition process; leader must also leave office through democratic means. In Kyrgyzstan it did not happen. Election took place but they were not competitive.

The transition literature also suggested that formal institutions play an important role in the process of democratic transition. However, in the Kyrgyz case, what is generally observed is the weakness of formal institutions and/or the dominance of informal ones such as family and kinship structures, traditions, social norms and tribal affiliations. It was suggested that the dominance of formal or informal institutions determines whether the country made a successful transition to democracy or not.<sup>867</sup> In that sense, Kyrgyzstan has not made a transition to democracy, because informal institutions are still prevalent and there is weak rule of law. Kyrgyzstan inherited the Soviet legacy in the form of dominance of informal institutions in political life, which impeded the establishment of rule of law and democratization, and was used by the regime as an instrument for achieving personal objectives, goals and interests as well as personal likes and dislikes reflected in the cadre policy. Therefore, informal institutions in Kyrgyzstan function in a context of weak state structure with poorly established governance structures. This is a kind of

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<sup>867</sup> See Vladimir Gel'man, "Post-Soviet Transition and Democratization: Toward Theory Building", *Ibid.*, pp.92-93

“perverse institutionalization”<sup>868</sup> observed during transition from authoritarianism to democracy that refers to an institutionalized pattern of behavior that did not conform to those required for democratic consolidation. Such patterns of behavior include many perverse aspects beginning from appointment and ending with decision-making. In the Kyrgyz case such patterns of behavior include regime’s use of administrative resource at elections, tutelary powers of the president in the sphere of appointments, reserved domains in policy-making such as the president’s right to initiate referendum, and establishment of the Central Agency for Development, Investment and Innovation of the Kyrgyz Republic, which was headed by Bakiev’s son Maksim (this body, which managed all foreign investments flowing to the country, was not elected). So, as formal institutions do not perform their function, there is a dependence of masses upon elite patronage. Therefore elites are important for analysis of Kyrgyzstan.

Institutionalization also refers to “the process by which a practice or organization becomes well established and widely known, if not universally accepted” and “party-system institutionalization means that actors entertain clear and stable expectations about the behavior of other actors, and hence about the fundamental contours and rules of party competition and behavior.”<sup>869</sup> In Kyrgyzstan political parties were not institutionalized as they had no roots in society. As the Kyrgyz political system was not institutionalized, the major political actors (such as president) did not always accord legitimacy to parties. Neither elites nor the public, as the responses indicated, really believed in parties as a necessary and desirable institution.

It has also been suggested that for a successful transition there must be a sufficient agreement about political procedures to produce an elected government.<sup>870</sup> This precondition for a real democracy was met to a certain extent in Kyrgyzstan in the early years of independence, especially with the adoption of the Declaration of State

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<sup>868</sup> Perverse institutionalization undermines working of democracy though nondemocratically generated tutelary powers, reserved domains of authority and policy making, and major discrimination in the electoral process. (Samuel Valenzuela, “Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings: Notion, Process, and Facilitating Conditions”, in S. Mainwaring, G. O’Donnell and J.S. Valenzuela eds. *Issues in democratic Consolidation*, pp.62-69)

<sup>869</sup> Scott Mainwaring “Party Systems in the Third Wave”, *Journal of Democracy*, 9(3), 1998 p.69

<sup>870</sup> Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Ibid., p.3

Sovereignty in 1991, which laid the principle of rule of law: the conduct of state power on the basis of separation of powers into the legislative, executive and judicial branches; political plurality, popular election of the president and the legislative body. Later, the 1993 Constitution laid the foundation to produce an elected government. Another important condition was related to the *de facto* authority of the government “to generate new policies”<sup>871</sup> After being elected in 1991, Akaev had the opportunity to generate certain policies to introduce transition to democracy, including the principle of separation of power among the three branches of legislature, executive and judiciary, at least in the very beginning. However, as was analyzed in the dissertation, later, through referendums, the separation of powers principle was damaged.

The second relevant issue that needs to be analyzed within the specific context of Kyrgyzstan is related to the discussions on political legitimacy. This debate is also closely connected to the electoral processes as by holding elections, the regimes tried to build democratic legitimacy. In other words elections are seen as the *sine quo non* of any democratic rule. However if elections are not accompanied with democratic accountability to the general public (as it happened in Kyrgyzstan) then there will be no value in such elections.<sup>872</sup> As such, elections will cease to carry out the functions expected of them in a democratic state. So the transitional paradigm becomes “inaccurate”<sup>873</sup> as countries may “have taken on a smattering of democratic features but show few signs of democratizing much further and are certainly not following any predictable democratization script.”<sup>874</sup>

In Kyrgyzstan, as “in many transitional countries, regular elections are held, but political participation beyond voting remains shallow and governmental accountability is weak.”<sup>875</sup> This was also accepted by a majority of the respondents

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<sup>871</sup> Ibid. p.3

<sup>872</sup> Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm, Ibid., pp. 6-7

<sup>873</sup> Ibid p.14

<sup>874</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7

<sup>875</sup> Ibid., p.15

who pointed this issue as a major problem. Therefore, this problem has a particular relevance in the Kyrgyz case, as the leaders have no real accountability and the people have no significant mechanism of political participation via strong opposition parties. As was analyzed on the part on elections and political parties, many respondents pointed out that in their country, only the presidential parties have a real chance of winning the elections.

Political legitimacy is also linked with transition and consolidation of democracy. It was argued that legitimization depends on the perceptions of effectiveness and efficiency in the governing process.<sup>876</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, economic stagnation and deterioration of living standards, as well as economic mismanagement did not contribute to the strengthening of regime's legitimacy. Both Akaev and Bakiev enjoyed political legitimacy as a result of elections or referendums, but only for a limited period of time mostly due to ineffective governance. In other words, they could no longer maintain legitimacy, which is key factor for effective rule.<sup>877</sup> Describing positive images of Akaev, for example, many respondents remembered his first years as fruitful, encouraging and democratic. But as soon as his government proved to be ineffective in solving every-day problems of social and economic nature, and started being perceived as ineffective, his positive image slowly disappeared. The same can be said about Bakiev, as several respondents pointed out that in the beginning things seemed to be promising, as Akaev was removed, and Bakiev had come to power with new promises and hopes. Soon however, again as was indicated by the responses, bad governance, corruption and other practices such as nepotism, emphasized in subsection on Bakiev in Chapter III, led to his downfall.

In the Kyrgyz case, it is appropriate to separate the two presidential periods of Akaev and Bakiev, both of which had their own particular "stages." In other words, the two presidencies showed that the sequence of the transitional stages is not neatly

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<sup>876</sup> Philippe Schmitter, "The Consolidation of Political Democracies: Processes, Rhythms, Sequences and Types" in Geoffrey Pridham (ed.) *Transitions to Democracy: Comparative Perspectives from Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe*, p.547

<sup>877</sup> Ibid.

following each other.<sup>878</sup> This was also mentioned by the respondents who made a distinction between the two periods of Akaev and Bakiev, while they were talking about post-independence era in Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, when they were asked how elections were held in their country, again some automatically referred to either the Akaev or the Bakiev era, making a comparison between the two leaders. Likewise, some respondents while describing their perceptions of the Akaev era divided his 15 years rule into several periods, focusing first on the early years full of reforms; then a period of deterioration and slowing of reforms as well as lack of implementation of promised policies; and finally authoritarian practices. It must also be noted that often referendums and decisions pushed through referendums marked the beginning or the end of a particular period in the presidency of Akaev.

As was mentioned above, the third relevant issue described in the literature on transition was related to the major role of elites in their attempt to legitimize their regimes. This argument holds true for Kyrgyzstan, because on several occasions, both Akaev and Bakiev attempted to demonstrate democratic practices such as organization of press-conferences, meeting with the electorate in provinces, organizing meetings (or round tables) to be held with the media, opposition groups and the NGOs as ways of providing legitimacy. However, many Kyrgyz citizens were not sure that the elections were free and fair, so they had doubts whether the elected leader or parliamentarians possess legitimacy. That is one of the major issues focused by many respondents. Furthermore, people do not trust the results announced by the Central Election Commission. As was seen by the responses given to the questions on elections and referendums, the distrust to CEC is stressed over and over again, and is seen as the main reason of unfair elections. As these responses further indicated, the people do not see the results of elections producing legitimate outcomes.

Furthermore, in the case of Kyrgyzstan, since the leaders do not seem to think that it is very necessary to foster democratic traditions, their rule is less legitimate and consequently politically weak and unstable. Responses showed that both Akaev and Bakiev regimes were perceived by the people as ineffective, undemocratic and hence

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<sup>878</sup> Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm", *Ibid.*, p.15

not supported. Ineffective because infrastructure (the roads, power plants, hospitals and schools) are not renovated and there is a brain drain as skilled people leave the country to find a better life. Akaev and Bakiev made little effort to maintain or replace either of these two losses, and funds allocated for this purpose have largely been eaten up by corruption. Thus legitimacy could not be secured through economic means. Respondents blamed Akaev and Bakiev for the ineffective use of resources and funds earmarked for reforms, education, training and maintenance. Akaev's power usurpation and elimination of political opposition combined with ineffective governing which resulted in the deterioration of economic conditions made Akaev an undesired leader, a leader who does not work for the people. Therefore, especially after 2000, many of the former Akaev's allies took their support back. Bakiev also failed to gain the support of both elites and the people, and because of authoritarian practices and bad economic conditions, his government was also overthrown. Respondents indicated that they were very optimistic about Bakiev but their hopes were not realized, as his promises were not fulfilled. As a result, just like Akaev, Bakiev too was ousted.

Related to these developments, Mainwaring's predictions seem to be relevant for Kyrgyzstan, in the sense that "if commitment to democracy does not emerge over time, democracy is in trouble."<sup>879</sup> Unfortunately, even after twenty years of independence, elite commitment to democracy has not emerged, and prospects for democracy in Kyrgyzstan are gloomy. Respondents' perceptions of democracy and its prospects in Kyrgyzstan also showed lack of confidence in the leaders' commitment to democracy and consequent lack of belief in viability and applicability of democracy in Kyrgyzstan, regardless of their general positive opinion about democracy as in theory.

In Kyrgyzstan, the decision to democratize or not to democratize was in the hands of political leaders, that is, the presidents. For example, in the post-Soviet era, referendums were always initiated by the presidents. The constitution was also shaped under the strong influence of the presidents. Because the Kyrgyz people have

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<sup>879</sup> Mainwaring, Scott, "Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues," in S. Mainwaring, G. O'Donnell and J. S. Valenzuela. eds. *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, p.307



not had much experience in democratic politics, and opposition was also weak, major political decisions were shaped by leaders. It can therefore be argued that leaders' role in the transition process was detrimental. O'Donnell and Schmitter argued that leaders may postpone democratization, saying that the country is not ready for democracy.<sup>880</sup> According to this, the independent country may need a strong leader, as it does not have enough democratic experience and has weak political parties, which make it unprepared for competitive politics. This is how leaders may try to justify their stay in power for long periods of time. Especially in Central Asia, the leaders highlighted certain achievements such as multi-ethnic peace and stability. In Kyrgyzstan, in the first years, Akaev also used some of these justifications as reasons of delaying democratization of the country, by which he tried to justify his own policies. Authoritarian leaders may "routinely insist that their states are democracies, although they often attach qualifying words to indicate the supposed distinctiveness of their systems - sovereign democracy, democracy in formation, or managed democracy."<sup>881</sup> Both Akaev and Bakiev in their speeches often asserted that in Kyrgyzstan democracy is in formation or in transformation.

Therefore as elites in Kyrgyzstan had no real commitment to democracy their rule turned out to be more and more authoritarian. The leaders showed patterns of "competitive authoritarianism"<sup>882</sup> especially after 1996, when "administrative resources" started being abused by those in power for their own purposes. Unequal access to state institutions, resources and the media during elections was also discussed in literature as "unequal playing field."<sup>883</sup> It was seen as important impediments to democratization and as "an increasingly important means of sustaining authoritarian rule."<sup>884</sup> Use of administrative resource which was so often mentioned by the respondents is exactly what Levitsky and Way refer to by using the

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<sup>880</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, p.15

<sup>881</sup> Arch Puddington, "A Third Year of Decline," *Journal of Democracy*, 20(2), April 2009, pp. 105-106

<sup>882</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism", p.52

<sup>883</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field" *Journal of Democracy*, 21(1), January 2010, p.57

<sup>884</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67. When these conditions exist and incumbent or the regime does not allow other parties or candidates the access to as state institutions, resources and the media, there is "unequal playing field." (p.57)

term unequal playing field. Spread of particularism of incumbent which especially becomes obvious during elections, undermines democracy itself. Particularism is a result of incumbent's desire to hold power as long as possible. Levitsky and Way identify three ways of particular importance: access to resources, media access and uneven access to the law. Moreover authors believe that unequal playing field "enables autocrats to retain power without sacrificing international legitimacy - effectively". It was also argued that "Although a skewed playing field may be less visible than fraud or repression, it can be equally, if not more, damaging to democratic competition... [and] where oppositions lack reasonable access to resources and the media, even clean elections are markedly unfair."<sup>885</sup> As was discussed in detail in Chapter II, after 1996, the media institutions started to suffer from various attacks from government bodies, oppositional candidates were harassed, intimidated or detained, and electoral results were widely manipulated. Such incidents took place in Kyrgyzstan during all presidential and parliamentary elections as well as referendums. Responses given in the part on perceptions of democracy and authoritarianism in terms of both their general meaning and in terms of their everyday practice also indicated the existence of a variety of features of competitive authoritarianism in Kyrgyzstan. The specific feature of this approach suggests that on the surface democratic rules are not violated and elections are regularly held.<sup>886</sup> However the regime uses state agencies to suppress opposition. This feature is applicable in Kyrgyzstan as regime demonstrated that democratic rules are followed but in reality they are not. In other words, whatever was proclaimed by the regime for the international community was not what was happening in reality. As was elaborated in detail in this study, the presidents used state resources and agencies to get rid of their critics and to weaken them. Responses given on Akaev and Bakiev as well as in the part on elections also indicated frequent use of administrative resource and state agencies for various purposes, including the elimination of opposition in all of the regularly held elections as major deficiencies of the system.

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<sup>885</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way "Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field", *Ibid.* p.61

<sup>886</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53

The term superpresidentialism, is also a very relevant phenomenon that can be observed in independent Kyrgyzstan, because the president was constitutionally placed above all the other branches of state, and as “the guarantor of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic”<sup>887</sup> he could propose changes to the constitution any time. Furthermore, the president could legislate by decree and dissolve the parliament. Mainly, superpresidentialism implies concentration of power in the hands of president, and as such it “undermines democratization.”<sup>888</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, the system initially was not superpresidential, however through a series of constitutional amendments, the presidents gained so much power that the system resembled more and more to a superpresidential system. Therefore, what we saw in Kyrgyzstan was not consolidation of democracy but consolidation of authoritarian rule. The various characteristics of superpresidentialism, such as a large apparatus of presidential power that exceeds other agencies in size and in resources, legislation by presidential decrees, de facto or de jure control of the president on the power of the purse, no possibility of repealing presidential decrees by the parliament, and a judiciary that cannot check presidential prerogatives or even abuse of power as it is controlled totally by the president<sup>889</sup> were all observed in the country. These characteristics were also frequently mentioned by the respondents in the parts on Akaev and Bakiev.

Likewise patronal presidentialism, shaped by elite contestation and consolidation, is also a relevant concept for Kyrgyzstan. In patronal presidentialism “the president depends on the elites for implementing decisions and delivering votes; while the elites depend on the president for resources and/or the continuation in their posts.”<sup>890</sup> Cyclical phases of elite contestation and consolidation were detrimental in Kyrgyzstan for the presidents to stay in power. This was and is evident in Kyrgyzstan’s post-independence history. For example, some of Akaev’s former supporters consolidated with his opponents and supported Bakiev, even held high positions in his government. Patronal presidentialism is also valid for Kyrgyzstan

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<sup>887</sup> Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 42(2)

<sup>888</sup> Steven Fish “The Dynamic of Democratic Erosion” in Richard D. Anderson, et al, p.54

<sup>889</sup> Ibid., p.69

<sup>890</sup> Henry Hale “Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia”, Ibid., p.138

because the president is like a “patron” who wields a high degree of informal power based on widespread patron-client relationships and exercises political authority “primarily through the selective transfers of resources rather than formalized institutional practices, idea-based politics, or generalized exchange, as enforced through the established rule of law.”<sup>891</sup> This kind of informal transfers of resources were very widely used by both Akaev and Bakiev. According to Hale, cyclical phases of elite contestation and consolidation are defined by elite expectations about the future, the so called “lame-duck syndrome” that precipitated elite defection from the president when elites feel that president may leave office. This was exactly what happened in Kyrgyzstan just few months before the toppling of the Akaev regime. Majority of so-called leaders of the Tulip Revolution left Akaev’s team shortly before the revolution. Moreover, in Kyrgyzstan, political elites do not have strong ideological basis, so they move from one political block to another (or from pro-government camp to oppositional camp) looking for a better position in order to have access to the limited resources available in the country. As was explained in the part on democracy and authoritarianism (particularly on sub-section on multi-party system) and in the part on elections, the respondents also focused on this factor and suggested that ideological basis of leaders and political parties was lacking and even absent in their country and that the only motivation of the political leaders was self-enrichment.

As was mentioned by several respondents, weakness of formal institutions was also seen in the perception of the leader being the major, dominant figure determining the fate of the regime, rather than the political institutions and the legal framework. It can be also added that formal institutions could not occupy any serious place in peoples’ minds because the presidents hold a stronger place. Furthermore in the part on elections, the leaders were indicated by the respondents as being more important than institutions such as political parties that are not seen institutionalized political actors with their own principles and ideology. In Kyrgyzstan as institutionalization was limited because a political party was only a personal instrument of a particular leader or politician. Leaders did not allow parties to grow and become autonomous

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<sup>891</sup> Ibid.

vis-à-vis individuals, in other words be institutionalized. Therefore parties could not be rooted in society because they were and they are personalized. This can be seen as one of the reasons of failed or “incomplete”<sup>892</sup> transition in the country. Therefore the Kyrgyz case with its uninstitutionalized parties, falls into the group of inchoate party systems<sup>893</sup> as reflected in the answers of the respondents claiming not to possess a clear party preference because “personalities rather than party organizations dominate the political scene.”<sup>894</sup> This was also indicated by respondents and it can also be argued that in the case of Kyrgyzstan, in personalized rule mechanisms of political accountability were weak.

Again as was indicated in the part on elections, the respondents perceived institutions as tools that serve the leader increase his power, such as the CEC which was a “machine” that is totally under control of the leader and his closest political circle. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that in Kyrgyzstan the reason of weakness of formal institutions is not only the strength of informal ones, but also in a belief that institutions operate totally under the command of a leader, not on the basis of established rules which exist independently of the leader.

As both Akaev and Bakiev made projected intentions of adopting a democratic model, they used democratic means (such as referendums) whenever a particular decision had to be made. However neither of them did realize (and did consider) other democratic conditions, such as political responsibility and accountability. Responses on the part of perception of democracy and authoritarianism frequently focused on this as a major deficiency. In that sense, there seems to be a total overlap with Nodia’s observation that in a gray zone there are “many other countries where most people acknowledge the presence of deep structural impediments to democracy, but embrace it as a long-term goal nonetheless ... Their major characteristics today are uncertainty and a sense of failure ... both elites and the public agree that their

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<sup>892</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way “Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field”, *Ibid.*, p.64

<sup>893</sup> Scott Mainwaring “Party Systems in the Third Wave”, p.69

<sup>894</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75. Probably the explanation of absence of clear party preference among respondents is that long communist rule made it more difficult for new political parties to take place in people’s minds.

regimes are unsteady, unfinished, and unconsolidated.”<sup>895</sup> Indeed the responses support this as well. For example, on perceptions of democracy, the majority of respondents, while evaluating the applicability of a multi-party system in their country, indicated that the system does not work properly in their own country, although they looked at it as an ideal, similar to their general ideas about democracy.

In short, therefore, the transition approach seems to have limited explanatory power for Kyrgyzstan, because it does not focus on the necessity of limiting the executive power by the principle of checks and balances among the three branches. That was among the main reasons of shifting to authoritarian practices in the country. Unless those mechanisms for the prevention of concentration of executive power are institutionalized, transition to democracy cannot be successful. This was frequently mentioned by the respondents as the part on Akaev and Bakiev indicated. Furthermore, the transition approach does not emphasize the importance of the constitution and the rule of law. In Kyrgyzstan, the constitution was changed easily and frequently, according to the wishes of the leaders, and there was no mechanism of preventing this, because neither the judiciary nor the parliament *de jure* had any power to do this. Mainly, the transition literature overemphasizes the termination of authoritarian rule; however, as it does mention the reversibility of democratization, it is only partially useful for understanding the Kyrgyz case.

The debate about the failure of democratic transition is more applicable to the case of Kyrgyzstan, especially when the “fragility [and] weakness”<sup>896</sup> of the Kyrgyz process of democratic transition is concerned, as there were several factors that negatively affected this process, such as the attitudes of Akaev and Bakiev, their use of referendums and elections as ways of increasing their own political power, and oppression of the opposition. Many respondents made similar remarks in the parts on democratization and Akaev’s and Bakiev’s presidencies. For example, as was elaborated in the part on perception of democracy in Kyrgyzstan, respondents believed in potential positive aspects of democratic system, but they did not see

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<sup>895</sup> Ghia Nodia “The Democratic Path,” *Ibid.* p.18

<sup>896</sup> Jean Grugel, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction*, p.4

democracy working properly in their country. Also a major skepticism about the possibility of transition and further consolidation of democracy in Kyrgyzstan was expressed by one third of respondents. This was because of various factors including irresponsible government, corruption, lack of rule of law, tribal and feudal practices in the spheres of appointments, and decision-making processes at all levels of government. Further as research findings showed, a number of respondents indicted Akaev's violations of democratic principles and a shift toward authoritarianism. The vivid example of this was when Akaev violated the constitution and ran for a third presidential term in 2000. As it can be seen in the part on perceptions of Akaev in Chapter IV, Akaev's authoritarian practices undermined the democratic transition process through attacks on opposition, constitutional amendments and pressure on independent media and NGOs. In the part on perception of Bakiev in Chapter IV, it was also indicated that Bakiev started out well, and some democratic practices began to be implemented but later freedom of speech was suppressed, and Bakiev's regime ended up to be a dictatorship. Also as findings indicated, the respondents saw Bakiev's regime as rather undemocratic, taking the country away from democratic transition toward authoritarianism or dictatorship, through his policies limiting freedom of speech, suppressing civil society and oppositional parties and politicians.

When the answers given by the respondents are analyzed, it is possible to suggest that between 1991 and 2010, there have always been several problems in the process of transition to democracy in Kyrgyzstan, including the non-democratic history and tradition of the country, specific political culture based on power and patronage, existence of personalized power and clan-based allegiance, strong tribalistic patterns of political loyalty, person-oriented politics, ideological vacuum, lack of alternatives to incumbents, poor living conditions. Non-democratic history includes both the Soviet past and pre-Soviet period.

Responses indicated that part of citizens miss the Soviet Union, feel nostalgia about the Soviet past which means they still positively looks at their undemocratic past. Another obstacle is political culture which as responses showed is still not ready to full embrace democratic values. Personalized politics, as many responses indicated is

so-widespread that political parties are known for their leader's name and clan, and not for their ideology or program. Ideological vacuum can also be seen as a problem because it allowed both Akaev and Bakiev to attempt to persuade both the electorate and the Western actors by repeated proclamations of democracy that their aim is rapid reforms and democratization. This rhetoric of democratization was used as means when it was proclaimed in the right discourse. Meanwhile this rhetoric was not producing results so obviously it was not surprising that some people stopped believing in possibility of democracy in Kyrgyzstan or even started thinking bad about democracy. Finally lack of alternatives to both Akaev and Bakiev, during their respective eras, was seen in the absence of real political competition (struggle) especially during Akaev era, due to use of administrative resource, rigged elections and pre-determined results.

These problems have prevented the country from realizing even the minimalist or formal democracy. It can be inferred from the answers that one major reason why a successful transition could not be realized has a lot to do with the attitudes of Akaev and Bakiev, both of whom were ousted by the people. These leaders unsuccessfully attempted to legitimize their rule through holding regular but non-competitive elections and referendums, portraying these two *sine qua non* conditions of a minimalist democracy as important tools of further democratization. Despite the fact that elections and referendums are *really* the major tools of democratization, in the case of Kyrgyzstan (as in other Central Asian countries) they failed to contribute to a successful transition to democracy, leave aside consolidation. Although they are *sine qua non* prerequisites of a democratic order, in Kyrgyzstan they turned out to be tools of legitimizing an undemocratic rule and authoritarian practices resulted in the expansion of presidential powers and consolidation of authoritarian and personalistic rule instead of democracy. In other words, they were used (or rather abused) as reasons *not to democratize* the system. Consequently, they failed to establish a legitimate political regime in Kyrgyzstan.

When we look at these elections and referendums, we see similar methods being used in terms of oppression of other candidates and/or parties, distortions and the



manipulations of results, and violations of existing rules and regulations. Especially during campaigning and election processes it is common to observe illegal use of state resources, mobilization of state employees, use of government-owned vehicles to travel to campaign rallies, use of state enforcement agencies (such as *SNB*) for repression of opponents, attacks on oppositional newspapers, journalists and leaders. In addition, incumbents gained significant advantage through their dominance of the CEC, Constitutional Court and other governmental bodies. As it was already mentioned, Akaev and Bakiev both tried to stay in power through rigged elections, which eventually challenged their legitimacy. Indeed when Akaev came to power in 1990 he inherited a system in which the leader had access to state resources, as private sector was in embryonic condition. Other actors did not have equal resources to compete with Akaev neither in 1995 nor 2000 presidential elections. Kyrgyzstan's economic underdevelopment created the conditions for a leader to use state resources and inability of opposition to accumulate substantial resources for real competition. In Kyrgyzstan both leaders Akaev and Bakiev, during their presidencies had significant advantage, as several respondents indicated, who mentioned that the incumbents could use public employees and state resources for election campaigns and powerfully shape media behavior.

As such, rather than contributing to the establishment of a legitimate, democratic order, these elections and referendums turned out to be useless attempts with their "pre-determined" outcomes. Paradoxically, they actually resulted in the loss of legitimacy both for Akaev and Bakiev. As such there was a reverse relationship in terms of elections and referendums on the one hand and establishing a legitimate political order on the other. In other words undemocratic and illegal ways were utilized for these seemingly democratic elections and referendums. The leaders attempted to create their own legitimacy themselves by imposing these elections and referendums from above, without any progress towards real democratization. So these democratic tools did not work and the two leaders were ousted following civilian unrest due to many factors including deterioration of socio-economic

conditions, authoritarian practices, and inability to establish a democratic transfer of power.<sup>897</sup>

On the part of the Kyrgyz people, therefore, it may be possible to observe that they developed a general mistrust toward both Akaev and Bakiev, after it became clear that they would manipulate democratic means for their own undemocratic purposes; use/abuse their power and administrative resources, the media and all other tools of minimalist democracy for enhancing their own power. This distrust on the part of the people to these leaders would eventually lead to their own downfall. People no longer believed in them.

One other major point that needs to be indicated is related to the discrepancy between theory and practice felt by the respondents in terms of Akaev's and Bakiev's words and actions. This discrepancy could be seen in all questions about democracy, leadership, elections and referendums on the one hand and their everyday practice in Kyrgyzstan on the other. It is obvious that for a majority of respondents regardless of ages, occupations, *oblasts*, and gender, there is a general tendency to have faith in democracy but not in its Kyrgyz version in which elections are held but the results are almost always pre-determined. There emerged distrust, skepticism, cynicism and sometimes anger towards the actual democratic experience in the country. In other words, despite the fact that there is a strong belief in democracy as an ideal and as a desired political regime, and there is an increased awareness on the importance of elections and referendums in bringing out real democracy, there is also some level of hopelessness in terms of its real applicability in Kyrgyzstan.

This perhaps became more of an issue when we take into account the fact that both Akaev and Bakiev had the support and trust of the majority of the people when they first came to power, employing a democratic rhetoric in order to further legitimize their rule. Furthermore, despite the fact that their methods turned out to be less and

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<sup>897</sup> Both leaders, Akaev and Bakiev failed to secure peaceful transfer of power. Instead they attempted either to re-shape the constitution and have their children in parliament or establish mechanisms to ensure their rule to continue, even in cases when they are unable to fulfill their functions (for example due to bad health). A clear example of this was the *Prezidentskoe Soveshanie* (Presidential Council), which was established by Bakiev, the members of which were not elected but appointed by the president. This council had the power to elect a new president if the incumbent one is incapacitated.

less democratic, they continued to use this rhetoric. That may have also resulted in an increased awareness on the part of the people in terms of necessity of further democratization on the one hand and lack of real intention on the part of their leaders to realize this ideal on the other, resulting in frustration.<sup>898</sup>

This frustration, when combined with the lack of revenues from the sale of natural resources that could be at least partially transformed to people (as in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan), the leaders and their regimes further lost their credibility and legitimacy. Being used to the social services network of the Soviet era, the transition to democracy was especially hard on the resource-poor Kyrgyzstan. For the ordinary Kyrgyz citizens therefore, neither Akaev nor Bakiev could succeed to provide any real improvement in their lives in terms of economic wealth and democratic rights. When democratic rhetoric failed “to bring food to the table” the discrepancy between democracy as a rhetoric and actual authoritarian rule as an everyday practice became more obvious and paradoxical, resulting in the downfall of both of these leaders.

In general this study aimed to contribute to existing literature on post-Soviet transition through exemplifying the Kyrgyz case by a field research conducted during a turbulent time for the country in terms of political change and economic crisis, which analyzed the ordinary people’s perceptions of political institutions (president, parliament, elections), regimes (Akaev and Bakiev), and notions such as political legitimacy, leadership, stability and democratization. The dissertation showed that both of the former presidents of Kyrgyzstan had the basic desire to remain in office and retain power, by using (or rather abusing) referendums and elections as democratic means. Presidential hegemony, a clear sign of which was “winning” 80 percent and more of popular vote, was revealing itself through authoritarian practices which instead prevented to build a legitimate regime. As such, they both failed to build a legitimate political regime even though referendums and elections were regularly held. As the analysis in the survey demonstrated, these strategies did not prove to be sufficient in the eyes of the people.

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<sup>898</sup> As explained in Chapter IV, despite the fact that there were some respondents who made no comment or did not elaborate on their answers, there were many others who chose to indicate their opinion clearly.

Both leaders, instead of helping the country to democratize, pushing forward for reforms, and effectively using international assistance, engaged in enriching themselves and thinking how to stay in power as long as possible. They weakened legislative and judicial institutions as well as political parties. The electoral process was fraud and Central Election Commission was dependent on the regime's orders. Political parties were constantly weakened by laws about method of election. Leaders also weakened civil society institutions and the media. Leaders claimed their legitimacy only on the basis of election results and this proved to be insufficient to be perceived as legitimate leaders, as legitimacy means a real belief on the part of the majority of people that a particular leader occupies his office rightfully, that he deserves people's trust.

A leader is legitimate when he carries his rule (governs) with the consent of the governed. This consent is a foundation of leader's power (his right to power) and when such a foundation is built it results in "some recognition by the governed of that right."<sup>899</sup> Respondents' perception revealed that Akaev and Bakiev failed to build such a foundation and consequently lacked political legitimacy. This perception is closely related to the perception of democracy. As Seymour Martin Lipset noted, legitimacy "involves the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate and proper ones for society."<sup>900</sup> It can be said that legitimacy of a leader involves his capacity to maintain a belief or perception that his rule is the most appropriate for the country. In the Kyrgyz case leaders failed to maintain such a belief. Although socio-economic conditions were important, people also wanted to enjoy their political rights and freedoms. They wanted to see free and fair elections, they wanted to see accountable government, they wanted to see a just regime, and they wanted the regime to protect their interests. When people get frustrated or disappointed, they start to question the legitimacy of regime. As for relationship between legitimacy and political stability, there is a direct link between the two concepts. When leader's legitimacy diminishes political stability is endangered.

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<sup>899</sup> Richard Ashcraft, (ed.): *John Locke: Critical Assessments*. London: Routledge, 1991, p. 524

<sup>900</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (2nd ed.) Heinemann, London 1983, p. 64

Kyrgyzstan seemed to have been embarked on a reformist democratic course at various times during the post-Soviet period. The events of April 2010 showed that people wanted a fresh start after Bakiev with a new form of government: a parliamentary republic. It is yet to be seen how a parliamentary form of government will work in Kyrgyzstan. The significance of the recent events from the point of the theoretical insights developed in this thesis suggests that lack of both democratic leadership and political legitimacy has become a major concern in the Kyrgyz society. Free and fair elections as well as referendum are seen as major pre-conditions of a legitimate rule and how a leader should stay in power. Neither Akaev nor Bakiev could realize this type of rule. Although it is not the aim of this thesis to analyze the April 2010 events which resulted in Bakiev's oust, one thing is clear: Kyrgyzstan so far has been the first and only country in Central Asia to realize two leadership changes by popular uprisings. Despite the fact that the Kyrgyz people are still going through a hard time of finding a proper system of government which would leave the majority satisfied, it seems as if both the people and the elites understood that political legitimacy is one major principle of a democratic order. It seems that Kyrgyzstan's new president Rosa Otumbaeva, who has already declared that she would not run for the next presidential term, set a good example of a leader who does not stick to his/her chair, who respects laws and the constitution and who understands the importance of free and fair elections. The parliamentary elections which were held on 10 October, 2010 were widely accepted as free and fair by international observers and Otumbaeva did not interfere in any way during the election process. Her example may give us a reason to be hopeful in the sense that after two decades of trial and errors of transition, the future may hold a more democratic Kyrgyzstan.

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## APPENDIX A

### GENERAL COUNTRY PROFILE

Kyrgyzstan is a small Central Asian country of five million people, mostly covered by some of the highest mountain ranges in the region, including the Tian Shan. Of the total mass of nearly 200,000 square kilometers only about seven percent of the land is arable; the rest is covered with mountains, high pastures and woodlands. Kyrgyzstan shares borders of slightly over 1,000 kms each with both Kazakhstan to the north and Uzbekistan to the West and of between 850-900 kms each with both Tajikistan and China to the south and east. Kyrgyzstan is comprised of 7 *oblasts* (provinces): Chui *oblast*, Talas *oblast*, Issyk-kul *oblast*, Osh *oblast*, Batken *oblast*, Naryn *oblast*, Jalal-Abad *oblast*. The capital, Bishkek and the second large city Osh are administratively independent cities with a status equal to a province. As for Kyrgyzstan's natural resources, the country is rich in mineral resources but has negligible petroleum and natural gas reserves; it imports petroleum and gas. Among its mineral reserves are substantial deposits of coal, gold, uranium, antimony, and other rare-earth metals. Two large gold mines are Kumtor and Jerui. "Kumtor, said to be the seventh-largest gold deposit in the world with an estimated value of US\$5.5 billion, is being explored by the Canadian Metals Company (Cameco), a uranium company, in a joint-venture operation. Gold deposits are concentrated in Talas Province in north-central Kyrgyzstan, where as much as 200 tons may exist; deposits in Makmal are estimated at sixty tons. Deposits adjacent to the *Chatkal* River in the northwest amount to an estimated 150 tons."<sup>901</sup>

The ethnic composition of the country is diverse with more than one hundred different ethno-national groups of which twelve have populations of over 20,000.<sup>902</sup> Three main ethnic groups are Kyrgyz who comprise up to 71.0%, Uzbeks, who comprise 14.3% and Russians who comprise 7.8%, as determined by the 2009

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<sup>901</sup> *Kyrgyzstan. Natural resources.* available at <http://countrystudies.us/kyrgyzstan/20.htm> (Accessed on 13.01.2011)

<sup>902</sup> Kyrgyzstan Census: Main Results of the First National Population Census of the Kyrgyz Republic of 1999, National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (Bishkek 2000), p. 29.

census.<sup>903</sup> Among other groups there are Ukrainians, Tatars, Dungans, Uigurs, Turks, Koreans and Germans. At the time of independence Russians constituted 21.5% of the total population<sup>904</sup> but due to large waves of Russians emigrating to Russia, the ratio has considerably decreased. Traditionally the Kyrgyz, a Turkic-speaking people, were sheep, cattle and horse breeding nomads moving back and forth with their herds between high pastures and the lower valleys according to seasonal dictates. Current official state documents refer to the existence of a “Kyrgyz nation” first being mentioned in Chinese documents as long ago as 201 BC.<sup>905</sup>

The first Kyrgyz state, the Kyrgyz Khanate, existed from the sixth until the thirteenth century A.D., expanding by the tenth century southwestward to the eastern and northern regions of present-day Kyrgyzstan and westward to the headwaters of the Ertis (Irtysh) River in present-day eastern Kazakstan.<sup>906</sup> In this period, the khanate established intensive commercial contacts in China, Tibet, Central Asia, and Persia. The Kyrgyz reached their greatest expansion by conquering the Uygur Khanate and forcing it out of Mongolia in A.D. 840, then moving as far south as the Tian Shan range, a position the Kyrgyz maintained for about 200 years.<sup>907</sup> The Mongols' invasion of Central Asia in the fourteenth century devastated the territory of Kyrgyzstan, costing its people their independence and their written language. The son of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan, Dzhuchi, conquered the Kyrgyz tribes of the Yenisey region, who by this time had become disunited. For the next 200 years, the Kyrgyz remained under the Golden Horde and the Oriot and Jungar khanates that succeeded that regime. Freedom was regained in 1510, but Kyrgyz tribes were overrun in the seventeenth century by the Kalmyks, in the mid-eighteenth century by the Manchus, and in the early nineteenth century by the Uzbeks.

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<sup>903</sup> Kyrgyzstan Census: Main Results of the Second National Population Census of the Kyrgyz Republic of 2009, National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (Bishkek 2010)

<sup>904</sup> See Eugene Huskey, “Kyrgyzstan: the Fate of Political Liberalization,” Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.) *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 247

<sup>905</sup> Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen “Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan”, DEMSTAR Research Report No. 16, Sep 2003, p.10

<sup>906</sup> For more information please see Petr Kokaisl and Pavla Kokaislova, *The Kyrgyz-Children of Manas*, Alterra, Prague, 2009; David J. Philips, *Peoples on the Move: Introducing the Nomads of the World*, Piquant, UK, 2001.

<sup>907</sup> *Kyrgyzstan. Early History*. Available at <http://countrystudies.us/kyrgyzstan/20.htm> (Accessed on 13.01.2011)

The Kyrgyz began efforts to gain protection from more powerful neighboring states in 1758, when some tribes sent emissaries to China. A similar mission went to the Russian Empire in 1785. Between 1710 and 1876, the Kyrgyz were ruled by the Uzbek Kokand Khanate. Kyrgyz tribes fought and lost four wars against the Uzbeks between 1845 and 1873. The defeats strengthened the Kyrgyz willingness to seek Russian protection. In 1876 Russian troops defeated the Kokand Khanate and occupied northern Kyrgyzstan. Within five years, all Kyrgyzstan had become part of the Russian Empire, and the Kyrgyz slowly began to integrate themselves into the economic and political life of Russia. Following a brief period of independence after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the territory of present-day Kyrgyzstan was designated as the Kara-Kyrghyz Autonomous Region and a constituent part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union) in 1924. In 1926 the official name was changed to the Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic before the region achieved the status of a full republic of the Soviet Union in 1936.<sup>908</sup>

During the Soviet era, Kyrgyzstan's industry had been specialized to serve the Soviet military-industrial complex. After acquiring independence in 1991, the country suffered heavily when that demand disappeared.<sup>909</sup> Kyrgyzstan's largest role in the Soviet economy was as a supplier of minerals, especially antimony (in which the republic had a near monopoly), mercury, lead, and zinc. Of greatest significance economically, however, was gold, of which Kyrgyzstan was the Soviet Union's third-largest supplier.<sup>910</sup>

Since independence, the country's industrial production has declined precipitously since independence. (See Table E.1) Kyrgyzstan adopted a shock-therapy economic program, that included release of price and currency controls, withdrawal of state subsidies, and immediate trade liberalization, privatization started in 1991. Privatization continued throughout 1990s and is not over yet, as giant hydro-electric

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<sup>908</sup> *Kyrgyzstan. Early History*, available at <http://countrystudies.us/kyrgyzstan/20.htm> (Accessed on 13.01.2011)

<sup>909</sup> Glenn E. Curtis, Introduction in Buyers M. Lydia (ed.) *Central Asia in Focus: Political and Economic Issues* p. xvii

<sup>910</sup> *Kyrgyzstan. Role in the Soviet Economy*, U.S. Library of Congress, available at <http://countrystudies.us/kyrgyzstan/19.htm> (Accessed on 13.01.2011)

companies are still owned by the state.<sup>911</sup> Privatization was carried out in such a way as to encourage corruption and unscrupulous asset stripping.<sup>912</sup> Some other socio-economic indicators for the years 1993-2008 are provided in Table E.1.

Today, Kyrgyzstan is still primarily an agricultural country (35% of the labor force works in agriculture as of 2007<sup>913</sup>) and production activities are concentrated in tobacco, cotton, potatoes, various fruits and vegetables, sheep, goats, cattle and wool (Table E.2).

Kyrgyzstan also exports some minerals and hydropower, but the latter is a very underdeveloped potential. Water is the one natural resource that Kyrgyzstan has in abundance and the development of its hydropower sector could free it from its dependence on imported energy. Industrial production (a mere twenty percent of the labor force in 2007) is concentrated in textiles, food processing, cement, shoes, small machinery suitable for consumer durables and other low value added sectors. The leading exports are cotton, wool, meat, tobacco, metals (particularly gold, mercury, uranium, and steel), hydropower, and machinery; chief imports are grain, lumber, industrial products, ferrous metals, and fuel.

As for the general social tendency of the people in Kyrgyzstan, it is possible to suggest that clan affiliations, which are a legacy of centuries long nomadic lifestyle, continued to be influential during both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras.<sup>914</sup> It has been suggested that “Clan affiliations tend to correlate with the regional division of the country, which is a historical legacy of the fragmentation of Turkistan by the Soviets shortly after the October Revolution. From this fragmentation resulted the creation of

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<sup>911</sup> For detailed information on privatization see Turar Koichuev “Kyrgyzstan: Economic Crisis and Transition Strategy”, in *Central Asia in Transition. Dilemmas of Political and Economic Development*, Boris Rumer (ed.), M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1996

<sup>912</sup> Richard A. Slaughter, “Poor Kyrgyzstan”, *The National Interest*, Summer 2002, pp. 55-65.

<sup>913</sup> National Human Development Report, Kyrgyzstan, UNDP, 2009/10, p.78

<sup>914</sup> Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen “Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan”, DEMSTAR Research Report No. 16, Sep 2003, p.24

Soviet Kyrgyzstan from several diverse regions that were grouped into ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’ clusters, primarily in accordance with their geographical location.”<sup>915</sup>

Therefore, the most important social dynamic in Kyrgyzstan is existence of regional clans, especially the “northern” and “southern” clans that are sometimes hostile to each other. The “south” of the country refers to the area around the cities of Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken (and the provinces that bear their names) as well as the Ferghana Valley, whereas the north refers to four provinces Chui *oblast*, Talas *oblast*, Issyk-kul *oblast* and Naryn *oblast*, “northern” although, bordering China, much of it is actually south of Jalal-Abad province.<sup>916</sup>

There are regional tribal unions (Uruks<sup>917</sup>) that originate from the main tribal regions in the country are Talas, Sayaks, Chuy, Issyk-kul, Kemin, Naryn and other southeastern tribal unions. Kyrgyz tribes are divided into two grand “wings”, Ong kanat (right wing), Sol kanat (left wing), and Ichkilik<sup>918</sup> (neither). The Left wing consists of seven tribes based in the North and West (Northerners). During the Soviet Union period, first the Buguu tribe, then the Sarybagysh tribe had been well-known tribes within this alliance.<sup>919</sup> The right wing (Ong) consists of tribes based in the South (Southerners). The Adygines and Ishkiliks are the most prominent tribes of this group. Former President Askar Akaev was originally from the Sarybagysh tribe. Ichkilik is composed of ten major and several minor tribes. The Ich Kilik tribes have historically inhabited the southern region and eastern Pamir mountains.<sup>920</sup> Another source states that “the tribes of the Ich Kilik live in the southern Ferghana

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<sup>915</sup> Ibid.

<sup>916</sup> Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen “Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan”, DEMSTAR Research Report No. 16, September 2003, pp.24-25

<sup>917</sup> Kyrgyz social structure was constructed from some 40 different tribes (uruu) based on kinship relations. Each tribe consisted of different kin subdivisions (top), which were united by imaginary, rather than real kinship links. (Azamat Temirkulov, p. 332)

<sup>918</sup> Some scholars use *Ich Kilik*, some use *Ichkilik*, yet others use *The Ich Kilik*.

<sup>919</sup> Haluk Alkan “Post-Soviet Politics in Kyrgyzstan: between Centralism and Localism?” *Contemporary Politics*, Routledge, 15(3), September 2009, p.356. Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen “Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan”, *Ibid.*, pp.25-26

<sup>920</sup> Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, St. Martin’s Press, NY, 1995, p. 178

Valley in southern Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan.”<sup>921</sup> Some of the left wing and Ich Kilik tribes are of Mongol origin.<sup>922</sup> Similar information was provided in another study as follows “the Ich Kilik confederation consists of scattered tribes and clans, some of non-Kyrgyz origin”<sup>923</sup> According to some scholars “Ichkilik (Pamir Kyrgyz) are the only true and real Kyrgyz because the Kyrgyz in the southern Kyrgyzstan are considerably influenced by Uzbeks, and those in the north by Russians.”<sup>924</sup>

Some scholars argue that “in most cases clan loyalties trump other kinds of identities [as] clan identity tends to correspond to a region of the country as that particular region is the traditional home of the clan, and a multiplicity of sub-clans, even though its members may have migrated far afield.”<sup>925</sup>

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<sup>921</sup> R. Khanam (ed.), *Encyclopaedic Ethnography of Middle East and Central Asia*, Vol.2, Global Vision Publishing House, New Delhi, 2005, p.510

<sup>922</sup> R. Khanam (ed.), *Encyclopaedic Ethnography of Middle East and Central Asia*, Vol.2, Global Vision Publishing House, New Delhi, 2005, p.510

<sup>923</sup> David J. Philips, *Peoples on the Move: Introducing the Nomads of the World*, Piquant, UK, 2001, p.314

<sup>924</sup> Petr Kokaisl and Pavla Kokaislova, *The Kyrgyz-Children of Manas*, Alterra, Prague, 2009, p.202

<sup>925</sup> Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen “Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan”, p.25-26

**Table A.1 Indicators of Economic trends in Kyrgyzstan 1993 -2008**

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Consumer price index (December in % to December of previous year)	1029.9	162.1	132.1	134.8	113.0	116.8	139.9	109.6	102.3	105.6	102.8	104.9	105.1	120.1	120.0
Total budget surplus/deficit (% of GDP)	-7.1	-7.7	-11.5	-5.4	-5.2	-3.0	-2.5	- 2.0	-1.0	-0.8	-0.5	0.2	-0.2	0.1	0.83
Trade balance, mln. US dollars*	-87.6	23.1	- 113.4	- 332.3	- 105.5	- 327.9	- 145.9	-49.6	- 101.2	- 135.3	- 222.2	- 429.3	- 924.1	- 1277.9	- 2430.2
Indicator of poverty rate (% of population)	45.4	-	57.3	43.5	42.9	54.9	55.3	52.0	44.4	49.9	45.9	43.1	39.9	35.0	
Real GDP per capita** (PPP, US \$)	2330	1890	1850	2101	2264	2299	2374	1332	1438	1558	1697	1728	1813	1980	
<b>National income accounts:</b>															
Agricultural Industry (% of GDP)	39	38.3	40.6	46.2	41.1	35.9	38.2	34.2	34.4	33.6	32.9	28.5	28.7	26.9	25.8
Industry (% of GDP)	25.1	20.5	12.0	11.1	16.5	16.3	18.3	25.0	17.9	17.3	16.0	17.3	14.9	13.1	14.0
Services (% of GDP)	25.8	31.5	34.0	30.1	30.3	34.7	32.2	29.6	35.6	36.8	38.1	40.7	41.2	42.9	43.9

\*Not including foreign trade volumes of individuals

\*\*Data of the round of international comparisons in 2005

Source: National Human Development Report, Kyrgyzstan, UNDP, 2009/10, pp. 74-80



**Table A.2. Employment**

<b>Employment</b>	<b>1993</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Labor force (as % of total Population)	38	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	40	40	39	44	44	45	-
Percentage of the labor force in: Agriculture	39	42	47	47	48	49	52	53	53	49	43	39	38	36	35	-
Industry	21	19	17	15	14	13	12	10	10	12	15	18	18	19	20	-
Services	40	39	36	38	38	38	36	37	37	39	42	43	44	45	45	-
Number of working hours per week (per person in manufacturing)	35	35	36	36	36	36	36	35	36	35	35	35	33	35	35	35

*Source:* National Human Development Report, Kyrgyzstan, UNDP, 2005, p.79 and National Human Development Report, Kyrgyzstan, UNDP, 2009/10, pp. 74-80

## APPENDIX B

### CONSTITUTION 1993: POWERS OF PRESIDENT, PARLIAMENT, JUDICIARY AND THE GOVERNMENT

#### The Powers of the President<sup>926</sup>

Art. 46. (1) The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall:

- 1) determine the structure of the Government of Kyrgyz Republic and submit it to the confirmation by the Jogorku Kenesh;
- 2) appoint the Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic with the consent of the Jogorku Kenesh;
- 3) appoint members of the Government upon presentation by the Prime Minister and with the consent of the Jogorku Kenesh;
- 4) relieve members of the Government and heads of administrative departments of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- 5) accept the resignation of the Government; on his own initiative with the consent of the Jogorku Kenesh shall take a decision on withdrawal of the Powers of the Government before the date the Powers of the Government expire.

(2) The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall:

- 1) appoint with the consent of the Jogorku Kenesh the Procurator-General of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- 2) appoint with consent of the Jogorku Kenesh Chairman of the Board of the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- 3) appoint upon presentation by the Prime Minister and with the consent of the corresponding local Keneshs' Heads of state administrations of oblasts and the city of Bishkek;

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<sup>926</sup> Chapter III, Section 2, the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, 1993, *Transition to Democracy. Constitutions of the new Independent States and Mongolia*, edited by International Institute for Democracy, Council of Europe Publishing, Germany 1997, pp. 259-267

- 4) approve Heads of regional and city state administrations nominated by the Prime Minister with the consent of local Keneshs upon presentation by the Heads of state administrations of regions and the city of Bishkek;
- 5) present to the Jogorku Kenesh the candidatures for the office of Chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic, Deputy Chairman and seven judges of the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- 6) present to the Jogorku Kenesh the candidatures for the offices of Chairman of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Economic Court of the Kyrgyz Republic, Deputy Chairmen and judges of the Supreme Court and the Supreme Economic Court of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- 7) appoint with the consent of the Jogorku Kenesh Chairmen, deputy Chairmen and judges of regional courts, the court of the city of Bishkek, district and city courts, regional economic courts as well as military tribunals of the Kyrgyz Republic and remove them from office in the events prescribed by the Constitution and laws;
- 8) appoint with the consent of the Jogorku Kenesh Heads of diplomatic missions of the Kyrgyz Republic in foreign countries and international organizations;
- 9) receive the Letters of Credence and Recall of diplomatic missions of foreign countries and representatives of international organizations accredited to him;
- 10) confer high military ranks, diplomatic ranks, class ranks and other special titles.

(3) The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall:

- 1) decide the matters concerning granting citizenship of the Kyrgyz Republic and withdrawal from it, grant pardons;
- 2) award orders and medals as well as other state rewards of the Kyrgyz Republic; award honorary ranks and state bonuses of the Kyrgyz Republic.

(4) The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall:

- 1) on his own initiative submit bills to the Jogorku Kenesh;

2) sign within a two week term laws after their adoption by the Jogorku Kenesh or refer them to the Jogorku Kenesh with his remarks for a second consideration. If the Jogorku Kenesh confirms the previously taken decision by a majority of 2/3rds from the total number of deputies, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall sign the law; if the President does not express his attitude to the law within a two week term and does not demand its second consideration, he shall be obliged to sign that law;

3) address the People with an annual report on the situation in the Republic announced in the Jogorku Kenesh;

4) conduct international negotiations and sign international treaties of the Kyrgyz Republic; submit them for ratification to the Jogorku Kenesh;

5) have the right to protest to the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic against a law adopted by the Jogorku Kenesh or an international treaty ratified by the Jogorku Kenesh;

6) abolish or suspend the effect of acts of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministries, state committees and administrative departments of the Kyrgyz Republic, Heads of local state administration in case they contravene the Constitution and Laws of the Kyrgyz Republic.

(5) The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall have the right to:

1) convene an extraordinary session of the Uluk Kenesh;

2) submit issues of state life to a public referendum;

3) dissolve the Jogorku Kenesh before the date on which its Powers expire in accordance with the results of a public referendum and set up the date of a new election to the Jogorku Kenesh.

(6) The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall notify of a possibility of introduction of a state of emergency with the existence of grounds envisaged by law and in case of necessity shall impose it in separate localities without preliminary announcement and immediately notify the Jogorku Kenesh.

(7) The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall declare universal or partial

mobilization, declare a state of war in case of military aggression against the Kyrgyz Republic and shall immediately submit this issue to the consideration by the Jogorku Kenesh; he shall proclaim martial law in the interests of defense of the country and security of the population and shall immediately submit this issue to the consideration by the Jogorku Kenesh.

Art. 47. The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall be the Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, he shall appoint and replace the command-in-chief of the Armed Forces of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Art. 48. (1) The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall issue within his Powers on the basis and for the implementation of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic decrees binding upon the whole territory of the country.

(2) The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall issue resolutions and instructions on separate matters referred to his competence.

Art. 49. The President of the Kyrgyz Republic may delegate the execution of his Powers envisaged in subpoint 9 of point 2 and in subpoint 4 of point 4 of Article 46 to the Toroga of the Jogorku Kenesh.

Art. 50. The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall enjoy the right of integrity and immunity.

Art. 51. (1) The Powers of the President may be stopped as a result of his retirement by a resignation sent to the Jogorku Kenesh, inability to discharge his Powers in the event of a disease, in case of his death as well as in the event of removal from office in the events envisaged in the present Constitution.

(2) In case the President of the Kyrgyz Republic is unable to discharge his Powers on the account of a disease, the Jogorku Kenesh shall on the basis of the conclusion of an independent medical commission decide on the removal of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic before the date on which the Powers of the President expire; a majority of not less than 2/3rds of votes from the total number of

Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh shall be required to remove the President.

Art. 53. (1) In case of inability of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic to exercise his Powers on any reason they shall be delegated to the Toroga of the Jogorku Kenesh pending the election of a new President. In case the Toroga of the Jogorku Kenesh is unable to discharge the powers of the President they shall be delegated to the Prime Minister.

(2) The election of a new President of the Kyrgyz Republic in this case shall be held within three months.

### **The Powers of the Jogorku Kenesh**

Art. 58. The following powers shall be vested in the Uluk Kenesh:

- 1) to amend and change the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic in accordance with the procedure established by the Constitution;
- 2) to adopt laws of the Kyrgyz Republic; to amend laws and to exercise control over their fulfillment;
- 3) to make official interpretation of the adopted normative acts;
- 4) to determine the guidelines of home and foreign policy;
- 5) to approve the republic Budget of the Kyrgyz Republic and the report on its execution;
- 6) to determine the monetary system in the Kyrgyz Republic;
- 7) to change the bounds of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- 8) to decide the matters concerning administrative territorial structure of the republic;
- 9) to set up the date of election for President of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- 10) to organize the Central Commission on election and referenda;
- 11) upon presentation by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic to elect the Chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic, Deputy Chairman and seven judges of the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- 12) upon presentation by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic to elect the Chairman of the Supreme Court, the Chairman of the Supreme Economic Court

- of the Kyrgyz Republic, Deputy Chairmen and judges of the Supreme Court and the Supreme Economic Court of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- 13) to determine the structure of the Government of Kyrgyz Republic;
  - 14) to give consent to the appointment of the Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic and the composition of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Procurator-General of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Chairman of the Board of the National Bank;
  - 15) to give consent to the appointment of heads of diplomatic missions of the Kyrgyz Republic to foreign countries and international organizations;
  - 16) to give consent to the dissolution of the Government before the date on which the Powers of the Government expire;
  - 17) upon presentation by the Toroga of the Jogorku Kenesh to appoint the Chairman and Deputy Chairmen of the Supervisory Chamber of the Jogorku Kenesh;
  - 18) to ratify and denounce international treaties; to decide issues of war and peace;
  - 19) to institute military ranks, diplomatic ranks, class ranks and other special titles of the Kyrgyz Republic;
  - 20) to establish state awards and honorary titles of the Kyrgyz Republic;
  - 21) to issue acts on amnesty;
  - 22) to impose a state of emergency or to confirm and abolish the act of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic on this issue; the resolution of the Jogorku Kenesh approving the decision of the President to impose a state of emergency shall be adopted by a majority of not less than 2/3rds from the total number of Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh;
  - 23) to proclaim martial law, announce a state of war and to issue a resolution concerning their declaration by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic;
  - 24) to decide on the use of the contingent of the Armed Forces of the republic when it is necessary to support peace and security in accordance with intergovernmental treaty obligations;
  - 25) to hear reports of the bodies formed or elected by it as well as reports of officials appointed or elected by it; in case when it is necessary, to decide the question of confidence to the Government of the republic or its individual member

by a majority of 2/3rds from the total number of Deputies by secret ballot;  
26) to submit the matters of state life to a referendum;  
27) to decide the matter concerning the removal of officials in the events specified in Article 52 and point 1 of Article 81 of the present Constitution.

Art. 59. (1) The Jogorku Kenesh shall elect the Toroga and Deputy Toroga from among Deputies, form committees, Supervisory Chamber, and provisional commissions.

(2) The Toroga of the Jogorku Kenesh shall be elected by secret ballot. He shall be accountable to the Jogorku Kenesh and may be relieved from his office by the decision of the Jogorku Kenesh taken by a majority of not less than 2/3rds of the total number of the Deputies.

(3) Tot Toroga of the Jogorku Kenesh shall preside at the sessions of the Jogorku Kenesh, exercise general control over the preparation of the matters liable to consideration at the sessions of the Jogorku Kenesh and its Presidium and shall be responsible for their internal order, sign resolutions and decisions adopted by the Jogorku Kenesh and its Presidium and shall exercise other powers vested in it by the Constitution and laws of the Kyrgyz Republic.

(4) Deputy Torogas of the Jogorku Kenesh shall be elected by secret ballot, they shall carry out on the commission of the Toroga his separate functions and act as Toroga in case of his absence or inability to discharge his Powers.

Art. 60. (1) The Toroga, Deputy Torogas, Chairmen of committees shall form the Presidium of the Jogorku Kenesh.

(2) The Presidium of the Jogorku Kenesh shall be accountable to the Jogorku Kenesh and shall provide the organization of its activity.

(3) The Presidium shall prepare the sittings of the Jogorku Kenesh, coordinate the activity of committees and provisional commissions, organize nationwide discussion of draft laws of the Kyrgyz Republic and other important issues of state life.

(4) The Presidium shall publish texts of laws of the Kyrgyz Republic and other acts adopted by the Jogorku Kenesh.



Art. 61. Committees and provisional commissions of the Jogorku Kenesh shall conduct law drafting works, preliminary consider questions referred to competence of the Jogorku Kenesh, supervise the implementation of adopted laws and decisions.

Art. 62. The procedure of activity of the Jogorku Kenesh shall be determined by rules.

Art. 63. The Jogorku Kenesh may be dissolved before the date on which its Powers expire by the decision taken by not less than 2/3rds of the total number of Deputies or on the results of a nation-wide referendum.

#### **The Legislative Activity of the Jogorku Kenesh**

Art. 64. The right to initiate laws shall be vested in Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Supreme Economic Court of the Kyrgyz Republic and people's initiative - 30,000 of electors.

Art. 65. A bill submitted to the Jogorku Kenesh shall be discussed in the committees after which the bill shall be referred to the Presidium which shall send it for consideration to the Jogorku Kenesh.

Art. 66. (1) The bill shall be considered passed if it has been voted for by a majority of the total number of Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh.

(2) In case of amending or changing the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, adoption of the constitutional acts and amending them not less than 2/3rds of votes from the total number of Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh shall be required.

(3) Amending the Constitution and constitutional acts shall be prohibited during a state of emergency and martial law.

Art. 67. A law shall become effective since the moment of its publication if not

indicated otherwise in the law itself or in the resolution of the Jogorku Kenesh on the procedure of its implementation.

Art. 68. A referendum shall be held by the proposal of not less than 300,000 of electors of 1/3rd of the total number of Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh.

### **The Government**

Art. 70. (1) The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic shall be the highest executive body of State Power in the Kyrgyz Republic.

(2) The activity of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic shall be headed by the Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic. The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic shall consist of the Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic, Vice-Prime Ministers, Ministers and Chairmen of state committees of the Kyrgyz Republic.

(3) The structure of the Government shall be determined by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic upon presentation of the Prime Minister and shall be approved by the Jogorku Kenesh.

Art. 71. The Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic shall:

- present to the President the candidatures for the office of members of the Government;
- form and abolish administrative departments of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- appoint Heads of administrative departments;
- present to the President the candidatures for the office of heads of regional state administrations and state administration of the city of Bishkek;
- appoint with the consent of local keneshs Heads of district and town state administrations upon presentation by Heads of state administrations of regions and the city of Bishkek and remove them from office. The decisions by the Prime Minister concerning appointment and removal shall become effective after they have been approved by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Art. 72. (1) The President of the Kyrgyz Republic shall exercise control over the

work of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. The President shall have the right to preside at the sitting of the Government.

(2) The annual report on the work of the Government shall be submitted to the Jogorku Kenesh by the Prime Minister. The Jogorku Kenesh shall have the right to demand the report from the Government or its individual members.

Art. 73. (1) The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic shall decide all matters of state governing except of administrative and supervisory authorities vested in the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Jogorku Kenesh by the Constitution.

(2) The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic shall:

- prepare the republican budget, submit it to the Jogorku Kenesh and provides its implementation;

- pursue budgetary, financial, tax, and price policy;

- organize and manage state property;

- take measures to provide the rule of law, the rights and freedoms of citizens, protection of property and public order, fight with criminality.

(3) The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan shall provide for a sole monetary, credit, and currency policy.

Art. 74. The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic shall issue decrees and ordinances binding throughout the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic for all bodies, organizations, officials and citizens and organize, supervise and secure their fulfillment.

Art. 75. (1) The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic shall guide the activity of ministries, state committees, administrative departments and bodies of local state administration.

(2) Ministries, state committees and administrative departments shall issue within their competence decrees and ordinances on the basis and for the implementation of the Constitution, laws of the Kyrgyz Republic, resolutions of the Jogorku Kenesh, acts of the President, organize, verify and secure their implementation.

(3) The Government shall hear reports of the Heads of local state

administration, invalidate the acts of the Heads of local state administration which contravene the legislation with further notice of the President.

Art. 76. The Procuracy of the Kyrgyz Republic shall within its competence supervise the precise and universal observation of legislative acts. The bodies of the Procuracy shall exercise criminal pursuit, participate in judicial proceedings in cases and in the procedure prescribed by law.

### **Courts and Justice**<sup>927</sup>

Art. 79. (1) Justice in the Kyrgyz Republic shall be administered only by the courts.

(2) In the Kyrgyz Republic there shall be the following courts: the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Supreme Economic Court of the Kyrgyz Republic and local courts (courts, courts of the city of Bishkek, district and municipal courts, regional economic courts, military tribunals as well as courts of elders and courts of arbitration).

(3) The status of courts and judges in the Kyrgyz Republic shall be specified by the constitutional laws. The organization of and procedure for court operation shall be specified by law.

(4) A judge shall be subordinate only to the Constitution and the Law. A judge shall enjoy the right to integrity and immunity and in accordance with his status shall be provided with social, material, and other guarantees of his independence.

Art. 81. (1) Judges of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court and the Supreme Economic Court of the Kyrgyz Republic may be removed from office for treason and other offenses by the Jogorku Kenesh on the basis of the judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic; the majority of not less than 2/3rds of

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<sup>927</sup> Chapter VI, the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, 1993, *Transition to Democracy. Constitutions of the new Independent States and Mongolia*, edited by International Institute for Democracy, Council of Europe Publishing, Germany 1997, pp. 259-267

the votes of the total number of Deputies shall be required to remove a judge from office.

(2) Judges of local courts may be removed from office on the basis of their health, at their personal request, according to the results of examinations, for the violation of law or dishonorable conduct incompatible with their high position as well as on the basis of a binding court judgment.

A judge of a local court may be prosecuted for criminal activity with the consent of the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Art. 82. (1) The Constitutional Court shall be the highest body of judicial power for the protection of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic.

(2) The Constitutional Court shall consist of the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and seven judges of the Constitutional Court.

(3) The Constitutional Court shall:

1) declare laws and other normative legal acts unconstitutional in the event they contravene the Constitution;

2) decide disputes concerning the effect, application and interpretation of the Constitution;

3) determine the validity of the elections for President of the Kyrgyz Republic;

4) issue a judgment concerning the removal from office of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic as well as judges of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, the High Court of Arbitrage of the Kyrgyz Republic;

5) give its consent for the criminal prosecution of judges of local courts;

6) issue a judgment concerning amendments and changes to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic;

7) annul the decisions of bodies of local self-government which contravene the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic;

8) render decisions concerning the constitutionality of practices in the application of laws which affect the constitutional rights of citizens.

(4) A decision of the Constitutional Court shall be final and no appeal will be

heard. If the Constitutional Court declares laws or other acts unconstitutional, such laws or acts shall no longer be in effect on the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic; such a finding shall also annul normative and others which are based on the act declared unconstitutional.

Art. 83. (1) The Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic shall be the highest body of judicial power in the sphere of civil, criminal and administrative court action.

(2) The Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic shall supervise the operation of the court of the city of Bishkek, regional, municipal courts and military tribunals of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Art. 84. (1) The Supreme Economic Court of the Kyrgyz Republic and regional economic courts shall form a single system of economic courts of the Kyrgyz Republic.

(2) Economic Courts shall decide economic disputes between objects of economy based on different forms of property.

(3) The Supreme Economic Court of the Kyrgyz Republic shall supervise the operation of regional economic courts of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Art. 85. (1) Courts of elders and courts of arbitration may be established on the territory of ails, settlements, cities by the decision of citizens' meetings from among elder people and other citizens held in respect and authority.

(2) Courts of elders and courts of arbitration shall consider property, family disputes and other cases envisaged by law referred to them by the arguing parties with the purpose of conciliation and passing a just decision which do not contravene the law.

(3) The decisions of courts of elders and courts of arbitration may be appealed to the corresponding regional and municipal courts of the Kyrgyz Republic.

## APPENDIX C

**Table C.1 Number of respondents according to population in various provinces,  
gender and age groups**

	Thousand people	%	Number of respondents (140 in total)	Male/ female	Age groups (number of people)			
					Up to 25	25-45	45-65	65-85
<b>Bishkek city</b>	849,2	16,08	23	9 men 14 women	6	6	6	5
<b>Batken oblast</b>	428,8	8,12	11	6 men 5 women	2	3	3	3
<b>Jalal-Abad oblast</b>	994,0	18,82	26	13 men 13 women	6	8	6	6
<b>Osh oblast</b>	1062,1	20,11	28	14 men 14 women	7	7	7	7
<b>Issyk-kul oblast</b>	437,2	8,28	12	6 men 6 women	3	3	3	3
<b>Naryn oblast</b>	251,0	5,13	7	3 men 4 women	2	2	2	1
<b>Osh city</b>	253,9	4,80	7	5 men 2 women	2	2	2	1
<b>Talas oblast</b>	219,8	4,16	6	3 men 3 women	1	2	2	1
<b>Chui oblast</b>	763,9	14,46	20	9 men 11 women	4	6	5	5

## APPENDIX D

### LIST OF QUESTIONS

#### 1. Democracy

- 1.1 How do you remember the Soviet Union?
- 1.2 How do you evaluate the political consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union for Kyrgyzstan?
- 1.3 How do you evaluate the political consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union for Kyrgyzstan in terms of the emergence of the multi-party system?
- 1.4 How do you evaluate the political consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union for Kyrgyzstan in terms of presidentialism?
- 1.5 How do you evaluate the presidential system in Kyrgyzstan?
- 1.6 What does “democracy” mean for you?
- 1.7 To what extent democracy is important for Kyrgyzstan, why/why not?
- 1.8 Do you believe democracy will be consolidated in Kyrgyzstan, why/why not?
- 1.9 How do you evaluate Akaev’s regime?
- 1.10 How do you evaluate Bakiev’s regime?
- 1.11 How do you evaluate change of power from Askar Akaev to Kurmanbek Bakiev?

#### 2. Leadership and Legitimacy

- 2.1 What should be the qualities of a good leader?
- 2.2 Do you think Askar Akaev possessed such qualities?
- 2.3 What about Kurmanbek Bakiev? Does he possess these qualities?
- 2.4 Do you think Askar Akaev represented your interests as a president? Why?
- 2.5 Do you think Kurmanbek Bakiev represents your interests as a president? Why?



### **3. Elections**

- 3.1 Do you vote regularly?
- 3.2 Did you vote in all elections?
- 3.3 Do you think your vote is counted?
- 3.4 How do you vote in the elections? Do you vote for the leaders or the parties?
- 3.5 What are the main criteria for you when you vote for a deputy/political party? On the basis of political views, region, educational qualifications, professional experience?
- 3.6 What are the main criteria for you when you vote for a presidential candidate? On the basis of political views, region, educational qualifications, professional experience?
- 3.7 What do you think are the necessary requirements for a better election system?
- 3.8 Do you believe that the political parties are given equal conditions to compete in the elections?
- 3.9 How do you evaluate the election campaigns during the parliamentary elections? Do you think they were conducted in a fair manner? If yes, how? If not why not?
- 3.10 Do you think the party/candidate elected at the parliamentary elections represents your interests? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- 3.11 In your opinion which elections (parliamentary or presidential) are more meaningful and critical for Kyrgyzstan? Why?
- 3.12 Overall, do you evaluate the election results as legitimate?

### **4 Referendums**

- 4.1 Do you vote in referendums? If no, why not?
- 4.2 Do you think that it's meaningful to vote in a referendum?
- 4.3 How do you evaluate the role of referendums in the process of democratization in Kyrgyzstan?
- 4.4 When you go to a referendum do you know what the issue/issues are put on the agenda of the referendum?

4.5 Do you think that referendums are useful tools for the representation of your interests?

4.6 Do you think that referendums are important in order to strengthen presidential power? How?

## APPENDIX E

**Table E.1 Table of Respondents**

Respondents	Age, nationality, place of origin and occupation	Occupation/ sector
R1	A 23 year old Kyrgyz man from Bishkek who is employed in a state corporation	state
R2	A 23 year old Kyrgyz man from Bishkek who is a student	
R3	A 25 year old Kyrgyz man from Bishkek who is a master's student	
R4	A 22 year old Kyrgyz man from Bishkek who is a student	
R5	A 25 year old Kyrgyz man from Bishkek who is unemployed	
R6	A 19 year old Kyrgyz woman from Bishkek who works at a factory	private sector
R7	A 40 year old Kyrgyz man from Bishkek who is unemployed	
R8	A 33 year old Kyrgyz woman from Bishkek who works at a small enterprise	private sector
R9	A 29 year old Kyrgyz woman from Bishkek who is unemployed	
R10	A 30 year old Kyrgyz woman from Bishkek who is unemployed	
R11	A 29 year old Kyrgyz man from Bishkek who work as an economist	private sector
R12	A 33 year old Russian woman from Bishkek who works as a teacher	state
R13	A 83 year old Russian woman from Bishkek who is retired	
R14	A 65 year old Kyrgyz man from Bishkek who is retired	
R15	A 67 years old Tatar woman from Bishkek who is retired	
R16	A 69 year old Kyrgyz woman from Bishkek who is retired	
R17	A 73 year old Kyrgyz woman from Bishkek who is retired	
R18	A 49 year old Russian man from Bishkek who is self-employed	private sector
R19	A 54 year old Kyrgyz woman from Bishkek who works as a doctor	state
R20	A 54 year old Kyrgyz woman from Bishkek who is a civil servant	state
R21	A 55 year old Kyrgyz woman from Bishkek who is a civil servant	state
R22	A 58 year old Kyrgyz woman from Bishkek who works in a private company	Private sector
R23	A 60 year old Russian woman from Bishkek who works as a teacher	state
R24	A 25 year old Kyrgyz man from the Chui oblast who works in a library	state
R25	A 24 year old Russian man from the Chui oblast who works in an NGO	NGO
R26	A 24 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Chui oblast who works in a private bank	private sector
R27	A 27 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Chui oblast who works in a private bank	private sector
R28	A 31 year old Kyrgyz man from the Chui oblast who works in a furniture shop	private sector
R29	A 30 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Chui oblast who works as a teacher	state
R30	A 44 year old Russian man from the Chui oblast who works as a teacher	state
R31	A 28 year old Kyrgyz man, from Chui oblast, who is a master's student and who also works as a part-time civil servant.	state
R32	A 30 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Chui oblast who is a master's student	
R33	A 30 year old Russian woman from the Chui oblast who is an owner of paleography company	private sector
R34	A 60 year old Kyrgyz man from the Chui oblast who is a retired engineer	
R35	A 47 year old Kyrgyz man from the Chui oblast who is self-employed	private sector
R36	A 58 year old Kyrgyz women from the Chui oblast who works in a	state

	library	
R37	A 46 year old Kyrgyz women from the Chui oblast who works in municipality	state
R38	A 52 year old Kyrgyz women from the Chui oblast who works in a hospital	state
R39	A 65 year old Kyrgyz women from the Chui oblast who works as a teacher	state
R40	A 66 year old Kyrgyz man from the Chui oblast who works as a teacher	state
R41	A 68 year old Kyrgyz man from the Chui oblast who is retired	
R42	A 80 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Chui oblast who is retired	
R43	A 72 year old Tatar woman from the Chui oblast who works as a teacher	state
R44	A 26 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh city who is a master's student	
R45	A 23 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh city who is a student	
R46	A 26 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh city who is a student	
R47	A 37 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh city who works in an international organization	NGO
R48	A 57 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh city who works as a civil servant	state
R49	A 45 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh city who works in an accounting company	private sector
R50	A 65 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh city who works as a teacher	state
R51	A 23 year old Kyrgyz man from the Talas oblast who works in an NGO	NGO
R52	A 25 year old Kyrgyz man from the Talas oblast who works in an NGO	NGO
R53	A 26 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Talas oblast who is a student	
R54	A 46 year old Kyrgyz man from the Talas oblast who works as an economist in state organization	state
R55	A 58 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Talas oblast who works as a director in a small hotel	private sector
R56	A 72 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Talas oblast who is retired	
R57	A 21 year old Kyrgyz man from the Naryn oblast who works in a private company	private sector
R58	A 23 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Naryn oblast who works in an NGO	NGO
R59	A 40 year old Kyrgyz man from the Naryn oblast who works in a book shop	private sector
R60	A 44 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Naryn oblast who is works as a nurse in state hospital	
R61	A 48 year old Kyrgyz man from the Naryn oblast who works as a taxi driver	private sector
R62	A 47 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Naryn oblast who works as a teacher	state
R63	A 65 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Naryn oblast who is retired	
R64	A 24 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Issyk-Kul oblast who is a student	
R65	A 23 year old Kyrgyz man from the Issyk-Kul oblast who is a student	
R66	A 23 year old Kyrgyz man from the Issyk-Kul oblast who is a student	
R67	A 27 year old Kyrgyz man from the Issyk-Kul oblast who works in a private company	private sector
R68	A 28 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Issyk-Kul oblast who works in a hotel	private sector
R69	A 26 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Issyk-Kul oblast who is a housewife	
R70	A 50 year old Kyrgyz man from the Issyk-Kul oblast who is a shepherd	private sector
R71	A 46 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Issyk-Kul oblast who is a housewife	
R72	A 49 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Issyk-Kul oblast who works as a medical assistant	state

R73	A 64 year old Kyrgyz man from the Issyk-Kul oblast who tends his animals at his house	private sector
R74	A 65 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Issyk-Kul oblast, administrator	private sector
R75	A 65 year old Kyrgyz man from the Issyk-Kul oblast who is self-employed	private sector
R76	A 24 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who is a civil servant	state
R77	A 22 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who is a student	
R78	A 25 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who is a student	
R79	A 22 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who works in an NGO and who is also a master's student	NGO/student
R80	A 25 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who works in an NGO	NGO
R81	A 27 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who is unemployed	
R82	A 24 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who is self-employed	private
R83	A 30 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who is a diplomat	state
R84	A 34 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who is self-employed	Private sector
R85	A 29 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who is both a master student and works as a civil servant	state
R86	A 39 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who is a housewife	
R87	A 30 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who works in an NGO	NGO
R88	A 45 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who works as a psychologist	state
R89	A 44 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who works as a doctor	state
R90	A 47 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who works as a shepherd	private sector
R91	A 52 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who is a businessman	Private sector
R92	A 45 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who is a civil servant	state
R93	A 46 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who is a businessman	private sector
R94	A 58 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who is retired	
R95	A 47 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who is a housewife	
R96	A 52 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who works in a pharmacy	private sector
R97	A 65 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who is retired	
R98	A 69 year old Kyrgyz man from the Osh oblast who is retired	
R99	A 65 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who is retired	
R100	A 68 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who is retired	
R101	A 70 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who is retired	
R102	A 71 year old Uzbek woman from the Osh oblast who is retired	
R103	A 65 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Osh oblast who is retired	
R104	A 24 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who works in an NGO	NGO
R105	A 23 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is a student	
R106	A 25 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is a civil servant.	state
R107	A 22 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal Abad oblast who is a student	
R108	A 25 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is unemployed	
R109	A 25 year old Kyrgyz woman, from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is an entrepreneur	
R110	A 33 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who works in a private company	private sector
R111	A 54 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who works as a lecturer at a university	state
R112	A 30 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who works in a bank	private sector

R113	A 26 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is a student	
R114	A 34 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is a housewife	
R115	A 43 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is a housewife	
R116	A 42 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who works in municipality	state
R117	A 43 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who works in an NGO	NGO
R118	A 46 year old Uzbek man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is self-employed	private sector
R119	A 58 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is a carpenter	private sector
R120	A 54 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is unemployed	
R121	A 45 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who works as a lecturer at a university	state
R122	A 56 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who works in municipality	state
R123	A 60 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is an entrepreneur	private sector
R124	A 65 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is retired	
R125	A 66 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is an academician	
R126	A 70 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is retired	
R127	A 74 year old Kyrgyz man from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is retired	
R128	A 68 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who works at the local market	private sector
R129	A 72 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Jalal-Abad oblast who is retired	
R130	A 25 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Batken oblast who is a civil servant	state
R131	A 26 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Batken oblast who works as a teacher	state
R132	A 25 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Batken oblast who is a student	
R133	A 35 year old Kyrgyz man from the Batken oblast who is a civil servant	state
R134	A 45 year old Kyrgyz man from the Batken oblast who works in the private sector	private sector
R135	A 42 year old Kyrgyz man from the Batken oblast who works in municipality	state
R136	A 48 year old Kyrgyz man from the Batken oblast who works in municipality	state
R137	A 60 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Batken oblast who is retired	
R138	A 65 year old Kyrgyz man from the Batken oblast who is unemployed	
R139	A 65 year old Kyrgyz man from the Batken oblast who is an instructor	state
R140	A 66 year old Kyrgyz woman from the Batken oblast who works at the local market	private sector

## APPENDIX F

### GLOSSARY

<i>Aalam</i>	Universe
<i>Adilet</i>	Justice
<i>Ak Jol</i>	Bright Path
<i>Akim</i>	Head of regional administration
<i>Alga, Kyrgyzstan</i>	Forward, Kyrgyzstan
<i>Ar-Namys</i>	Dignity
<i>Asaba</i>	Banner
<i>Atajurt</i>	Fatherland
<i>Ata-meken</i>	Fatherland
<i>Azattyk</i>	Liberty
<i>Erkin Kyrgyzstan</i>	Free Kyrgyzstan
<i>Erkindik</i>	Freedom
<i>Glas Naroda</i>	Voice of the People
<i>Jani Bagit</i>	New Course
<i>Jogorku Kenesh</i>	The Supreme Council of Kyrgyzstan (parliament)
<i>Kayran-el</i>	Poor Nation
<i>Kenesh</i>	Council
<i>Maya Stolitsa</i>	My Capital
<i>Maya Strana</i>	My Country
<i>Nomenklatura</i>	Small elite group within the Soviet Union who held various administrative positions
<i>Novaya Sila</i>	New Force
<i>Obkom</i>	Province committee
<i>Oblast</i>	Province
<i>Procuracy</i>	Government bureau concerned with ensuring administrative legality

<i>Raikom</i>	District committee
<i>Rayon</i>	District
<i>Rodina</i>	Motherland
<i>Shailoo</i>	Elections
<i>Slovo Kirgizstana</i>	Kyrgyzstan's Word
<i>Sobranie Narodnih Predstavitelei</i>	Assembly of People's Representatives
<i>Taza Koom</i>	Clean Society
<i>Taza Shailoo</i>	Clean Elections, association which observes elections in Kyrgyzstan
<i>Toraga</i>	Speaker
<i>Turan</i>	Middle Persian name for Central Asia
<i>Verhovnii Soviet</i>	The Supreme Council, highest legislative body of Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic
<i>Yurt</i>	Tent
<i>Zakonodatelnoe Sobranie</i>	Lower Branch of Kyrgyz parliament, Legislative Assembly
<i>Zamandash</i>	Compatriot



## CURRICULUM VITA

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

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### EDUCATION

Degree	Institution	Year of Graduation
MA	Jamia Milli University, Political Science, New Delhi	2004
Bachelor	Academy of Management, under the President of Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	2002
Summer School	American Institute for Political and Economic Systems, Prague, Czech Republic	2006
High School	School-gymnasium 70, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	1998
Professional Music school	Major – Piano, Bishkek	1996

### WORK EXPERIENCE

Year	Place	Enrollment
2001	Education Information Center/ International Research and Exchanges Board (EIC – Bishkek/IREX)	Educational Adviser Assistant
2005-till present	freelance	Russian-English-Turkish translator

### FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Russian, English, Turkish

### HOBBIES

Swimming, Bicycling, Piano

## TURKISH SUMMARY

Bu tez, Sovyet sonrası dönemde Kırgızistan'daki demokratikleşme sürecinin başarısızlığını, Askar Akaev (1991–2005) ve Kurmanbek Bakiev (2005–2010) yönetimlerini karşılaştırarak incelemekte ve bu iki liderin demokratik meşruiyet kurma girişimlerini ve Kırgız halkının bu ilişkiyi nasıl algılayıp değerlendirmekte olduğunu irdelemektedir. Bağımsızlık sonrası süreçte yer alan bu iki dönemin karşılaştırılması, genel olarak demokrasiye geçişin boyutunun ve niteliğinin izlenebilmesini olanaklı kılacaktır. Bu tez ayrıca meşruiyet kavramını kullanarak Kırgız vatandaşlarının demokratik olmayan liderlere rağmen rejimi meşru olarak algılayıp algılamadıklarına da bakarak demokratikleşme sürecini incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Tezde, Kırgızistan'daki demokrasiye geçiş süreci, seçimler ve referandumlar incelenerek değerlendirilmektedir. Bunun temel nedeni Akaev ve Bakiev dönemlerindeki seçimler ve referandumların genel olarak insanlar için siyasete katılmanın tek yolu olduğu gerçeğidir. Bu durum, özellikle meşruiyet kavramı göz önüne alındığında önem kazanmaktadır; çünkü Kırgız halkı, liderler ve rejim hakkındaki düşüncelerini büyük ölçüde seçim ve referandum yoluyla ifade edebilmektedirler. Kırgızistan'ın da aralarında bulunduğu Orta Asya ülkelerindeki otoriter liderler, seçimleri hem kendi yönetimlerini devam ettirmek, hem de demokratikleşmemek için bir özür ve manipülasyon mekanizması olarak kullanmaktadırlar. Dolayısıyla, siyasi meşruiyetin yalnızca seçimler ve referandumlar yoluyla elde edilmediği, bu ülkelerde rejimin istikrarlı olamadığı ve demokratikleşmenin ikinci sırada yer aldığı görülmektedir.

Bu bağlamda tez için Kırgızistan'da niteliksel analize dayanan bir alan araştırması yapılmış ve seçim sürecinin ve referandumların Kırgızistan vatandaşları tarafından nasıl algılandığı araştırılmıştır. Bu bağlamda anket ve mülakatlar katılanlara aşağıda belirtilen konularda sorular sorulmuştur:

- 1) Akaev ve Bakiev kendi rejimlerinin meşruiyetlerini nasıl sağlamaya çalıştılar?
- 2) Akaev ve Bakiev dönemleri siyasi meşruiyet anlamında vatandaşlar tarafından nasıl algılanmıştır?

3) Hangi faktörler vatandaşların bu iki lider ve onların politikalarıyla ilgili meşruiyet algılamasında önemli olmuştur?

Bu sorular önemlidir; çünkü siyasi meşruiyet, vatandaşların algılamaları ve hükümetin günlük uygulamalarıyla yakından ilgilidir. Zayıf meşruiyet, rejiminin ve bir devletin kırılmasına neden olmaktadır. Serbest, düzenli ve adil seçimler (Kırgız örneğinde seçimlerin yanı sıra referandumlar) ile seçmenlerin kendi temsilcilerini seçmesi, demokrasinin prosedürel (minimalist) anlamı çerçevesinde siyasal meşruiyet için gerekli kabul edilebilmektedir.

Tezde Kırgızların çoğu için tek siyasi katılım yolunun parlamento ve başkanlık seçimlerinin olduğu varsayımından yola çıkılarak inceleme yapılmıştır. Kırgızistan'daki alan araştırmasının sonuçları beş ana başlıkta analiz edilmiştir:

- 1) Kırgızistan'da Sovyet deneyimi algısı ve Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının sonuçları;
- 2) Demokrasi ve otoriterliğin hem genel olarak hem de Kırgızistan'daki uygulamaları açısından nasıl algılanmakta olduğu;
- 3) Genel liderlik algısı ve Akaev ve Bakiev'in liderlik özelliklerinin algısı;
- 4) Kırgızistan'da seçimlerin algısı ve seçimlere katılım (oy verme) ve seçimlerin rolü, önemi ve özelliklerine ilişkin olan algı;
- 5) Referandumların algısı ve referandumlara katılım, referandumların rolü, önemi ve özelliklerine ilişkin algılar.

Tezde ayrıca, bu beş ayrı grup içersinde sorulmuş olan soruların yanıtlarının incelendiği ve tartışıldığı birer bölüm de yer almaktadır. Her bir kısmın ardından gelen bu incelemelerin genel çerçevesi ve birbirleri ile bağlantıları ise Sonuç bölümümde ayıca verilmektedir. Sonuç bölümünde bu bulgular tezin Giriş kısmında ele alınan teorik çerçeve ışığında da analiz edilmektedir.

Kısaca, bu çalışma, Askar Akaev ile Kurmanbek Bakiev dönemlerini, referandumlar ile parlamento ve başkanlık seçimleri bağlamında meşruiyet ile ilişkilendirerek

incelemektedir. Kırgızistan'da gerçekleştirilen alan araştırması sonucunda Kırgız halkının Sovyet sonrası dönemde demokrasi, demokrasiye geçiş, siyasi liderlik ve siyasal meşruiyet kavramlarını nasıl algılamakta olduğunu anlamak, bu çalışmanın bir diğer amacıdır. Tez, ayrıca, demokrasi söylemini ön planda tutan siyasi liderlerin; seçimler ve referandumlar gibi demokrasinin asgari koşullarını bile, yürütmenin gücünü artırmakta nasıl kullandıklarını da incelemektedir.

Tezin Giriş kısmında, demokratikleşme literatürünün genel bir taraması yapılmış ve bu bağlamda hem tezde kullanılması gerekli görülen kavramlara, hem de Kırgızistan'daki örneğe uygun olan teoriler ve kavramlara değinilmiştir. Bu çerçevede literatürdeki elit yaklaşım, meşruiyet tartışmaları, demokrasiye geçiş yolları ve Sovyet sonrası bağımsızlığını kazanan yeni ülkelerin demokratikleşmesi gibi konularda geliştirilen yaklaşımlar ele alınmıştır. Tezin Giriş kısmından sonraki 2. Bölümde, ilk önce, Kırgızistan'da 1993 yılında kabul edilen yeni anayasanın oluşum sürecinde ortaya çıkan olaylar kısaca anlatılmış, daha bu anayasanın temel özelliklerine yer verilmiştir. Bu bölümde ayrıca Akaev döneminde 1993 Anayasası'na çeşitli değişiklikler getiren referandumlar incelenmiş ve parlamento ve başkanlık seçimleri anlatılmıştır.

Tezin 3. Bölümünde, benzer şekilde, Bakiev dönemindeki referandumlar ile parlamento ve başkanlık seçimleri incelenmiş, ayrıca Akaev ile Bakiev dönemlerinin genel bir karşılaştırılması yapılmıştır. Bu iki lider döneminde yapılan referandumlar ve seçimler genel olarak incelendiğinde, bunların ülkedeki demokrasinin gelişmesine ya da meşru siyasi hükümetlerin oluşmasına katkıda bulunmamış olduğu öne sürülmüştür. Tam tersine, bu referandumlar ve seçimler özel bir rejim tipi olan karma ("hybrid") sistemin ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuşlardır. "Rekabetçi otoriterlik" denilen bu sistemde resmi demokratik kuruluşlar, siyasi gücün elde edilmesinin ve kullanılmasının yolu olarak görülmektedirler.<sup>928</sup>

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<sup>928</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism", *Ibid.*, p. 52; Larry Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes" *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), April 2002, pp. 21-35; Daniel Calingaert, "Election Rigging and How to Fight It", *Journal of Democracy*, 17(3), July 2006, p. 138.

Akaev ve Bakiev dönemlerini inceleyen her iki bölümde de gerekli olan yerlerde tezin Giriş kısmındaki teorik çerçeveye kısa atıflarda bulunulmuştur. Bu iki bölümden sonraki bölüm için Kırgızistan'daki yedi bölge ve iki şehirde (Bişkek ve Oş) 140 kişi ile mülakat ve anket yolu ile görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Daha sonra bu görüşmeler elektronik ortama aktarılmış ve Rusça ve Kırgızca olan yanıtların İngilizce çevirileri yapılmıştır. Daha sonraki aşamada ise bu görüşmeler beş genel bölüm içinde gruplandırılarak tezin Giriş kısmında yer alan teorik çerçeve ışığında incelenmiştir. Bu analiz, tezin 4. Bölümünün temelini oluşturmaktadır.

Gerçek bir demokrasininin yerleşmesi için referandum ve seçimler gerekli olsa da yeterli değildir. Her ikisi de formal (minimalist) demokrasinin koşulları arasındadır ve demokratikleşmeyi başlatan ve daha sonra demokrasinin yerleşmesini (consolidation) sağlayan demokrasiye geçiş sürecinin ilk adımlarıdır. Ancak tezin ilgili bölümlerinde de anlatıldığı üzere Kırgızistan örneğinde, ne referandumlar ne de parlamento veya başkanlık seçimleri demokratikleşmenin gerçekleşmesi yönünde bir katkı sağlamamıştır. Referandumlar, demokrasiye geçişin ilk adımlarını oluşturmak ve demokrasinin yerleşmesinin önünü açmak yerine, devlet başkanının yetkilerinin arttırılmasının ve parlamentonun yetkilerinin azaltılmasının yolu olarak kullanılmıştır. Bu tutum, otoriter sisteme geçişin de yolunu açmıştır.

Kırgızistan örneği incelendiği zaman, ilgili literatür ve tezin Giriş kısmında sunulan teorik çerçevede yer alan belli kavramlar ve argümanların yararlı olduğu görülmektedir. Bu bağlamda birbiriyle ilişkili üç kavramsal çerçeve Kırgız örneği için açıklayıcı olabilir:

- 1) Demokrasiye geçiş (transition) literatüründe seçimlere ve resmi kurumlara verilen önem;
- 2) Siyasi meşruiyet konusundaki tartışmalar;
- 3) Demokrasiye geçiş sürecinde elitlerin önemi.

Kırgız örneğinde bunların hepsi birbiriyle ilişkili ve birbirini etkilemektedir.

Demokrasiye geiş literatürünün en ok üzerinde durulan konularından biri, seçimlerin demokratikleşme sürecinde önemli bir rolü olmasıdır. Gerçek demokrasinin gereği olarak serbest ve adil seçimlerin olması birinci koşuldur. Başka bir deyişle, demokrasiye geişin yapılabilmesi için hükümet, serbest ve adil seçimler sonucunda işbaşına gelmelidir. Ancak demokratik yolla işbaşına gelmek yeterli değildir, liderler demokratik yollarla da gidebilmelidirler. Kırgızistan örneğinde ise durumun böyle olmadığı görülmektedir. Örneğin, Akaev görev sürecini tamamladıktan sonra ayrılmamış ve toplam 15 yıl devlet başkanı olarak görevde kalmıştır. Bu süre boyunca seçimler yapılmıştır ancak bunlar siyasi rekabete açık olmamışlardır.

Demokrasiye geiş literatürü, seçimlere ek olarak resmi kurumların demokrasiye geiş sürecinde önemli rol oynadığını da vurgulamaktadır. Ancak, Kırgızistan’da resmi kurumların zayıf, resmi olmayan aile ve kabile gibi kurumların ise baskın olduğu görülmektedir. Resmi ya da resmi olmayan kurumların hâkimiyeti bir ülkenin demokrasiye başarılı geiş yapıp yapmadığını belirlemektedir.<sup>929</sup> Bu anlamda Kırgızistan demokrasiye geişi gerçekleştirememiştir; çünkü resmi olmayan kurumlar hala yaygındır ve hukukun üstünlüğü ilkesi sistem içerisinde yer almamaktadır. Kırgızistan, siyasi hayatta resmi olmayan kurumların hâkimiyetini Sovyetlerden miras olarak almıştır. Bu da hukukun üstünlüğünün oluşmasını ve demokrasinin gelişmesini engellemektedir. Bu durum, özellikle resmi atamalarda devlet başkanlarının tutumu göz önüne alındığında çok daha belirgin bir biçimde ortaya çıkmaktadır. Resmi olmayan kurumların gücü, zayıf devlet ve zayıf yönetim bağlamında Kırgızistan örneğinde daha da net görülmektedir. Resmi kurumlar kendilerine ait olan işlevlerini yerine getiremeyince, bu durumun doğal sonucu halkın elitlerin himayesine bağımlı olmasıdır. Dolayısıyla, elitler Kırgızistan örneğinin anlaşılmasında oldukça önemli bir yere sahip olmaktadır.

Öte yandan Kırgızistan’da siyasi partiler de kurumsallaşamamıştır; çünkü toplumsal kökenleri bulunmamaktadır. Bu durum, devlet başkanı gibi önemli siyasi aktörlerin bile kimi durumlarda siyasi partilere meşruiyet sağlayamamasına yol açmaktadır.

<sup>929</sup> Vladimir Gel’man, “Post-Soviet Transition and Democratization: Toward Theory Building”, Ibid., pp.92-93

Alan araştırması sonuçlarının da gösterdiği üzere ne elitler ne de halk, partilerin gerçekten gerekli ve önemli kurumlar olduğuna inanmamaktadır.

Bir diğer önemli konu ise siyasi meşruiyetle bağlantılıdır. Bu kavram seçimlerle de doğrudan ilişkilidir; çünkü seçimler demokratik meşruiyet elde etmenin en etkin yöntemidir. Başka bir deyişle, seçimler demokratik bir hükümetin temeli gibi görülmüştür. Diğer geçiş sürecinde olan ülkeler gibi Kırgızistan'da da seçimler yapılmıştır, ancak siyasete katılım ve hükümetin siyasi sorumluluğu zayıf kalmıştır. Anketlere ve mülakatlara yanıt verenlerin çoğu bunun önemli bir problem olduğunu ifade etmişlerdir. Gerek Akaev gerekse Bakiev dönemlerinde liderler gerçek bir siyasi sorumluluğa sahip değillerdi. Öte yandan halk, muhalefet partileri aracılığıyla da siyasete katılma olanağı bulamamıştır, çünkü muhalefet partileri devamlı baskı altında tutulmuşlardır.

Tezin seçimler ve siyasi partiler ile ilgili kısımlarında anlatıldığı üzere, sorulara yanıt verenlerin çoğu, ülkede sadece rejimin desteklediği partilerin kazanma şansı olduğunu inanmaktadırlar. Bu durum meşruiyet açısından önemli bir sorun oluşturmaktadır. Meşruiyeti etkileyen başka bir faktör ise ülkenin ekonomik durumu ve halkın yaşam standartlarının kötüleşmesidir. Ekonomik durgunluk ve hükümetin ekonomiyi kötü yönetmesi rejimin meşruiyet kaybetmesine yol açmıştır. Hem Akaev hem de Bakiev siyasi meşruiyeti seçim sonucu olarak elde etmişler ve bunu sadece belli bir süre için koruyabilmişlerdir. Akaev'in olumlu özelliklerine vurgu yapan yanıtlar verenlerin çoğu kendisinin ilk yıllarında verimli, teşvik edici ve demokratik olduğunu vurgulamışlardır. Ancak Akaev hükümetinin günlük hayatta sıkıntı yaratan ekonomik ve sosyal sorunları çözemediği ve verimsiz olduğu anlaşılınca, bu olumlu imaj yok olmuştur. Bakiev için da aynı şey söylenebilir. Ankete katılanlara göre, Bakiev hükümeti ilk başta umut verici görünmüş, ancak çok geçmeden kötü yönetim, rüşvet, akraba kayırma gibi faktörler Bakiev rejimin çökmesine neden olmuştur.

Demokrasiye geçiş literatüründe önem verilen üçüncü konu elitlerin rolü ve rejimi meşrulaştırmaya çalışmaları ile ilgilidir. Akaev ve Bakiev, aslında yakın çevrelerini kullanarak meşruiyetin var olduğunu göstermek istemiş, bu amaçla demokrasiye

uygun görünen faaliyetlerde bulunmuşlardır. Örneğin, her iki liderin döneminde de kurultaylar ve basın toplantıları yapılmış, muhalefetle, sivil toplum kuruluşlarıyla, medya ve seçmenlerle düzenli toplantılar düzenlenerek yönetimin meşru ve demokratik olduğu algısı yaratılmaya çalışılmıştır. Ancak, sorulara yanıt verenlerin çoğu seçimlerin serbest ve adil olmadığını düşünmektedirler. Dolayısıyla adil olduğuna inanılmayan bir seçim sonucunda seçilen milletvekilleri ve liderler de halk gözünde meşru görülmemektedirler. Bu problem, anket ve mülakatları yanıtlayanların vurguladığı temel konulardan bir tanesidir. Ayrıca, seçmenler Seçim Kurulu'nun ilan ettiği seçim sonuçlarına da güvenmemektedirler. Seçim Kurulu'na güvenilmemesi, seçimler ve referandumlar kısmında verilen yanıtlarda tekrar vurgulanmakta ve serbest ve adil seçimlerin yapılamamasının nedeni olarak gösterilmektedir.

Yanıtlar Akaev ve Bakiev rejimlerinin meşru ve demokratik olmadığını, siyasi olarak ise zayıf ve istikrarsız olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Her iki liderin de, ülkeye uluslararası kuruluşlar tarafından verilen yardımlar ve destekleri (kredi, ödenek/taahhüt) yanlış ve verimsiz kullandığı, bu yardım ve desteklerin haktan çalınıp harcanmasına göz yumdukları söylenmektedir. Reformların gerçekleştirilmesi, eğitim ve altyapı hizmetlerinin sunulması ve halkın yaşam standartlarının yükseltilmesi için verilen fonların tüketildiği ve kötü yönetildiği de belirtilmektedir. Böylece meşruiyet, ekonomik gelişme ile de sağlanamamış olmaktadır.

Tüm bu sorunlar, zaman içerisinde Akaev'in siyasi gücü elinde toplayıp muhalefeti yok eden, ülkeyi kötü yöneten ve halk için çalışmayan bir lider olarak algılanmasına neden olmuştur. Bu yüzden özellikle 2000'den sonra Akaev'in eski müttefikleri kendisini desteklememeye başlamışlardır. Ancak Akaev'in ardından iktidara gelen Bakiev de otoriter uygulamalar ve kötü yönetim nedeniyle hem elitlerin hem de halkın desteğini almayı başaramamıştır. Bugün gelinen noktada Kırgızistan'daki siyasi elitlerde demokrasiye yönelik olarak gerçek bir inancın var olduğunu söylemek çok zordur. Benzer şekilde Kırgızistan'da demokratikleşme olasılığı da düşük görünmektedir. Anketi yanıtlayanların çoğunda teorik olarak demokrasi



hakkında olumlu bir izlenim olmakla birlikte, liderlerin demokrasiye bağlılığı ve Kırgızistan'da demokrasinin uygulanabilirliğine yönelik bir inanç oluşmamış durumdadır.

Kırgızistan'da demokratikleşme kararı, siyasi liderin yani devlet başkanının elinde olmuştur. Benzer şekilde çoğu zaman anayasa değişiklikleri, liderlerin inisiyatifinde ve onların etkisi altında gerçekleşmiştir. Kırgız halkının demokrasi deneyiminin olmayışı muhalefetin zayıf oluşu ile de birleşince tüm önemli kararların liderler tarafından belirlenmekte olduğu bir siyasi yapı ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu bağlamda liderlerin Sovyet sonrası geçiş sürecindeki rolleri de kaçınılmaz bir biçimde artmıştır.

Demokrasiye gerçek anlamda bir bağlılıkları olmadığından, yönetimi ele geçiren Kırgız elitleri gün geçtikçe daha da otoriter bir tavır sergilemeye başlamışlardır. Akaev, özellikle 1996'dan sonra, "rekabetçi otoriterli" kapsamında değerlendirilebilecek yöntemlere yönelmiş ve elindeki "idari kaynakları" seçim sürecinde kendi çıkarları doğrultusunda kullanmıştır. Devlet kurumlarının, tüm kaynakların ve medyanın adil olmayan bir biçimde iktidar tarafından kullanılmasına literatürde "eşit olmayan oyun alanı" denmektedir. Böyle bir siyasi ortam demokratikleşme yolunda önemli bir engel ve "otoriter yönetimin devam ettirilmesi için önemi gittikçe artan bir araç"<sup>930</sup> olarak değerlendirilmektedir. İdari kaynakların iktidar için kullanımı katılımcılarının çokça değindiği bir problem olmuştur. 2. Bölümde detaylı olarak tartışıldığı gibi, 1996'dan sonra, medya kuruluşları hükümet organlarının çok sayıda saldırısına maruz kalmaya başlamış, muhalefet üyeleri tutuklanmış, korkutulmuş, taciz edilmiş ve seçim sonuçları ile oynanmıştır. Bu tür olaylar Kırgızistan'daki tüm seçimler ve referandumlarda yaşanmıştır. Hem genel anlamda hem de günlük uygulamalarda demokrasi ve otoriter yönetime ilişkin algılamalarla ilgili olarak anket katılımcılarının verdiği yanıtlar rekabetçi otoriterlik kapsamında değerlendirilebilecek birçok uygulanmanın Kırgızistan'da gerçekleştiğini göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda, demokratik kurallar görünürde ihlal edilmemekte ve düzenli olarak seçimler yapılmaktadır. Ancak, rejim devlet organları yoluyla muhalefeti baskı altında tutmaktadır. Rekabetçi otoriterlik yaklaşımı

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<sup>930</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field" *Journal of Democracy*, 21(1), January 2010, p.67

Kırgızistan için açıklayıcı niteliktedir, çünkü rejim demokratik kurallara uyuyor görüntüsü vermiş, ancak gerçekte bu kuralları ihlal etmiştir. Başka bir deyişle, uluslararası toplum önünde rejimin uyduğunu söylediği kurallar gerçekte hiçe sayılmıştır.

“Süper başkanlık” yaklaşımı da Kırgızistan örneği için açıklayıcıdır, çünkü Akaev ve Bakiev döneminde devlet başkanı yasama, yürütme ve yargının üstünde yer almış ve “anayasanın garantörü” olarak istediği zaman anayasa değişikliği teklifinde bulunma hakkını elinde tutmuştur. Dahası, devlet başkanı kanun hükmünde kararname çıkarabilme ve parlamentoyu feshetme yetkisine de sahip olmuştur. Bu nedenle Kırgızistan’da görülen demokrasinin yerleşmesi değil, otoriterliğin pekişmesi idi.

Kısaca, kaynak ve büyüklük bakımından diğer devlet kurumlarının çok üstünde bir başkanlık kurumunun olması, kanun hükmünde kararnameler, hazine üstünde devlet başkanının fiili ya da hukuki kontrole sahip oluşu, yargının devlet başkanının yetkileri konusunda bir denetim gücüne sahip olmayışı ve devlet başkanının denetim yokluğundan dolayı yetkilerini kötüye kullanması gibi süper başkanlık yönetimine özgü unsurların hepsi Kırgızistan özelinde gözlenmiştir. Bu öğeler ayrıca anket katılımcılarının Akayev ve Bakiyev ile ilgili sorulara verdikleri yanıtlara da sıkça yansımıştır.

Kısaca, Kırgızistan’da siyasal sistemin işleyişi hem “süper başkanlık” kavramı ile hem de “patronal başkanlık rejimi” açıklanabilecek bir çerçeveye sahip bulunmaktadır. Patronal başkanlık rejiminde iktidar kararları yerine getirmesi ve oy sağlaması için elitlere bağlı; elitler ise iktidara kaynakların ve konumlarının korunması için bağlıdır.<sup>931</sup> Patronal başkanlık rejimi ayrıca, iktidarı elinde toplayan devlet başkanının resmi ve resmi olmayan kurumları kontrol etme araçlarına sahip olması, devlet başkanının kararlarına sıkı sıkıya bağımlı kılınan bir ekonomik ve bürokratik seçkinler grubunun oluşturulması, idari ve yargısal kurumların siyasal hayat üzerinde devlet başkanının otoritesini pekiştirici rol

<sup>931</sup> Henry Hale “Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia”, Ibid., p.138

oynayabilmesi açlarından da yapısal olarak süper başkanlık rejimine benzemektedir. Buna karşılık, bu sistemde iktidar tekeli istikrarlı bir görünüme sahip değildir. Ayrıca bu sistemde başkan patron-müşteri (patron-client) ilişkilerini temel alan ve yoğun bir biçimde informal gücü kullanan bir patron gibi davranarak politik otoriteyi sağlamaya çalışır. Devlet kaynakların resmi olmayan kanallara aktarımının bu çeşidi Akaev ve Bakiev tarafından yaygın bir şekilde kullanılmıştır.

Kırgızistan'daki siyasi elitlerin hem birbirleri ile mücadele etmeleri hem de kimi durumlarda birlikte hareket etmeleri devlet başkanlarının iktidarda kalmaları için göz önünde tutmalarını gerektiren bir zorunluluk olmuştur. Bu durum, Kırgızistan'ın bağımsızlık sonrası siyasi tarihinde açık olarak görülmektedir. Örneğin, Akaev'in eski destekçilerinden bazıları zaman içinde değişen koşulların etkisi ile onun rakipleriyle birleşmişler ve Bakiev'i desteklemişlerdir, hatta Bakiev hükümetinde üst kademelere atanmışlardır.

Hale'e göre, içinde bulunulan siyasal ortama bağlı olarak elitlerin hem birbirleri ile mücadele etmeleri hem de birlikte hareket etmeleri, onların geleceğe yönelik beklentilerini de biçimlendirmektedir. Bu durum elitlerin, devlet başkanının koltuğundan ayrılacağı hissedildiğinde aceleyle kendisini terk etmeleri anlamına gelen "total ördük sendromu" olarak adlandırılmaktadır.<sup>932</sup> Kırgızistan'da Akaev rejiminin düşmesinden yalnızca bir kaç ay önce olan da tam olarak buydu. Lale Devrimi'nin liderleri olarak adlandırılanların çoğu devrimden kısa bir süre önce Akaev'i yalnız bıraktılar. Bu durum aynı zamanda Kırgızistan'daki siyasi elitlerin ideolojik temele sahip olmadıklarının da bir göstergesiydi: ülke genelinde gözlemlenen temel eğilim, ülke kaynaklarının dağılımında daha avantajlı bir yere sahip olmak adına siyasi elitlerin değişik dönemlerde değişik siyasi bloklara rahatlıkla geçmeleridir.

Bu bağlamda tezin demokrasi, otoriterlik ve seçimler alt bölümlerinde açıklandığı gibi anket ve mülakatlara katılanlar bu faktörlere odaklanan yanıtlar vermişlerdir. Katılımcılara göre gerek siyasi partilerin gerekse liderlerin ideolojik bir tutumları

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<sup>932</sup> Henry Hale "Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia", Ibid., p.138

yoktur, bu nedenle de siyasi alandaki tek motivasyon kaynağı siyasetin olanaklarını kullanarak bireysel zenginlik elde etmektir.

Bazı katılımcılar tarafından ifade edildiği üzere, resmi olmayan kurumların güçlü oluşu, rejimin kaderini belirlemede siyasi kurumlar ve yasal çerçeveye oranla daha önemli ve belirleyicidir. Ayrıca resmi kurumların insanların kendi algılarında da baskın bir yer edinmemiş olduğu söylenebilir. Buna karşılık devlet başkanı insanların zihninde daha güçlü bir yer edinmiştir. Benzer şekilde tezin seçimlerle ilgili altbölümünde vurgulandığı gibi, liderlerin siyasi partilere göre de daha önemli olduğu belirtilmiştir. Kırgızistan'da siyasi partiler ve diğer resmi kurumlar açısından kurumsallaşma tam anlamıyla sağlanamamıştır. Bunun temel nedeni bir siyasi partinin yalnızca belirli bir liderin kişisel güç aracı olarak görülmesidir. Liderler, partilerin büyümelerine ve kendilerinden bağımsız olarak gelişip kurumsallaşmasına izin vermemişlerdir. Bu durum, genel olarak siyasi başarısızlığın nedenlerinden biri olarak görülebilir ya da Kırgızistan'ın demokrasiye geçişi tamamlanamaması biçiminde algılanabilir. Bu yüzden herhangi bir partiye bağlı olmadığını belirten kişilerin yanıtlarında da görüldüğü üzere, Kırgızistan, kurumsallaşamamış partileriyle gelişememiş parti sistemleri grubu içerisinde yer almaktadır. Bu bağlamda ülkede parti örgütlerinden çok siyasi liderler siyaset alanına egemendirler. Anket ve mülakatlara katılanlar tarafından da sık sık belirtilen bu nokta, Kırgızistan örneğinde, siyasi sorumluluğun olmadığı ve iktidarın kişiselleştirildiği bir yapının varlığına da işaret etmektedir.

Tezin seçimlerle ilgili bölümünde de değinildiği gibi, katılımcılar Seçim Kurulu gibi tamamıyla hem liderin kendisinin hem de yakın çevresinin kontrolü altında bulunan kurumları, devlet başkanının gücünü arttıran araçlar olarak algılamaktadırlar. Bu yüzden, Kırgızistan'da resmi kurumların güçsüzlüğünün nedeni olarak, yalnızca resmi olmayan kurumların güçlü olmasının değil, aynı zamanda kurumların tamamen liderin kontrolü altında ve liderden bağımsız olarak oluşturulmuş kuralları dikkate almadan işlediği inancının olduğunu söylenmek mümkündür.

Hem Akaev hem de Bakiev, demokratik bir model benimseme niyetlerini göstermek için özel bir karar almak zorunda olduklarında referandum gibi demokratik olan araçları kullandılar. Ancak, ikisi de siyasi sorumluluk ve siyasi hesap verebilirlik gibi diğer demokratik koşulların gereğini yerine getirmediler ya da getirmeyi düşünmediler. Demokrasi ve otoriterlik algısı bölümündeki yanıtlar, bu konunun temel bir eksiklik olarak algılanmakta olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu bağlamda Kırgızistan, tam da Nodia'nın belirttiği gibi geçiş döneminde olan pek çok başka ülke ile beraber “gri bir bölgede” yer almakta ve ülkede gerçek bir demokrasinin oluşmasının önünde önemli yapısal engeller bulunmaktadır. Ancak yine de demokrasinin oluşturulması uzun dönemde gerçekleştirilecek bir amaç olarak kabul edilmektedir. Bugünkü koşullar altında bu tür bir geçiş döneminde olan ülkelerde egemen olan duygu belirsizlik ve başarısızlıktır. Gerek elitler gerekse halk ülkelerindeki rejimin istikrarsız, tamamlanmamış ve pekiştirilmemiş olduğu konusunda hemfikirdirler.<sup>933</sup> Gerçekten de, yanıtların pek çoğunda da bu görüşlere ortaya çıkmaktadır. Örneğin, demokrasi algısı ile ilgili olarak yanıt verenlerin çoğu Kırgızistan'da çok partili sistemin bir ideal olarak kabul edilebilir olduğunu belirtmiş ve demokrasinin olumlu özelliklerinin farkında olduklarını gösteren yorumlarda bulunmuşlardır. Ancak aynı kişiler hem çok partili sistemin, hem de demokrasinin kendi ülkelerinde düzeli bir şekilde çalışmadığına inandıklarını da vurgulamışlardır.

Bu bağlamda değerlendirildiğinde demokrasiye geçiş literatürünün Kırgızistan için sınırlı bir açıklayıcı gücü olduğu görülmektedir. Bu yaklaşım özünde yasama, yürütme ve yargıdan oluşan üç erk arasındaki güçler ayrılığı ilkesi ile yürütmenin gücünün sınırlanmasının gerekliliği üzerine odaklanmamaktadır. Bu da ülkedeki otoriter uygulamalara yönelmenin temel nedenleri arasında görülmüştür. Ancak siyasi gücün yürütmenin elinde toplanmasının önlemesi için gerekli olan demokratik mekanizmalar kurumsallaştırılmadıkça, tam olarak demokrasiye geçiş başarılamaz. Bu tür görüşler, Akaev ve Bakiev ile ilgili bölümlerdeki sorulara verilen yanıtlarda da çok sık belirtilmiştir. Benzer şekilde, demokrasiye geçiş yaklaşımı, hukukun üstünlüğüne ve anayasanın önemine de belirgin bir vurgu yapmamaktadır. Kırgızistan'da liderlerin kendi istekleri doğrultusunda kolay ve hızlı bir şekilde

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<sup>933</sup> Ghia Nodia “The Democratic Path,” Ibid. p.18

anayasa deęişikliklerine gidilmiştir ve bunu önleyecek yasal mekanizmaların olmayışı nedeni ile ne yargı ne de parlamento bu durumu önleyememiştir.

Kırgızistan örneğinde, demokrasiye geçişteki başarısızlık hakkındaki tartışmanın daha uygun olduğu söylenebilir; özellikle Kırgızistan'da demokrasiye geçiş sürecinin zayıflığı ve kırılabilirliği göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, Akaev ve Bakiev'in siyasi gücü arttırmanın bir yolu olarak seçimleri ve referandumları kullanmalarına dönük tutumları ve muhalefete baskı uygulamaları bu sürece olumsuz bir şekilde etki eden çeşitli faktörler arasında yer almıştır. Anket ve mülakatlarda pek çok kişi demokratikleşme ve Akaev ile Bakiev'in başkanlıkları başlıklı bölümlerde benzer yorumlarda bulunmuşlardır. Örneğin, Kırgızistan'daki demokrasi algısı bölümünde demokratik sistemin potansiyel olarak olumlu yönleri olduğu, ancak Kırgızistan'da demokrasinin düzenli bir şekilde çalışmadığını belirtilmiştir. Benzer şekilde, katılımcıların yaklaşık olarak üçte biri, Kırgızistan'da demokrasinin yerleşmesi konusunda kuşku duyduklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Bu kuşkunun nedenleri arasında, hükümetin sorumsuzluğu, rüşvet, hukukun üstünlüğünün eksikliği, atamalar alanında ve her düzeydeki karar verme süreçlerinde kabilenin kayırılmasına yönelik feodal uygulamaların yaygın olması gibi çeşitli faktörler yer almaktadır. Akaev'in anayasayı ihlal ederek 2000 yılında üçüncü kez devlet başkanlığına aday olması, bunun en açık örneğidir. 4. Bölümdeki Akaev algısı başlığında görülebileceği gibi bu dönemde muhalefete karşı saldırılar, devlet başkanının yetkilerini arttıran anayasa deęişiklikleri ve sivil toplum örgütleri ile bağımsız medya üzerinde baskı kurma türünden uygulamalar, demokrasiye geçiş sürecini zarflatmıştır. Yine 4. Bölümde yer alan Bakiev algısı başlığında bazı demokratik uygulamaları yürürlüğe koyarak, Bakiev'in iyi bir başlangıç yaptığı ifade edilmektedir, ancak, daha sonra ifade özgürlüğü baskı altına alınmış ve Bakiev rejimi bir diktatörlüğe dönüşmüştür. Buna bağlı olarak anket ve mülakatlara katılanlar, Bakiev'in ülkeyi demokrasiye geçiş yerine otoritellik veya diktatörlüğe doğru götüren, ifade özgürlüğünü sınırlayıcı politikalar uygulayan ve sivil toplum, muhalefet partileri ve siyasetçiler üzerinde baskı uygulayan bir lider olarak gördüklerini belirtmişlerdir.

Verilen yanıtlar analiz edildiği zaman 1991–2010 yılları arasında Kırgızistan’da demokrasiye geçiş sürecinde birçok problemin sürekliliğinden söz etmek mümkündür. Bu problemler arasında, ülkenin geçmişinde demokratik bir yönetim anlayışının bulunmaması, ülkenin siyasi gelenekleri, himayeye ve güce dayanan özel siyasi kültürü, kişiselleşmiş iktidarın varlığı, aşiret temelli bağlılık, politik sadakatin güçlü olduğu kabile düzeni, kişi bazlı politikalar, ideolojik boşluk, mevcut hükümete alternatif olmaması ve düşük yaşam standartları en baskın olarak öne çıkanlardır.

Yanıtlar, vatandaşların bir kısmının Sovyetler Birliği’ne özlem duyduğunu da göstermektedir, Sovyet geçmişi hakkında nostalji hissi onların demokratik olmayan geçmişe hala olumlu baktıkları anlamına gelmektedir. Diğer bir önemli nokta, demokratik değerlerin bütünüyle benimsenmeye hala hazır olunmadığını gösteren yanıtlardan da anlaşılabilen siyasi kültürdür. Birçok yanıtta belirtildiği gibi kişiselleştirilmiş politikalar o kadar yaygın olmuştur ki siyasi partiler, program veya ideolojileri ile değil, aşiret ve liderin ismi ile bilinmektedir. Sovyet sonrası ortaya çıkan ideolojik boşluk da önemli bir başka problem olarak görülmektedir, çünkü bu boşluk, hızlı reformlar ve demokratikleşme amacına yönelik sürekli tekrarlanan demokrasi açıklamaları yoluyla Batılı aktörler ve seçmenlerin Akaev ve Bakiev’i ön planda tutmalarının da yolunu açmıştır. Bu demokratikleşme söylemi, doğru yerde ve zamanda öne sürülerek bir araç olarak kullanılmıştır. Bununla birlikte, bu söylem istenilen sonuçları vermemiştir. Bu nedenle Kırgızistan’daki pek çok kişinin demokratik bir ülkede yaşama olasılığına olan inançlarını kaybetmeleri, hatta demokrasi ile ilgili olumsuz kanılara varmaları şaşırtıcı değildir. Sonuç olarak, Akaev ve Bakiev dönemlerinde gerçek bir siyasal alternatifin ve rekabetin olmadığı açıktır: özellikle Akaev döneminde sonuçları önceden belirlenmiş hileli seçimler ve kamu kaynaklarının yasa dışı yollarla kullanımına yönelik uygulamalarla bu durum daha net görülmüştür.

Bu problemler ülkede minimalist veya formal demokrasinin oluşmasını engellemiştir. Başarılı bir geçişin gerçekleştirilememesinin temel nedeninin her ikisi de halk tarafından düşürülen Akaev ve Bakiev’in tutumları ile doğrudan ilgisi olduğu verilen yanıtlardan açıkça anlaşılmaktadır. Bu liderler bir yandan, demokratikleşme

sürecinin önemli araçlarından olan seçimler ve referandumları minimalist demokrasinin olmazsa olmaz şartlarından göstererek, diğer yandan ise düzenli ancak rekabetçi olmayan seçimler ve referandumlar yaparak iktidarlarını meşrulaştırmaya başarısızca gayret göstermişlerdir.

Kırgızistan örneğinde başka Orta Asya ülkelerinde olduğu gibi referandumlar ve seçimler gerçek bir demokratikleşmenin temel araçları olmalarına rağmen, demokrasinin yerleşmesi bir yana, demokrasiye başarılı bir geçişe olanak yaratma konusunda da etkisiz olmuşlardır. Referandumlar ve seçimlerin demokratik düzenin olmazsa olmaz ön koşulları olmalarına rağmen, Kırgızistan’da bu araçlar demokrasi yerine kişisel iktidarın yerleşmesinin, otoriterliğin pekişmesinin, başkanın gücünün genişlemesinin ve demokrasiyi gerçek amaç edinmemiş bir iktidarın meşrulaştırılmasının araçları haline dönüşmüşlerdir. Diğer bir deyişle, hem seçimler, hem de referandumlar, demokratikleşmenin gerekçeleri haline dönüşmüşler ve bu bağlamda demokratik birer yöntem olarak liderler tarafından kötüye kullanılmışlardır. Sonuç olarak, referandumlar ve seçimler Kırgızistan’da meşru bir siyasi rejimin oluşturulmasında işlevsiz kalmışlardır.

Kırgızistan örneğinde seçimlere ve referandumlara baktığımız zaman, yasal çerçevenin ve bu alanda varolan düzenlemelerin sürekli olarak ihlal edildiğini, sonuçlarla oynandığını ve sonuçların manipüle edildiğini ve muhalefet partilerinin ve/veya adaylarının siyasi baskı altına alındığını görmek mümkündür. Özellikle kampanya ve seçim süreçlerinde devlet kaynaklarının yasadışı kullanımı, devlet çalışanlarının iktidardaki lidere destek sağlamak için harekete geçirilmesi, kampanya mitinglerine gitmek için devlete ait araçların kullanımı, rakiplerin bastırılmasında rejim için çalışan devlet istihbarat kurumlarının kullanımı, ve muhalif gazetelere, gazetecilere ve liderlere yönelik saldırılar sık sık gözlemlenen olgular haline gelmişlerdir.

Buna ek olarak, liderler Seçim Kurulu, Anayasa Mahkemesi ve diğer ilgili devlet organlarını etki altına alarak önemli avantajlar kazanmışlardır. Daha önce belirtildiği gibi, hem Akaev hem Bakiev hileli seçimler yoluyla iktidarda kalmaya çalışmışlar



ancak son tahlilde bu hileli seçimler onların ciddi şekilde meşruiyetlerini zayıflatmıştır. Gerçekten de 1990 yılında Akaev'in iktidara gelmesi ile birlikte devlet başkanının devletin kaynaklarına erişebildiği bir sistem oluşmuş ve bu sistem daha sonraki döneme miras olarak kalmıştır. Özel sektörün yeni oluşmaya başladığı bu dönemde sistemdeki diğer siyasal aktörlerin Akaev'le eşit rekabet edecek ne kaynakları ne de destekleri bulunmaktaydı. Bu durum hem 1995, hem de 2000 yılında yapılan başkanlık seçimlerinde açıkça görülmüştür. Kırgızistan'ın ekonomik olarak az gelişmiş bir ülke oluşu da devlet başkanının devletin kaynaklarını kullanması için uygun koşullar yaratmış ve muhalefetin gerçek anlamda rekabet yapmasının da önünü tıkamıştır. Yanıtlarda da belirtildiği gibi, Kırgızistan'da her iki liderin de kendi başkanlık dönemleri sırasında, seçim kampanyaları için kamu çalışanlarını ve devlet kaynaklarını kullanabilmeleri ve medyayı yönlendirmeleri kendilerine önemli avantajlar sağlamıştır. Meşru ve demokratik bir düzenin kurulmasına katkıda bulunmak yerine, bu seçimler ve referandumlar önceden belirlenmiş sonuçları ile faydasız girişimlere dönüşmüşlerdir. Paradoksal bir biçimde seçimler, hem Akaev'in hem de Bakiev'in meşruiyetlerini kaybetmelerine neden olmuştur. Başka bir deyişle, demokratik olmayan çeşitli yasadışı yöntemler görünüşte demokratik seçimler ve referandumlar için kullanılmıştır. Liderler bu seçimleri ve referandumları yukardan dayatarak gerçek demokratikleşme yönünde hiçbir ilerleme olmadan, kendilerine güç ve destek sağlamaya çalışmışlardır. Böylece özünde demokratik olan bu araçlar işe yaramamıştır ve iki lider de sosyo-ekonomik koşullar, otoriter uygulamalar ve iktidardan demokratik yöntemlerle ayrılmaya direnme de dahil olmak üzere birçok nedenden dolayı ortaya çıkan toplumsal huzursuzluk ve isyanın ardından iktidardan düşürülmüşlerdir.

Genel olarak, Kırgız halkının bir kısmında Akaev ve Bakiev'e karşı gelişmiş bir güvensizliğin olduğunu gözlemek mümkündür. Bu güvensizliğin nedeni liderlerin sahip oldukları güçlerini artırmak için minimalist demokrasinin bütün diğer araçlarını, medyayı, kamu kaynaklarını ve kendi yetkilerini kötüye kullanarak antidemokratik amaçları için demokratik araçları yollarlı kötüye kullanmış olmalarının net bir şekilde ortaya çıkmasıdır.

Anket ve mülakatlara katılan kişilerin en çok üzerinde durduğu bir başka önemli konu ise, hem Akaev'in hem de Bakiev'in sözleri ve eylemleri arasındaki uyumsuzluk ya da tutarsızlıkla ilgilidir. Bu uyumsuzluk demokrasi, liderlik, seçimler ve referandumlarla ilgili olarak sorulan sorulara verilen tüm yanıtlarda görülmüştür. Öte yandan bu alanlara ilişkin Kırgızistan'daki gündelik uygulamalarla ilgili yanıtlarda da benzer yorumlar yapılmıştır. Katılımcıların büyük bir çoğunluğunun (aralarındaki yaş, meslek, bölge ve cinsiyet farkına rağmen) demokrasiye inandıkları açıktır, ancak Kırgızistan özelinde gerçek bir demokratik sistem olmadığı sık sık dile getirilmiş ve varolan sisteme karşı güvensizlik, şüphecilik, alaycılık ve bazen öfke beslenmekte olduğu verilen yanıtlarda ortaya çıkmıştır. Başka bir deyişle, ideal ve istenen bir siyasi rejim olarak demokrasiye karşı güçlü bir inanç beslenmesine ve seçimler ve referandumlara demokratik araçlar olarak giderek daha fazla önem verilmesine rağmen, Kırgızistan'da gerçek anlamda bir demokrasinin uygulanabilirliği açısından belirgin bir umutsuzluk vardır.

Akaev ve Bakiev iktidara geldikleri zaman halkın çoğunluğunun desteğini ve güvenini sağlamak ve kendi yönetimlerini meşrulaştırmak için demokratik söylemler kullanmışlardır. Zaman içerisinde otoriter eğilimler sergilemelerine rağmen, bu tür söylemleri kullanmaya da devam etmişlerdir. Bu durum, hayal kırıklığı ile sonuçlanmış ve liderlerin demokrasi idealine gerçek anlamda bağlı olmadıklarının anlaşılmasına yol açmıştır. Ancak aynı süreç ilginç bir şekilde daha fazla demokratikleşmenin gerekli olduğunu konusunda halk düzeyinde bir farkındalık yaratmıştır. Bu bağlamda yaşanan hayal kırıklığı, Türkmenistan ve Kazakistan gibi ülkelerin aksine doğal kaynakların satışından elde edilen gelirlerin olmayışı ile birleşince, liderlerin ve yönetimlerinin güvenilirliğini ve meşruiyetlerini kaybetmelerine yol açmıştır. Sovyet döneminin sosyal hizmetler ağına alışmış ve doğal kaynaklar açısından yoksul olan Kırgızistan için demokrasiye geçiş özellikle zor olmuştur. Bu nedenle, sıradan Kırgız vatandaşları, ne Akaev ne Bakiev döneminde ekonomik refah ve demokratik haklar açısından hayatlarında herhangi bir gerçek gelişme görememişlerdir. Demokratik söylem “masaya yiyecek getirmeyi” başaramayınca, söylemler ile günlük hayatta görülen otoriter uygulamalar arasındaki

tatarsızlık daha da açık ve paradoksal olmuştur, bu durum her iki liderin de halk ayaklanması sonucu iktidardan düşmesiyle sonuçlanmıştır.

Genel olarak bu çalışma, Sovyet sonrası dönemde demokrasiye geçiş ile ilgili mevcut literatüre katkıda bulunmak amacıyla, siyasi değişim ve ekonomik kriz açısından Kırgızistan için çalkantılı bir dönemde yapılan alan araştırması yoluyla halkın, siyasi kurumlar (devlet başkanlığı, parlamento, siyasi partiler), Akaev ve Bakiev yönetimleri, siyasi meşruiyet, liderlik, istikrar ve demokratikleşme gibi kavramları nasıl algıdığını incelemiştir. Tez Kırgızistan'da iki eski cumhurbaşkanının referandum ve seçimler gibi demokratik araçları kullanarak iktidarda kalmayı temel bir amaç haline getirmiş olduklarını göstermiştir. Her iki lider döneminde de referandum ve seçimlerin düzenli olarak yapılmasına rağmen meşru bir siyasi rejim oluşturmak için belirgin bir başarı elde edilememiştir. Verilen yanıtların analizi bu stratejilerin Kırgız halkının gözünde yeterli olmadığını ortaya koymuştur.

Liderler, yasama ve yargı kurumlarının yanı sıra siyasi partileri de zayıflatmışlardır. Seçim süreçlerinde çeşitli hilelerle devlet başkanlarına yönelik güven ve inanç azalmış ve bağımsız olması gereken Seçim Kurulu'nun rejime bağlı olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Siyasi partiler, liderlerin sürekli seçim sistemini ve seçimle ilgili düzenlemeleri değiştirmesinden dolayı zayıflatılmıştır. Liderler ayrıca, sivil toplum örgütleri ve medya kuruluşlarını da zayıflatmışlar ve kendi meşruiyetlerini yalnızca seçim sonuçlarına dayanarak temellendirmişlerdir. Ancak bu tutum meşru bir lider algılaması için yeterli olmamıştır, çünkü meşruiyet liderin iktidara haklı ve adil bir biçimde gelmesini ve iktidarda kaldığı süre içerisinde de halkın güvenine layık olduğunun insanların çoğunluğu tarafından kabul edilmesi ile ilgili bir algıdır.

Ancak verilen yanıtlar Akaev ve Bakiev'in böyle bir temel oluşturmayı başaramadığı ve dolayısıyla siyasi meşruiyetlerinin eksik olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu algının demokrasi algısı ile ilgili olduğu söylenebilir. Bu bağlamda bir liderin meşruiyeti onun iktidarının ülke için en uygun olduğuna olan inanç veya algının lider tarafından sürdürülebilme kapasitesine bağlı olduğu belirtilmelidir. Kırgız örneğinde liderler bu bağlamda bir inancı devam ettirememişlerdir. Sosyo-ekonomik koşulların zorluğuna ek olarak, halk siyasi hak ve özgürlüklerden de yeterince yararlanamamıştır. Özgür

ve adil seçimler, siyasi sorumluluğa sahip bir yönetim, adil ve halkın çıkarlarını koruyabilen bir rejim talebi de bu nedenle ortaya çıkmıştır.

Kırgızistan'da Sovyet sonrası dönemde çeşitli zamanlarda demokrasinin gelişmesi için belirli girişimler olmuştur. Nisan 2010 olayları halkın Bakiev hükümetinden sonra yeni bir başlangıç, yeni bir rejim şekli (bir parlamenter cumhuriyet) istediğini gösterdi. Bu yeni düzenin Kırgızistan'da nasıl şekilleneceği zaman içinde daha iyi görülecektir. Son olaylar bu tezde geliştirilen teorik çerçeve açısından incelendiğinde, demokratik liderliğin ve siyasi meşruiyet eksikliğinin Kırgız toplumunda çok önemli bir sorun haline geldiğini daha açık bir biçimde görülmektedir. Özgür ve adil seçimler ve referandumlar meşru iktidarın ve bir liderin iktidarda kalmasının gerekli ön koşulları olarak görülmektedir. Ancak ne Akaev ne de Bakiev bu tür bir iktidar anlayışına sahip olmuşlardır. Bu tezin amacı Bakiev'in görevden uzaklaştırılmasına neden olan Nisan 2010 olaylarını analiz etmek olmasa da bir nokta açıktır: Kırgızistan şimdiye kadar Orta Asya'da halk ayaklanması ile iki lider değiştirmeyi gerçekleştirebilen ilk ve tek ülkedir. Kırgız halkı hala çoğunluğu memnun edecek uygun bir sistem bulma çabası içersindedir, ancak siyasi meşruiyet artık demokratik düzenin temel bir ilkesi olarak insanlar ve elitler tarafından benimsenmiş görünmektedir. Bir sonraki başkanlık seçimleri için aday olmayacağını açıklayan Kırgızistan'ın yeni cumhurbaşkanı Roza Otumbaeva, koltuğuna bağlı kalmayan, anayasaya ve yasalara saygı duyan ve özgür ve adil seçimlerin önemini anlayan iyi bir lider örneğini oluşturmuş gibidir.

Uluslararası gözlemciler tarafından özgür ve adil olarak kabul edilen parlamento seçimleri 10 Ekim 2010 tarihinde yapılmış ve Otunbaeva seçim sürecine herhangi bir şekilde müdahale etmemiştir. Demokrasiye geçişte yirmi yıl boyunca çeşitli yolları denemenin ardından, Otunbaeva'nın örneği bize, gelecekte daha demokratik bir Kırgızistan idealinin gerçek olabileceği yolunda umut vermektedir.