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Social Ties and State Formation in Post-Soviet Central Asia

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SOCIAL TIES AND STATE FORMATION IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

by

DAVID SIEGEL

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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David Siegel

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Political Science to satisfy the dissertation
Requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

SOCIAL TIES AND STATE FORMATION IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

by

DAVID SIEGEL

Adviser: Professor Susan L. Woodward

This dissertation examines state formation in newly or recently independent states. Why are state authorities able to exert control over provincial areas in some cases but not others? How do the national authorities of newly independent states build centralized bureaucracies, control state cadre, and ensure deference among their regional subordinates? Why do they sometimes fail? I answer these questions by focusing on the social ties of state officials in the periphery. Specifically, I argue that where the state's regional officials are socially embedded in local communities, the process of administrative centralization will proceed unevenly and incompletely. It is only by dislocating state personnel from local social structures that they become, as Weber described them, "servants of the state."

While framed within theories from the literature on state formation, this study demonstrates how the contemporary historical context reshapes processes of state development. International policy prioritizes decentralization and regional representation over administrative centralization and can have the unintended effect of creating social bases of support for the state's regional cadre, bolstering their independence, and undermining the state's administrative hierarchy.

This dissertation employs a comparative analysis of two post-Soviet Central Asian states—Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan—during their first two decades of independence, from 1991

to 2013. These two states share a common Soviet institutional legacy and adopted similar formal administrative structures after independence; they are both non-democratic unitary states where the highest-level provincial officials formally represent the central government in the regions, not the populations living there. Yet, the politics of bureaucratic centralization and cadre control have differed dramatically in each state. Central authorities in Kazakhstan have obtained firm control over their regional cadre and mete out swift punishment for insubordination. By contrast, central authorities in Kyrgyzstan have twice been overthrown by revolutions led by regional elite. Moreover, they regularly face challenges from local cadre and ordinary people when they seek to fire, relocate, or replace state officials in the periphery, in accordance with their formal legal authority. In short, regional officials in Kazakhstan who challenge national authorities end up in jail or in exile while their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan often end up in power.

The data for this study were collected during 15 months of fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. During this time I conducted ethnographic research at the village level in each state. This included interviews with local officials and ordinary villagers as well as observational research about the processes of local government. I also interviewed former and current state officials in the capital city of each state, representatives of international organizations, local scholars, and journalists. Finally, using local media sources, I created an original database of provincial governors' biographies and career trajectories. Using these data, I analyze levels of social embeddedness for regional officials and trace local, provincial, and national outcomes in state formation.

I find that Kyrgyzstan, which was dependent on international donors for aid, adopted many of the reforms that donors favored, including a system of local self-government that kept village-level officials socially embedded in local communities, forging close bonds between

those officials and the population. The pattern of state-society relations that resulted from these close bonds undermined the central government's ability to appoint and remove its own cadre at the provincial level, leaving them only loosely integrated into the state's administrative bureaucracy. The insubordination of regional cadre becomes observable not only in Kyrgyzstan's two national-level revolutions, but in regular center-periphery political struggle over the appointment of regional officials. With surprising regularity, local officials, backed by supporters in their native villages and districts, have sacked provincial state offices, or resisted central authorities' orders for relocation to a different province.

Kazakhstan, which was wealthier at independence, was virtually immune to international pressure to decentralize administration. There, central authorities maintained strict appointment powers down to the village-level and used them to rotate cadre across regions, further disembedding state officials from local social contexts and facilitating the centralization of bureaucratic administration. The upshot is that regional cadre have few social bases of support in the regions and are more dependent on their bosses in the capital city. This has facilitated bureaucratic centralization; that is, it has enabled central authorities to construct a robust hierarchy of state administration, given them more control over regional cadre and, therefore, better reach into the regions themselves.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Social Ties and State Formation

I. The Puzzle

In 2002, the governor of Kazakhstan's Pavlodar province, Galymzhan Zhakiyanov, was arrested on charges of abusing power. His real crime, however, was to publicly criticize President Nazarbayev's constitutional authority to appoint and remove provincial governors. Zhakiyanov demanded that governors be chosen by direct election instead. In this and other instances the president faced few problems overcoming and eliminating insubordinate opponents. Zhakiyanov served four years in jail and was released on the condition of permanent exile.

Even more than Zhakiyanov in Kazakhstan, the tenure of Melis Myrzakmatov in Kyrgyzstan—the mayor of Osh city from 2009 to late 2013—was marked by highly public forms of insubordination. Myrzakmatov not only flouted official government policies, he openly questioned the legitimacy of the central government itself. Authorities in Bishkek, however, did not have an easy time getting rid of him, even though they had the legal authority to do so. When the president attempted to fire Myrzakmatov in 2010, thousands of his supporters protested in the streets of Osh until the government relented, leaving him in office to serve another three years.

The contrasting fates of Zhakiyanov and Myrzakmatov reflect a broader divergence of state formation outcomes in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. These are center-periphery conflicts that reflect levels of centralized administration in each state, or the degree to which regional officials are actually integrated into the state's administrative hierarchy and subordinate to

national authorities in the capital city.¹ And, since the centralization of bureaucratic administration is one of the key processes of state formation, these outcomes pose a number of broader questions about state development in post-Soviet Central Asia, and in newly independent states more generally: What enables rulers to centralize state administration and recruit personnel in far-flung regions who accept their own subordination in the state's administrative hierarchy? Why do central authorities sometimes fail to achieve this? And, what are the ways in which the contemporary historical context of neoliberal globalization—characterized, in part, by a series of norms about modern statehood—creates differences in this process today compared with the past? I seek to answer these questions in a comparative study of two post-Soviet Central Asian states.

The remainder of this introductory chapter is organized in two sections. In the first section I define state formation stressing the process of bureaucratic centralization and the question of whether and how state officials are integrated into a state's administrative apparatus as subordinate agents to national authorities. Building on Weber's concepts of patrimonialism and rational-legal bureaucracy, I suggest that we understand administrative relations within state bureaucracies as social relations, not only between national authorities and their subordinate agents—as Weber emphasized—but also between those agents and the societies that they govern.

Next, I review the ways in which the literature on state formation has emphasized the importance of local social ties in the recruitment and integration of officials into state administration, a key element in the process of bureaucratic centralization. A large body of this literature holds that preexisting forms of social and political organization in peripheral territories

¹ Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are both non-democratic unitary states. Provincial governors and mayors of large

often determined how provincial elites were integrated into officialdom. They also shaped the kinds of institutions that structured relationships between those officials and nascent national authorities, and also between those agents and society. These different patterns of social ties, and the institutions that resulted from them, are what created significant variations in the kinds of states that emerged across Europe, Russia, and large parts of the Middle East and Africa.

While this literature provides key insights into the broadest factors shaping trajectories and outcomes of state formation, it tends to treat preexisting forms of social and political organization as static, fully formed, and exogenous to centralizing states. This stems from the deep historical context of these analyses, which focus heavily on European state formation over the course of several centuries. The “state-in-society” literature—driven initially by a need to explain the presumed anomalies in forms of state rule during the post-colonial period—has drawn much more attention to the interactive processes of state power, stressing mutually constitutive elements of both states and societies. Yet, this literature has said relatively little about the process of state formation itself. Just as the state-in-society approach has shed light on post-colonial regime politics and state-society relations, it can tell us a lot about state formation in the post-Cold War era. I build on this literature taking insights that might be especially useful for the analysis of state formation in newly independent, post-colonial states. I also point out unique features of the contemporary international context of state formation, which has created new pressures and imperatives to build different kinds of state institutions, and in different sequences than in the past. Later in the dissertation I argue that these changes have had profound effects on state-society relations in ways that have shaped state formation outcomes.

In the final section of this chapter I review the literature on state formation in post-Soviet states, with an emphasis on Central Asia. In fact, political scientists have tended not to focus on

processes of state formation, or the problems associated with building (or rebuilding) state structures and administrative bureaucracies in the former Soviet Union. Instead, this literature tends to focus almost exclusively on regime dynamics and transition, particularly democratization or authoritarian consolidation.

Notably, an analytical focus on regimes does say something about state formation, if only indirectly; it tends to assume that post-Soviet states are products of their Soviet past, highly centralized and fully formed at independence. In other words, questions central to studies of democratization—focusing on whether or how central authorities decentralize power—tend to assume that state power is centralized to begin with, thus marginalizing questions related to state formation. And, normatively, it tends to suggest that this starting point is problematic, or at least undesirable. A primary focus on state formation brings some of these assumptions to light, and raises questions about regime transitions that have not been sufficiently addressed. For example, what happens when states begin to decentralize power that is not yet centralized, or devolve authority that has not first been consolidated?

In contrast to political scientists, anthropologists and sociologists who study post-Soviet states have stressed the virtual absence of state authority after the collapse of the Soviet Union, implying challenges and dilemmas for central authorities who must contend with numerous competitors in the periphery—typically current or former state personnel themselves, including members of defunct security services, former managers of state and collective farms and factories, and mid-level bureaucrats.

By focusing on whether and how national authorities integrate (or re-integrate) these personnel into a centralized state bureaucracy, I draw on this anthropological literature to reevaluate how political scientists have approached the problems of post-Soviet state formation.

In the end, I seek to answer one main question: what accounts for the different outcomes of state formation in post-Soviet Central Asian states and what does this tell us about contemporary state formation? In the final section of this chapter I outline the subsequent dissertation chapters, which seek to answer this question.

II. State Formation, Social Ties, and State-Society Relations as a Theoretical Framework

State formation includes a number of related processes, including the nationalization of taxation and the monopolization of coercion. The process central to all of these, however, is bureaucratic centralization (Tin-bor Hui 2005: 38-53; Vu 2010). Without a unified and centralized administrative apparatus, central authorities will be ill-equipped to secure tax revenues in far-flung territories, and will continue to face challenges from multiple and dispersed centers of authority. Centralization is, by definition, the process by which territorial administration is unified under a single hierarchy, and by which central authorities come to occupy the top of that hierarchy. Whether and how state personnel are recruited and integrated into the state's administrative structures is a defining aspect of this process. But, the ways in which administrative centralization unfolds can vary greatly, and sometimes it happens incompletely, or not at all. One of the main questions that the literature on state formation seeks to address is how and why the process of state formation produces such wide variations in the form and nature of centralized bureaucracies.

Before discussing state formation, though, I would like to specify contrasts and commonalities in different modes of state administration, with particular attention paid to the social relations that define them. Above all else, "organized domination" of the kind that exists in state hierarchies, "requires control of the personal executive staff" (Weber 1958: 80). Weber

described the two most widely referenced styles of administrative relations through which this control is achieved: bureaucratic and patrimonial (Weber 1978). A rational-legal bureaucracy is defined by the strict delimitation of public and private realms, such that the offices of the state are not the private domain of either the ruler or his or her staff, but established to serve impersonal and functional purposes according to procedures defined by law. Offices are arranged hierarchically, designed to carry out orders from state leadership (1978: 956-58).

In contrast, administrative relations in a patrimonial state are personalized, with little distinction between public and private realms. The state itself is administered as the personal possession of the ruler, and the personnel he or she appoints are frequently close acquaintances, personal dependents, and even direct kin (1025-1031). Patrimonialism is depicted by Weber as a subcategory of patriarchalism, akin to a father's rule over a household, where "the belief in authority is based on personal relations that are perceived as natural" (1007). In a patrimonial state, hierarchy in administrative relations is not based on the laws structuring state offices—or, rational-legal legitimacy—but on the same sociology that subordinates children to their parents—traditional legitimacy (1006-1013).

Patrimonial and bureaucratic administration are, in short, two different ways of understanding the social relations that tie central state authorities to their staff, the bases by which the former obtain authority over the latter, and the overall character and nature of the state's administrative system. They are both hierarchies, but defined by different styles of social relations between principals and agents. As others have suggested, we might conceptualize the key differences as falling along a "personalism-impersonality continuum" within state administrative relations (Rudolph and Rudolph 1979: 205). As Weber himself put it, they are both types of "authority relationships" (1978: 212-216). We can imagine state formation as the

process by which these relationships are incorporated into state administration, the degree to which bureaucratic centralization is actually achieved, and the character of social relations that ensure it is.

Moreover, in how they shape social relations between agents of the state and members of a broader society, patrimonial and bureaucratic styles of state administration share important similarities. Both forms of rule mitigate against the development or maintenance of social ties between state officials and the rest of society. This is because they both require the replacement of elites representing local interests with state officials who have exclusive loyalty to central authorities in the capital city, the very essence of centralized administration and a defining feature of statehood. Yet, these important places of overlap between “ideal” forms have been given relatively less attention than their differences.

For instance, Weber stresses that functionaries in both patrimonial and bureaucratic states are appointed, not elected. Despite the fact that rational-legal bureaucracy is often associated with democracy, bureaucrats themselves cannot be subject to elections. Their task as state officials is to carry out orders from above, not to represent interests from below. As Weber notes, “in all circumstances, the designation of officials by means of an election modifies the rigidity of hierarchical subordination [...] the official who is not elected, but appointed by a master, normally functions, from a technical point of view, more accurately ...” (1978: 960). In fact, someone who is elected by the population, according to Weber, “is no longer a purely bureaucratic figure” (220-1; 960). One reason that Weber regards rational-legal bureaucracy as a superior form of administration is not because it is more just or representative of social interests, but precisely the opposite: it fosters stronger hierarchy with stricter rules, making administration

more unified and coherent, and *less* determined by centrifugal social pressures (973-975).² Thus, a rational-legal bureaucracy “could not be *replaced* by election from below” (Beetham 1985: 70).³

A system of appointments—whether in a rational-legal or patrimonial state—makes state officials less responsive to social pressures because it weakens and possibly severs their social ties to local and regional communities. They are not selected *from* or by localities, but sent *to* them. State bureaucracy, writes Weber, “develops the more perfectly, the more it is ‘dehumanized,’” when its agents operate as socially disembodied officials, not as members or representatives of particularistic (and decentralized) communities (Weber 1978: 975). The bureaucracy becomes its own social structure. Bureaucratic centralization proceeds as officials become embedded in the administrative structure and disembodied from society; each individual bureaucrat is “forged to the community of all the functionaries who are integrated into the mechanism,” and take on its interests as their own (Weber 1958: 228).

In patrimonial states, too, administrative control rests on weak social relations between state functionaries and local communities. Weber writes, “just like bureaucratic officials, the patrimonial officials usually develop into a status group set off from the ruled” (Weber 1978: 1026). To ensure that subordinates do not obtain too much independence, the rulers of patrimonial states tend to recruit their own personal dependents and other socially displaced persons—“aliens,” “serfs,” or “slaves,” in Weber’s language (1013-1031). They do so precisely because this helps to ensure loyalty to the center, and subordination within the state’s

² The oft-cited connection between rational-legal bureaucracy and democracy is the rule of law. Rational-legal bureaucracy ensures that a rule of law can exist, which makes democracy possible. The key point is that even in a democracy, bureaucrats themselves are not subject to election, lest they cease to be bureaucrats. This makes state functionaries of all kinds—whether they be bound in a rational-legal or patrimonial system of administration—more alike than different.

³ Emphasis in original.

administrative hierarchy (1026). Elites in the periphery who are already embedded in local communities, by contrast, will have independent bases of support, and their integration into state administration will be compromised and remain incomplete.

In sum, neither rational-legal nor patrimonial bureaucrats are embedded members of society, nor do they represent local and regional social interests. To the extent that they are embedded in society and representative of its interests, the less they are state agents, the weaker the state's hierarchy, and the less complete the process of administrative centralization. State officials in a patrimonial administration are personally dependent on the ruler; those in a rational-legal bureaucratic system are dependent on their office, as "servants of the state" (Weber 1958: 79). In both cases, though, the process of administrative centralization requires that state officials, particularly those in far-flung regions and provinces, receive and execute orders from above. This is what it means to describe national authorities' control over cadre.

Thus, whether and how elites in the periphery become integrated into state administration as its officials—whether they be rational-legal or patrimonial—is a question of what kind of social ties bind them to the center, and whether and how their social ties to the periphery are weakened or severed. This is what gives state bureaucracy—whether patrimonial or bureaucratic—its autonomous character and ensures that it is relatively centralized. This is the quality that makes both styles of administration different types of *state* administration. The "coherence" of state administration, in short, "requires that individual incumbents be to some degree insulated from the demands of the surrounding society" (Evans 1995: 30). As Huntington observed, organizational autonomy from society "becomes a means to coherence" (1968: 22). Conversely, we might note that the logic of state administration itself can take on a mechanical and impersonal character precisely because the center seeks to manage multiple and complex

localities by abstracting and homogenizing them, thereby undercutting the contextualized local social knowledge of regional intermediaries (Scott 1998: 22-52). Local intermediaries become useful to the state as administrators when they adopt the administrative abstractions of the state's bureaucratic logic, and abandon, ignore, or forget the social and contextual features of their own localities (Ibid.).⁴

In terms of state formation, the key question becomes whether and how elites in regions and localities are incorporated into the state apparatus as its officials. In answering this question we should treat patrimonial administration and rational-legal bureaucracy not as exclusively different forms of rule, but as similar ways of organizing social relations between state and society, while acknowledging differences in social relations within the administrative bureaucracy itself. We should seek to describe these relations empirically, explaining how they shape, and are shaped by, the process of bureaucratic centralization, and the ways in which they tie center and periphery together within a unified administrative apparatus. As Wolf said of other reified concepts in the social sciences, state bureaucracy must be understood empirically as “bundles of relationships” (Wolf 1997: 3). Thus, “we should treat states not as things but as sets of social processes and relations” (Verdery 1996: 209).

This suggests a group of related questions to be answered empirically: What are the social ties that define administrative relations between center and periphery? How are officials socially situated in the periphery? And, even more centrally, how does their place in local social settings affect subsequent trajectories of state formation as officials in the capital city seek to subordinate them within a centralized state administration? How do we end up with different

⁴ In fact, as Scott argues, one of the fundamental purposes of the state's abstract and socially ungrounded administrative logic is to undercut the independence of local and regional elites. “The very concept of the modern state,” he writes, applying this model to the realm of land tenure regulation, “presupposes a vastly simplified and uniform property regime that is legible and hence manipulable *from the center*” (1998: 35, emphasis added).

kinds of centralized administrations, and different kinds of administrative relations between center and periphery? What are the different kinds of paths toward state centralization? We find answers to these questions in the literature on state formation.

State Formation and Preexisting Socio-Political Organization in the Periphery

The literature on state formation has addressed two main questions. First, there is the deeply historical and Eurocentric question of how the modern state developed, and why it became the predominant form of political organization in the world today, eclipsing city-states and empires. The most commonly cited answer is that modern states developed inadvertently, as a result of the organizational demands of warfare in early modern Europe (Tilly 1975, 1992). Others have built upon this to show that the historical, geographical, and strategic context of warfare could determine the degree to which war actually had these effects (Centeno 2003; Tin-bor Hui 2005).

But, a second question in the state formation literature asks why states vary in their outcomes and trajectories of development. Even if states are the predominant forms of political organization today, they vary in numerous ways, including in their styles of administration (rational-legal versus patrimonial) as well as their levels of administrative centralization (the degree to which central authorities control their subordinates). In seeking to explain variations in the trajectories and outcomes of state centralization, scholars have focused heavily on the nature of preexisting social and political organization in the periphery. This harkens back to Weber and places social relations—both within state administration and between state and society—at the center of analysis. State formation and centralization occurred as rulers sought to extract

administrative agents from their local social bases and enmesh them in the state's hierarchy

instead:

Of necessity, the prince sought to create a staff of helpers dedicated wholly and exclusively to serving him, hence making this their major vocation. The structure of the emerging dynastic political organization, and not only this but the whole articulation of the culture depended to a considerable degree upon the question of where the prince recruited agents (Weber 1958: 84).

Indeed, the question of “where” the ruler's agents come from is key. As aspiring state leaders seek to achieve territorial encompassment of their rule, they interact with local elites who are embedded in different kinds of social and political structures across different territories. The nature of those preexisting social and political relations shaped both the kinds of institutions that state authorities developed to manage center-periphery relations, and the degree to which they were willing to recruit local elites into the state's administrative hierarchy or marginalize them from it. In other words, whether and how local and regional elites are integrated into the state bureaucracy and recruited as its “officials” were shaped by their preexisting connections to local and regional populations, which vary across territories.

The importance of this process in the formation of modern states is made evident by the fact that so many scholars take the center's dominance of the periphery for granted when defining states themselves. The conceptualization of the state as a unified and internally cohesive organization is so fundamental that when a state fails to exhibit these characteristics—where, for example, central authorities have little control over their own cadre, or face regular challenges from other local elites—scholars become reticent to call them states at all, at least not without the modifier “weak,” “failing,” or “failed” (Boege, Volker et al. 2010; Migdal 2001: 58-94). This conceptualization rests upon telling assumptions about how center and periphery came together in the first place. Namely, it assumes local and regional social forces were rendered obsolete by the process of state formation itself. As Migdal notes, scholars often “understand the

state to be the culmination of a process transcending the old localized organizations in societies, which had previously made the rules” (Migdal 2001: 111). He cites King, who writes that the modern state, which is defined by “a more impersonal and public system of rule over territorial circumscribed societies,” is “distinguished from the largely localized and particularistic forms of power which preceded it” (King 1986: 30).

The literature on state formation focuses precisely on the processes by which this centralization occurred. Rather than treating disparate and localized loci of authority as unimportant or obsolescent, this literature focuses heavily on the effect that these fissiparous forces had on centralizing states. Even when central authorities do succeed in defeating competitors in the regions, the institutions of the state itself often reflect these previous struggles, creating variations in how those states are organized (Tilly 1992, Barkey 1994). As briefly noted above, modern states vary in developmental trajectories and outcomes because of variations in preexisting social and political organization in the periphery that nascent central authorities had to contend with as they centralized administration.

Tilly, for example, describes how variations in social and political organization across the territory of Europe forged distinctly different trajectories of state formation (Tilly 1992: 127-160). Though European states ultimately merged into one kind—the modern “national” state—their prior histories, defined by variations in social structure across territory, left notable “marks on the state” in terms of their durable institutional configurations of administrative relations (ibid. 26).⁵ Tilly identifies three main social structures that varied across territory: coercive-intensive regions (those dominated by agriculture), capital-intensive regions, (those dominated by commerce), and intermediate capital-coercive regions (Tilly 1992).

⁵ Tilly defines the national state as a state “governing multiple contiguous regions and their cities by means of centralized, differentiated, and autonomous structures” (1992: 2).

As the relative intensity of agricultural production versus commerce varied across territory, so too did the social arrangements that linked local elites to their communities. The result was that local elites in different regions were integrated into the state differently, leading to variations in the levels of bureaucratic centralization, and qualitatively different kinds of administrative relations between center and periphery. The abundance of capital resources in capital-intensive regions, for example, allowed central authorities to extract loans and taxes without directly incorporating the holders of capital into the bureaucracy itself. Without the need for the direct participation of regional elites in state administration, these regions—typified by the city-states of Northern Italy—resulted in the formation of less centralized states with smaller bureaucracies (Tilly 1992: 143-151).

In capital-scarce regions dominated by agriculture, though, the extraction of resources was dependent on landlords' direct coercion of peasants and serfs. In order to obtain their share of these resources, aspiring state makers incorporated coercive-wielding local elites into the state itself, granting them land and official title. The regions of Europe that were defined by these kinds of local social arrangements tended to evolve into states like Russia, Poland, and Hungary, with large and “bulky” centralized bureaucracies (Tilly 1992: 137-143). England and France followed an intermediate capital-coercive trajectory, which entailed both processes simultaneously, and produced outcomes more like the modern state that we know today (151-160). The key point is that elites who were socially and politically embedded in different social contexts struck different bargains with the rulers of emerging states in modern Europe. This changed the kind of centralized bureaucracies that developed and whether and how local elites were incorporated into that bureaucracy as state officials. Echoing Moore, state institutions

came to reflect underlying social structures, which varied across both time and space (Moore 1966).

Similarly, Ertman describes variations in the trajectories of European states according to preexisting forms of social and political organization in the periphery. Where territorially based representative institutions existed at the onset of state formation, local elites were more likely and better able to resist centralization. This is because territorially based institutions were “inextricably linked to and rooted in organs of local government,” making local officials more tightly bound to the communities that they represented (22). Local elites in these territories were representatives of local interests rather than ready-made agents of the state. The result was that polities in these regions were less likely to be highly centralized absolutist states (Ertman 1997: 19-25). This was true, though, only when local government bodies were participatory. Where preexisting local governments were administrative instead, social ties between local elites and their communities were weaker, and governance was already “carried out almost exclusively by officials answerable to the center” (25). Because the elites in these territories were already socially disembedded, they were more fully incorporated into the state apparatus, making the creation of a centralized absolutist state more likely.⁶

Like Tilly and Ertman, Ziblatt argues that levels of state centralization vary according to preexisting social and political organization in the periphery. Where preexisting political organization in the periphery is characterized by more “infrastructural capacity”—namely, a well-functioning system of public administration and strong formal institutions like a

⁶ For Ertman, variation in levels of centralization was independent of whether administration was characterized as patrimonial or bureaucratic. As described above, bureaucratic and patrimonial states vary primarily in administrative relations between rulers and staff, but are similar in how they disembed state officials themselves from local social contexts. Though Ertman primarily treats the development of rational-legal bureaucracy as an historical and technical issue, he does acknowledge the politics of centralization. The necessary condition is that “[R]ulers successfully resist the appropriating designs of their elite staffs and retain the right to remove officials at will” (1997: 8-9). Just as Weber emphasized, the power of appointment was key.

constitution and parliament—central authorities will be more likely to decentralize authority, leaving independent power in the hands of local elites (Ziblatt 2004: 78).

In contrast, when the peripheral subunits lack formal rational-legal institutions of public administration, central authorities will be less likely to find a reliable partner whom they can trust to carry out the objectives of the central government. Central authorities, in this case, “are tempted by the prospects of sweeping away existing units, leading the way to greater centralization” (78-79). Ziblatt’s scope is limited to Europe and applies best to nascent states with central governments that have already-established rational-legal bureaucracies prior to centralization.⁷ But, Gerring, et al. expand the argument to all levels of center-periphery administrative relations, whether international, national, or subnational (2011).

Others have focused on the causal impact of preexisting social and political organization in non-European contexts to explain variations in the kinds of state institutions rulers adopted to incorporate regional cadre into a centralized administrative apparatus. For example, following Tilly’s work, Tin-bor Hui argues that key differences in social structures at the starting point of state formation placed China and Europe on drastically different paths of development. Unlike early modern Europe, ancient China engaged in little international trade, and, therefore, lacked the capital-intensive regions that existed in Europe. Where central authorities in the capital-intensive regions of Europe could forego bureaucratic centralization—bargaining with private capital instead—state makers in China did not have this option. “The only way they could build larger armies and raise higher revenues,” she writes, “was to build up their administrative capacity” (2005: 51). This meant that central authorities relied little on regional elites and built

⁷ That is, the variation in the periphery between patrimonial and rational-legal bureaucracy is not seen as varying in the center, which is assumed to already be defined by rational-legal bureaucracy. This likely stems from Ziblatt’s empirical cases, late nineteenth-century Germany and Italy.

bureaucracies from the capital city outward, such that the state became highly centralized, much more so than the states of early modern Europe.⁸

In the Ottoman Empire, Barkey suggests that the robust patronage ties that kept regional officials subordinate to central authorities were “intensified by the lack of local village-based organization and cooperation,” which precluded those officials from forming alliances with peasant communities (1994: 11). Like Ertman, this suggests that centralization proceeded where local officials lacked strong ties to the periphery. The independence of regional cadre in the Ottoman Empire was undercut even further, however, when central authorities recruited “bandits”—another difference in local social structure vis-à-vis Europe—to keep local authorities in check, as I discuss in more detail below (Barkey 1994).⁹

Anderson describes how differences in local social structures set the states of the Middle East and North Africa on a drastically different path from those in Europe, resulting in different styles of bureaucratic authority (1987). “The patterns and outcomes of state formation and bureaucratic development,” she writes, “depend on the character of society and authority at the outset of the transformation” (4). Because societies in the Middle East were traditionally nomadic, organized into tribes, and engaged in long-distance trade, there was little landed wealth (Anderson 1987; Khoury and Kostiner 1990). The result is that nascent state authorities in the Middle East, unlike their counterparts in both coercive- and capital-intensive regions of Europe, were less able to identify and recruit regional elites into the state; administrative centralization proceeded unevenly and incompletely, reflecting diffuse underlying social organization.

⁸ Conversely, the state in China was also much less representative of social interests. A highly centralized bureaucracy enabled the Chinese state to dominate society and crush opponents, preventing the kind of collective action that enabled certain populations to wrest representative institutions from the nascent state makers of Europe (Tin-bor Hui 2005: 39-53).

⁹ They also kept regional officials socially disembedded by rotating them across territory, as I discuss in the following chapter (Barkey 1994: 11).

Likewise, Boone argues that the distribution of power between center and periphery in post-colonial African states, and the administrative relations that define them, “are partly artifacts of the organization of power within agrarian society itself” (2003: 2). That is, they were shaped by the variations in preexisting social structures in the periphery. More specifically, the presence or absence of hierarchy in local social structures, in conjunction with local elites’ level of economic dependence on the center, determined the institutional strategies that state rulers could adopt in an effort to incorporate or exclude local elites from state administration.

In territories where local social structures were hierarchically organized, central authorities could either share power with local elites, ruling indirectly, or they could attempt to displace them, usurping their power altogether. Which of these options they chose depended upon whether local elites were economically dependent on the center. Where local elites had too much economic independence, central authorities faced the risk of defection and, thus, pursued a strategy of usurpation rather than power sharing. Where local elites were dependent on the center economically, central authorities were more likely to be assured of their subordination, and integrated them directly into the state bureaucracy. In territories where society lacked a pre-existing social hierarchy, usurpation would not be necessary and power sharing would not be possible. In these cases, says Boone, rulers would simply “attempt to govern from the center,” refusing to give any significant power to rural actors, an institutional outcome she calls “administrative occupation” (ibid.: 17-38).¹⁰ In other words, rather than risk the incomplete

¹⁰ These three institutional outcomes governing center-periphery relations assume that central authorities have an interest in controlling and incorporating the territory in question. Boone also includes a fourth outcome. Faced with territory that has no economic value, ruling elites might choose not to incorporate it into the state at all—Boone calls this, fittingly, “non-incorporation.” That is, rather than adopt a centralized versus decentralized administrative structure, ruling elites might choose to build no structure at all, voluntarily leaving that territory outside of the state’s realm of control.

integration of local elites into the state administration, state authorities marginalized them altogether.

All of these approaches highlight the interaction between differently embedded regional elites and central authorities in shaping trajectories and outcomes of state formation. They also, however, all treat these interactions as historical and completed. Through whatever institutional arrangement that incorporated or excluded regional elites, central authorities ultimately end up in charge of a more or less centralized, yet fully formed state administration. Migdal's contribution to this literature—which was briefly described above—was to criticize the tendency to treat states as the final outcome of these processes, and to problematize the image of central authorities as achieving domination over other state officials.

Instead, Migdal suggests that states are arenas of ongoing political struggle that rarely (or never) become fully unified; personnel are never extracted from local social bases, and their integration into the state's administrative hierarchy remains incomplete and problematic for ruling elites (Migdal, Kohli, Shue 1994; Migdal 1988, 2001). This "state-in-society" approach was primarily a reaction to scholars' emphasis on state autonomy, which tended to take administrative cohesion for granted, assuming not only that the state dominated society, but that it dominated itself as well (Skocpol 1985). Even approaches that stressed the ongoing interactive nature of state power and social forces—like Mann's concept of "infrastructural power"—tended to treat states and societies as fully formed and distinctly separate entities (Mann 1993).¹¹

¹¹ The concept of "infrastructural power" is meant to complicate the presumed one-way and hierarchical relationship between state and society common in other neo-Weberian accounts. Mann defines infrastructural capacity as "the institutional capacity of a central state, despotic or not, to penetrate its territories and logistically implement decisions." Importantly, this is conceived as "a two-way street" because it not only enables the state to control society, but "also enables civil society parties to control the state" (Mann 1993: 59). Even still, Mann regards states and societies as distinct and the process of centralization as a "tightening of state-society relations" whereby social relations are captured in a single national sphere rather than multiple local or regional spheres (Mann 1993: 60-1).

But, an additional impetus behind the state-in-society approach came through efforts to understand political struggles in post-colonial states that seemed to be anomalies under the old Eurocentric paradigm (Migdal, Kohli, Shue 1994; Migdal 1988, 2001). This approach urges us to “disaggregate” the state itself, emphasizing that administrative integration is a contentious and ongoing process, particularly in newly independent states. It also emphasizes the ambiguous and changing boundary between “state” elites and other social forces. In the “conflict-laden interactions” over power, writes Migdal, state actors and social forces often form alliances and coalitions that cut across the very boundaries by which they are distinguished (Migdal 2001: 10-22). This suggests that treating state and society as discrete and separate entities that interact with one another—which the state formation literature tends to do—is problematic. Migdal argues that,

[T]here has been an unfortunate tendency in social science to treat the state as an organic, undifferentiated actor. States have been assigned an ontological status that has lifted them apart from the rest of society. As a result, the dynamics of the struggles for domination in societies, in which components of the state have played differing roles in various arenas, have been obfuscated. Those struggles have not only been about who seizes the commanding political heights in society. They have involved alliances, coalitions, and conflicts among social forces in multiple arenas, including components of the state (123).

In this light, the center’s dominance over the periphery and the integration of its own cadre into state administration is a source of internal political division that remains unresolved. Contra Weber, the hierarchy of state administration is not autonomous from society, nor are its agents disembodied from local social structures. Rather, agents of the state—as much as central authorities might seek to disembodiment them from their social bases through either rational-legal bureaucratic offices or the personal dependencies of patrimonialism—remain members of society, responsive to social pressures, and frequently divided in their loyalties. Though Weber described state bureaucracies as “dehumanizing,” we are reminded that administrative structures “are human as much as they are mechanical contrivances” (Rudolph and Rudolph 1979: 198). Weber, along with his followers, tended to ignore “the reciprocal relationship between

environmental forces and actors on the one hand and bureaucracies on the other, and the impact of this relationship on organizational goals, resources, and internal power relationships” (ibid. 209).

Following from this, Migdal urges us to recognize that state officials are not a homogenous group of actors. Rather, officials at different levels of state administration find themselves differently embedded in varying social contexts. The officials in the capital city who occupy the “commanding heights” of the state’s presumed administrative hierarchy are located in different social contexts than those in territorially dispersed field offices, or those at the bottom, who work in “the trenches” in face-to-face contact with the population that the state is seeking to govern (ibid: 123). In proposing an “anthropology of the state,” Migdal writes that social scientists

[N]eed a method that looks carefully at [the state’s] different parts (just as anthropology often focuses on small portions of society); they require an approach that analyzes how its various components, often impelled by conflicting interests and pulling in different directions, relate to one another. Such an anthropology would reject the assumptions implicit in many studies concerning the smooth interlocking of relations within and between the organs of the state organization or of a state that simply reflects the will of its top leaders (Migdal 2001: 116).

Despite this emphasis on the ongoing political struggle between state and society, the disaggregation of the state between its highest and lowest levels, and the depiction of fluid conflict between center and periphery, proponents of the state-in-society approach have rarely addressed state formation explicitly. Nevertheless, this approach has clear implications for how we understand state formation: it suggests that state formation is an ongoing process with no clear endpoint, especially in newly independent post-colonial states. The center never truly incorporates the periphery so much as it remains in struggle with it. Central authorities might recruit local elites into state administration, but they remain wary of these officials’ social ties in their own territories, fearing they might undermine administrative hierarchy, or even threaten the tenure and security of central authorities themselves (Migdal 1988).

As a reaction against the neo-Weberian literature that stresses state autonomy, the state-in-society approach also tends to emphasize how societies shape states rather than how states shape their societies. But, a truly interactive approach would allow that states—even if imperfectly unified and powerful—can shape the social forces that they are interacting with, even as the state itself is simultaneously transformed. State institutions themselves might reinforce or even reforge the kinds of social ties that exist at the local level. Social structures in the periphery and the social relations between local elites and local communities might be produced by the interaction itself, even if inadvertently.

Indeed, particularly in the context of contemporary non-European states, scholars have suggested that we understand states and societies as a perpetual object of contention, subject to continual renegotiation and transformation. States can be changed through struggles with society, but the society in which the state is embedded changes simultaneously, with different social forces rising and falling, such that the distinctions between state and society are always blurry and in flux. Changes in social forces are the impetus behind contestation and, over time, shifts in state-society relations are reflected in transformations of the state itself (Hagmann and Peclard 2010: 541). This suggests, further, that the Eurocentric Weberian model of statehood is not a necessary outcome or a standard by which we can or should measure success or failure of state development in the non-European world (Boege, et al. 2010).

Overall, then, the state-in-society approach suggests a flaw with the very idea of preexisting social and political organization as depicted in the state formation literature. As I described above, the literature on state formation treats preexisting social and political organization and central states as exogenous to one another. That is, it assumes that social and political organization in the periphery is, in fact, preexisting, and that central authorities and

regional elites first come into contact as discrete, fully formed entities. The possibility that social and political organization in the periphery is itself produced and transformed through the process of state formation, and that center and periphery can shape each other in interactive ways over time has rarely been given serious consideration.

Barkey's study of state centralization in the Ottoman Empire is one of the few studies that does so. Barkey argues that centralization in the Ottoman Empire followed a different trajectory than in European states precisely because of the different social structures that existed there and the different strategies that rulers adopted to manage center-periphery administrative relations (Barkey 1994). More specifically, she argues that the state recruited poor rural vagrants as mercenaries to fight wars. During periods of demobilization these newly made soldiers became bandits, preying on the countryside. Rather than repress bandits by using force, though, Ottoman rulers hired them to fight against their own regional bureaucrats as a check on their independence. In this way the banditry was incorporated into the state itself, and the lines between bureaucrat and bandit—and between state and society—were continually redrawn.

The key point is that the banditry was not merely a preexisting or exogenous social element that rulers had to contend with. Rather, it was partly a creation of the state itself and one that was reproduced by the strategies rulers adopted to manage administrative relations with subordinates in the regions. The outcome of state centralization did not merely reflect struggles with preexisting social forces; it was the process of centralization itself that produced them. Endogenous social forces—or what can be called “new social formations” (142)—were strategically incorporated into or expelled from the state bureaucracy as strategic contexts changed over time. This constituted a unique Ottoman path toward state centralization (Barkey

1994; 2008). Theoretically, this work fills a gap between the state formation literature and the state-in-society approach.

The present study seeks to build on this approach. As I suggest below, the contemporary historical context not only gives us a unique opportunity to do so, but might require it of us. Relatively new norms about statehood and state development—particularly those that prioritize political and financial decentralization—can reshape how state and society interact with one another during the process of state formation, sometimes by changing the sequence of how state institutions are built, and by shaping local social ties and state-society relations endogenously, in ways that can either undermine or reinforce administrative centralization over time.

III. Contemporary State Formation and the Post-Soviet Context

Unlike in earlier historical periods of state formation—from which the vast majority of the literature draws its cases, including Barkey’s—newly independent states today exist in a world already defined by statehood, with strong international norms and pressures that can shape the kinds of institutions that central authorities build, and the kinds of states that are regarded as the “right” kind. This includes, for example, pressure on the national authorities of newly independent states to decentralize power to the local level and to adopt democratic reforms regardless of whether state administration is centralized to begin with. But, this contradicts the historical sequencing of how western states themselves developed. Even though European states did eventually decentralize power to ensure local representation and adopt a host of other democratizing reforms to “legitimize” their rule vis-à-vis the population, they only did so late in their historical development, after a long historical process of state centralization and consolidation.

For example, prior to the eighteenth century, the rulers of nascent states in Europe relied on socially embedded independent magnates. They did so out of necessity. The creation of a full-time professional class of administrators spanning vast territories was simply too expensive (Tilly 1985: 174). These regional and local elites were not incorporated into state administration, but merely “collaborated with the government without becoming officials” and were given tremendous leeway and independence in how they carried out their duties (Tilly 1985: 174-75). Over time, rulers sought to reduce the risks associated with these independent contractors—whose very independence made them “potential rivals” and “possible allies of a rebellious people”—and gradually centralized control by replacing regional magnates with their own officials (ibid; Tilly 1992: 103-117). It was precisely by “extending their officialdom to the local community” that administrative centralization proceeded (1985: 175).¹² In fact, the entire process can be summarized as the movement from indirect to direct rule (Tilly 1992 103-114). Socially embedded local elites were replaced by the state’s own bureaucrats, who were enmeshed in the administrative hierarchy of the state rather than in local communities.¹³ Democratic reforms like local self-government came much later, only after direct centralized rule was the norm; it was a decentralization of already centralized power.

As for the “legitimacy” of the state, its agents, and its activities, Tilly suggests that this mattered less than we tend to think and might serve merely to justify or explain the state’s centralization and monopolization of force rather than enable it (1985: 171). That is, legitimacy became significant only after centralization occurred, not before or during. Moreover, building on Stinchcombe’s definition of legitimacy, Tilly argues that the legitimacy that matters most is

¹² A second important innovation in this process, according to Tilly, was the creation of police forces that were directly subordinate to the central government.

¹³ I discuss the politics of this process in chapter 2.

between rulers and staff, not between rulers and ruled.¹⁴ Legitimacy is “the probability that other authorities will act to confirm the decisions of a given authority” (171). In the context of state formation—and in state rule generally—the primary concern is whether officials accept the orders of central authorities. Can central authorities build such an administrative structure? This question, again, lies at the heart of state centralization. It entails related questions about who fills state offices and whether and how they are integrated into the state as its officials; as a sequential process, the kind of legitimacy that mattered first was that state personnel accept subordination and eschew any claims they might have to represent regional or local communities or social interests.

However, international norms of modern statehood—driven largely by the Western liberal hegemony in the post-Cold War era—encourage newly independent states to reverse this process.¹⁵ Decentralization is prized over centralization, devolution over consolidation, and representation over administration. All of this is intended to create legitimacy for the state and its leaders in the eyes of society. The “transition paradigm,” which was widely adopted in both scholarly and policy circles, embodied many of these normative positions. But, as the critics of these ideas later noted, the proponents for democratization in newly independent states “did not give significant attention” to the effects of democratization on a society “while it is grappling with the reality of building a state from scratch or coping with an existent but largely nonfunctional state” (Carothers 2002: 8-9, 16-17). In fact, we know from other sources that the “[c]onsolidation of state power” is “an essential prerequisite for democratization” (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992: 9, see also pp. 63-69). How can power be decentralized if it is not yet centralized? What happens to social and political organization in the

¹⁴ In fact, Weber says the same thing.

¹⁵ In fact, western-international organizations, like the IMF and World Bank, alongside the US government, sometimes coerce them to do so.

periphery when it is given priority over state centralization? How do state and society interact when the historical sequencing that shapes center-periphery relations proceeds in a different order? How is the trajectory and outcome of administrative centralization changed as a result?

If the contemporary era creates a new historical context for recently independent states in general, nowhere is this truer than in the former Soviet Union. Newly independent post-Soviet states were not only forged in a world with strong pressures and norms about democracy and statehood, as described above, they also had to contend with international perceptions that excessive bureaucratic centralization was a legacy of the Soviet Union. If international policy called for states to decentralize and democratize state power and administration, nowhere was this seen to be more apt or relevant than in the former Soviet Union.

Much of the more policy-oriented political science scholarship on the region adopted this logic, focusing heavily on questions about whether and how post-Soviet states transition to democratic market economies, which also imply internationally appropriate models of statehood (Dawisha and Parrott, eds. 1997; Gleason 2004; Olcott 2005). The assumption here is that administrative centralization was not a goal that newly independent states needed to achieve, but an historical burden that they needed to overcome. The result is that questions at the heart of the literature on state formation—including the challenges of integrating cadre into a unified and centralized administrative bureaucracy—tended to remain unaddressed.

In fact, some scholars' emphasis on democratization and decentralization tended to highlight Soviet-era bureaucrats' resistance to change, implying that dismantling state bureaucracies was more important than building them. In extreme examples (though typical of the neoliberal perspective), state bureaucracy and democracy are framed as virtually incompatible. Aslund, for instance, argued that the need for economic reform and political-

administrative decentralization required new national authorities “to minimize the role of the old state apparatus” and “break the hold of the old system” (2007: 33). Rather than focusing on how to recruit and integrate state officials into a hierarchical administrative structure—central to the process of state formation—the question was how to expunge or disempower existing bureaucrats. Aslund writes, “[...] the state bureaucracy had numerous reasons to oppose a radical reform program. Under reform, it would lose its prior power, and most of its human capital would become obsolete because the old socialist micromanagement of enterprises no longer existed” (35). Obsolescent state cadre, it was suggested, would need to be removed in order for reforms to be implemented. If democratic reform and decentralization were seen as a post-communist “revolution,” then “the state bureaucracy represented a ‘counter-revolution’” (36). Democratization seemed to require the removal of incumbent bureaucrats, not their integration.

But, were the newly independent post-Soviet states really so robust and centralized after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991? While very few studies sought to ask this question or framed it as a problem, a handful of political scientists did urge us to do so. Some pointed out that studies of post-communist states tended to take state power for granted, and to wrongly assume that there was too much of it (Grzymala-Busse and Jones Luong 2002). Instead, we were prompted to consider the presence of multiple actors in competition with new national authorities, including local elites, foreign governments, and international organizations (ibid.). Others argued that the relevant legacies of the Soviet era were not impersonalized administrative centralization, but the persistence of personalized social relations between and across state ministries that threatened to undermine the post-Soviet state building process (Beissinger 1997). To some, similarities between post-Soviet states and post-colonial African states suggested that

questions of state formation and administrative strength should be at the center of attention (Beissinger and Young 2002).

Despite these few works, however, little empirical research on post-Soviet state formation has been carried out by political scientists.¹⁶ As noted above, the prioritization of political and economic reform and transition—which normatively stresses the need for decentralization rather than centralization—precludes such studies, or at least marginalizes their potential importance. Even Easter’s study of state formation in Russia and Poland—which focuses on taxation—treats the post-communist state as unique precisely because “state building begins with the state already in possession of an abundance of power resources in relation to society—the inheritance of the old regime” (2012: 2).¹⁷

Anthropologists, in contrast, took a dramatically different view of the post-communist state, and one that tended to be less centered on analytical and normative theories about regime transition. In the anthropology of post-Soviet states, the collapse of the Soviet Union is treated as a genuine breakdown of the old order. In this light, the national elites of newly independent states—even if they were Soviet-era elites—did not inherit the robust and highly centralized administrative machinery of the Soviet state itself. Soviet-era elites may have survived, as did many of the formal offices that they held, but the relationships and linkages connecting all of these offices into a functioning administrative hierarchy did not. Nobody doubts that the bureaucrats and state functionaries in the provinces of newly independent states no longer answered to Moscow; but, anthropologists suggested that they did not answer to the new national authorities in their respective capital cities either (Humphrey 2002; Verdery 1996).

¹⁶ I discuss some below.

¹⁷ Cooley offers a more nuanced view. He argues that the more a specific state function was controlled directly by Moscow during the Soviet era, the less it continued to operate in the immediate collapse of the Soviet Union; but, areas of administration that were already put in the hands of republic-level authorities during the Soviet era remained largely intact after 1991 (Cooley 2005: 109-125).

Indeed, to anthropologists the collapse of the Soviet state did not leave behind equally centralized protégé states so much as fissiparous decentralized authorities that were altogether disconnected from each other, and from their new capital cities. Humphrey argues that the collapse of the Soviet Union created “widespread uncertainty about government and law at ‘higher’ levels of the body politic” and showed how the surviving social, political, and economic organizations in the periphery became new “suzerainties,” run by “local bosses” (Humphrey 2002: 5-6). Former state bureaucrats—both members of local governments and managers and directors of state farms and factories—took control of new economies and localized political structures. In short, they began to operate outside the state itself. Even the national currency diminished in importance as economic activity was increasingly carried out in the regions through barter or coupon, and depended heavily on personal relationships and local social ties (11-12). These conditions also gave rise to organized crime in place of the state and its laws: “As governmental decrees become less effective, the sheer number of informal contracts has risen, and these in particular are neither serviced by banks nor protected by the law” (13).

Verdery provocatively suggests that the relevant transition that needed to be studied was not from socialism to capitalism or democracy, but from socialism to feudalism (1996: 205).¹⁸ The overlapping structure of the Soviet economy and society, where factories and farms provided not only jobs, but also housing, schools, hospitals, and cultural institutions, lent itself to the fracturing of authority after the Soviet collapse. Each enterprise became a virtual manor with its own lord, with very little tying them together across newly independent states’ territory. The collapse of the party-state, she writes,

Reinforced the tendencies to personalism and patronage inherent in such arrangements, making many people dependent on their locality, their workplace, or their boss for access to food, housing, and loans.

¹⁸ Verdery’s empirical focus is on Romania, but her argument is intended to apply to post-socialist states in general, including those of the former Soviet Union.

Belonging to a suzerainty, by either having a regular job or enjoying some other tie to a powerful and successful patron, meant dependence, but as in feudal times it also meant at least minimal security (206).

This *ad hoc* decentralization resulting from the collapse of the Soviet state included not only the reemergence of highly personalized local dependencies, but also demonetization of the economy, the growth of “localized protection” groups, and “rampant lawlessness and scorn for central directives” (207). In short, Soviet-era “state” officials in the periphery became local “lords” when the Soviet Union collapsed. Central authorities in the capital cities of newly independent states lacked subordinate administrative personnel in the provinces who would carry out their orders.

Volkov, too, stressed the parcelization, decentralization, and localization of authority that resulted from the Soviet collapse (Volkov 1999, 2002). In particular, he describes the virtual disintegration of Russia’s state security apparatus as tens of thousands of former state cadre moved into the “private security industry” after 1992 (Volkov 2002: 24; see also Ledeneva 2006: 66-72, 177-181). Personnel who were formerly integrated into the state’s centralized administrative structure suddenly situated themselves in multiple different organizations. While private security could be either legal (private security firms) or illegal (organized crime), the key point is that private security itself is highly decentralized and stands in marked contrast to the centralized state (Volkov 1999). There is no more dramatic or literal illustration of state disintegration than when former officials strike out on their own as “violent entrepreneurs,” in countless organizations spread across the state’s territory. As Volkov writes, the scenario “is plausible only insofar as it assumes that no central authority, that is, no state, exists” (2002: 26).

Importantly, local elites in these contexts were becoming deeply embedded in local social contexts as their ties to the state loosened (Humphrey 2002: 15, 18; Allina-Pisano 2004). As the process of administrative centralization (state formation) disembeds local elites from local social

contexts and integrates them into a unified administrative hierarchy, the Soviet collapse placed them back into local social contexts, creating mutual dependencies for survival based on face-to-face and highly personalized social ties at the local level.¹⁹

How did the central authorities of these newly independent states build (or rebuild) state bureaucracies, recruit and integrate regional cadre, and weaken or sever their local social ties? How did they succeed or fail in doing so, and why? These are questions that the present study seeks to answer through a comparative analysis of state formation of two post-Soviet Central Asian states that have dramatically different trajectories and outcomes in state development since 1991: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Research Design, Methodology, and Chapter Outline

This study adopts a most-similar research design. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan not only shared similar social and political institutions during the Soviet era, but also have a common nomadic and cultural history predating Soviet and Russian rule by hundreds of years.²⁰ Yet, as noted directly above, and in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter, they have had dramatically different trajectories of state development, with central authorities in Kazakhstan building a fairly robust and centralized state bureaucracy while their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan face continual challenges from regional authorities, if not outright rebellions. Before proceeding, then, it is important to address at least two independent variables that might account for these differences: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have different kinds of political regimes and

¹⁹ It is also true that Soviet cadre policy itself made this outcome more likely after 1991. As I discuss in the next chapter, both the policy of local cadre recruitment (*korenizatsiia*) and then the “stability in cadres” policy during Brezhnev’s long tenure had strong localizing effects on cadre recruitment in regions and provinces. The complete dissolution of the Soviet state—as described by Humphrey, Verdery, and Volkov—deepened and strengthened these local social ties.

²⁰ This is not to suggest that they were ever identical, only that they are similar, far more alike than any two randomly selected countries.

dramatically different levels of economic wealth. Since these represent competing explanations, I address them here.

One comparative study from 2004 confirms that state administration in Kyrgyzstan is not as well developed as in Kazakhstan. Using measures of the technical, implementational, and political capacities of state administration, Cummings and Norgaard find that Kazakhstan “appears to exhibit fewer problems” than Kyrgyzstan. The reason, they suggest, “appears to be primarily because of Kyrgyzstan’s stronger regional state interests and social interests, both of which challenge central state authority” (2004: 703).²¹ This, though, poses more questions than it answers. Why does Kyrgyzstan have stronger regional and social interests? Why, conversely, have authorities in Kazakhstan been able to avoid precisely this kind of contentious center-periphery dynamic, especially given the two states’ relatively similar starting points at independence? In posing a tentative answer, Cummings and Norgaard rely on what has become a conventional wisdom: Kazakhstan has substantial wealth from oil production, and, therefore, succeeded in building a more robust state apparatus. This points toward differences in the levels of economic development between these two states.

In fact, existing empirical research undermines this conventional wisdom. Jones Luong, for instance, showed that high levels of oil and mineral wealth in Kazakhstan have actually empowered regional governors vis-à-vis the central government, leading to *de facto* decentralization (Jones Luong 2004). Interestingly, Cummings has suggested the same (2000). If this is true, then Kazakhstan has achieved relatively high levels of administrative centralization *despite* its oil wealth. More generally, the literature on the resource curse undermines the notion that resource wealth necessarily contributes to stronger state institutions (Karl 1997; Ross 2012).

²¹ Their study was based on interviews and surveys of 125 “medium-ranking officials” in the executive and legislative branches of each state in 2002.

Indeed, Hertog's study of Saudi Arabia shows that oil wealth has caused administrative disintegration as powerful members of the state bureaucracy use income from oil rents to build virtual fiefdoms that they control personally, almost entirely outside the state's formal administrative hierarchy (Hertog 2010). If administrative centralization entails the integration of cadre into the state—as I suggested above—then oil wealth in Saudi Arabia appears to have had the opposite effect. In other oil-rich countries like Nigeria and Azerbaijan, authorities in the central government appear to have little or no influence in large swaths of the state's territory. One study of oil-rich post-Soviet states shows that the institutions governing the ownership and management of oil resources have a much greater impact on outcomes than the mere presence or absence of those resources (Jones Luong and Weinthal 2010).

This means that the effect of oil wealth on administrative centralization is contingent. If Kazakhstan's oil wealth facilitated higher levels of administrative centralization compared to Kyrgyzstan, we still need to explain how and why it did so. The present study will address this. I show that Kazakhstan's economic wealth has had a two-fold effect on state development. First, it gave Kazakhstan immunity from the pressures of western countries and international donor organizations that promoted decentralization and regional representation; second, it gave central authorities the economic resources to keep local officials financially dependent on Astana.²² Kyrgyzstan, which lacked this wealth, became dependent on international organizations for aid, and adopted many of the reforms that these donors favored or required. This includes the creation of a highly decentralized system of local self-government. It is this divergence that mattered most in these two states' subsequent trajectories of state formation: different systems of local self-government changed the ways in which local officials carry out local governance,

²² Arguably, this second factor derives from the first since part of the decentralizing reforms that international donors favor is financial decentralization and the creation of independent local budgets. I address this in chapter 3.

reshaped state-society relations more broadly, and led to dramatically different center-periphery politics around cadre appointment and regional representation. In short, it shaped whether, how, and why local officials were either embedded in local social structures or integrated into the state's administrative hierarchy instead.

A second factor setting these two states apart is their regime type. Observers are quick to note that Kazakhstan is a consolidated authoritarian regime, and Kyrgyzstan, even if not a democracy, is more pluralistic, competitive, and open. In fact, the vast majority of political science research on this region focuses primarily on the politics of regimes and regime transitions, rather than on state formation, as I noted above. What is it, though, that makes Kyrgyzstan more democratic than Kazakhstan? Kyrgyzstan, like Kazakhstan, has been under the control of one dictatorial president or another for most of its history since 1991. Likewise, the independence of parliament and the judiciary, though relatively robust since constitutional reforms were undertaken in 2010, has hardly been a regular or reliable feature of Kyrgyzstani politics. The only features of Kyrgyzstani politics that have been routinely democratic—relatively speaking—are its decentralized system of local self-government and its fairly high levels of public participation in politics, either formally, through regional representation in parliamentary elections, or informally, through mass mobilization and protest.

These are precisely the factors that I will be addressing. I will be addressing them, however, not as elements of a partially democratic regime, per se, but as concrete manifestations of the institutional configurations of state power and administration. That is, I focus on the institutions of local government, not on democracy. In doing so, I follow some of the more recent and innovative work on democracy, which suggests that we disaggregate democracies into

their component parts and focus more explicitly on subnational variations in governance (Coppedge and Gerring, et al. 2011).²³

Insofar as regimes are understood as different ways of organizing and configuring state institutions, I am looking at regimes by exploring these different institutional configurations. Similarly, I look at protest and mass participation in politics not as an aspect of democratization—or even as an aspiration for democracy, a notion that has already been challenged in the Central Asian context (see, for example, Radnitz 2010)—but as concrete manifestations of local interests. As one classic study on social movements has noted, labor activists in the United States did not protest against capitalism. Rather, they protested against their working conditions (Piven and Cloward 1977: 20). Likewise, we might say that ordinary people in Kyrgyzstan’s villages do not protest against authoritarianism. Rather, they protest to defend or promote popular local leaders, who are also their friends, family, and acquaintances.²⁴ Just as the concrete institutional setting of the workplace determined the grievances and targets of workers (ibid.), the institutional setting of local governance can shape preferences about what kinds of officials best serve local interests, and which ones do not.

All of this is to say that this study does not overlook regimes at all, but merely discusses them in their concrete institutional manifestations. For that reason, the word democracy appears few times in the chapters that follow; in its place, there will be discussions about local elections or appointments, independent or dependent local budgets, local protest mobilization or its absence, and the direct participation of ordinary people in local governance or their exclusion.

²³ I focus specifically on subnational variation between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Though some level of subnational variation exists within these states (as it does to some degree in every state), I do not address that here.

²⁴ In a parallel example from the post-communist world, Allina-Pisano notes that local officials in Ukraine did not thwart privatization because of ideological resistance to capitalism; they were opposed to breaking apart large collective farms because of the negative effects that they believed this would have on production, food supply, and the provision of social services in rural areas (Allina-Pisano 2004: 573-574).

In sum, research presented here takes variations in regime type and levels of economic wealth into account by saying precisely how and why they matter in shaping different trajectories of state formation. It does so by narrowing our focus to the institutions of local government and suggesting that different configurations of state organization at the local level dramatically reshape the social relations that state officials have with local officials—the institutions of local government can embed state officials in a local community or insulate them from it. If socially embedded local elites are less likely to accept direct subordination in the state’s hierarchy—as I suggested in the review of literature above—certain kinds of local government institutions make the task of bureaucratic centralization more difficult, at least from the perspective of national authorities. Finally, to the extent that the local social ties between state officials and local populations are shaped by the institutions of local government, we can say that local social ties are endogenous to state formation. Social relations in the periphery are not necessarily a preexisting given that national authorities confront in their quest to centralize power, but are themselves partly produced by the kinds of institutions that were created during the process of state development.

Thus, to the extent that the literature on Central Asia has focused on regimes alone, I do not address it in this introductory chapter. Importantly, though this work does have some implications for administrative centralization. As some have reminded us, the projects of authoritarian consolidation and state building are not always mutually exclusive and are sometimes overlapping (Slater 2010).²⁵ The post-Soviet policy of “cadre rotation,” which I discuss in chapter two, is one example. Additionally, to the extent that this literature outlines the more concrete dynamics of local social networks, state-society relations, center-periphery

²⁵ At the same time, we must keep in mind that this is not always the case as authoritarian leaders’ sometimes undermine state institutions in an effort to bolster their own personal power (Migdal 1988).

politics, and protest mobilization, I borrow from it heavily. Subsequent chapters of this dissertation build on this previous work. Explicit citations and references are made throughout, noting where I build on or depart from what has already been done in studying the region.

Back to the main question: How, precisely did the central authorities in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan seek to build (or rebuild) state administrations, recruit and integrate regional cadre, and weaken or sever their local social ties? How did they succeed or fail in doing so, and why? And what can this tell us more generally about state formation in the contemporary historical period? The remaining chapters seek to answer these questions and are outlined as follows:

In chapter two, I argue that the policy of “cadre rotation” was widely adopted by the new national elites of post-Soviet states to disembed regional officials from their social contexts and recentralize state administration after the Soviet collapse. I begin by outlining the state centralizing logic of cadre rotation in historical context and in various world regions, including within the Soviet Union itself. I then present evidence from an original database of provincial governor biographies in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan since 1991. These data show that Kazakhstan has been much more effective in socially disembedding its regional cadre, regularly rotating them across provinces and in and out of the central government, thus preventing them from building or maintaining social bases of independence and power in the regions. Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, has been less successful in implementing cadre rotation for extended periods of time. There, regional governors rarely serve in more than one province, and attempts to relocate them and replace them with “outsiders” are often met with powerful local resistance by local elites and the communities that they are socially embedded in. In short, chapter two describes how central authorities in both states adopted the same policy for integrating regional cadre into state administration; Kazakhstan succeeded, but Kyrgyzstan failed.

What accounts for these different outcomes? In chapter three, I disaggregate the state to show that even as national leaders adopted the same cadre policy at the provincial level, the two states differed dramatically in the kinds of institutions that were built at the lowest levels of administration, in villages, towns, and small cities. Kazakhstan rebuilt and reinforced the Soviet-style “power vertical” down to the village level.²⁶ Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, decentralized administration by establishing a system of local self-government. At the village level this included elections, an independent budget, and virtually unlimited decision-making authority about what problems to solve and how to solve them. Importantly, the reason for this divergence in local-level state institutions was exogenous. Kyrgyzstan was financially dependent on international donors and created and implemented local self-government reform under the guidance and tutelage of international organizations. Kazakhstan’s oil wealth insulated it from international pressure, and enabled authorities to withstand or ignore what little pressure was brought to bear.

Yet, it was not the mere creation of new formal institutions at the local level that mattered most; rather, it was the effect they had on local social ties. In chapters four and five, I show that differences in local government institutions had broad and profound effects on local social ties and broader state-society relations. They did so by changing the way that state officials were embedded in society, and how ordinary people came to interact with the state, through the personae of their own local officials. Insofar as these changes in local social ties were directly linked to the institutions of local government, they follow path-dependent patterns over time. As

²⁶ The term “power vertical” (or “vertical of power”) in the post-Soviet period is most closely associated with Vladimir Putin’s presidency, particularly during the period 2000 to 2008. During this time, Putin “sought to recentralize control, strengthen the central state and establish a strong vertical of power by appointing loyal figures to important positions to implement policy decisions” (Monaghan 2012: 1). The term is regularly invoked in other post-Soviet states and refers to the recentralization of state administration such that regional-, provincial-, and local-level officials are subordinate and loyal to central authorities. I use the term throughout the dissertation and intend for it to have this meaning.

I show in chapter three, the institutions of local government in both states were not created in a singular moment, but through piecemeal reforms over the span of a decade or more. Moreover, the institutions themselves established different *processes* of village governance that shape and reshape local social ties on an ongoing and daily basis.

For example, chapter four shows that the election of local officials in Kyrgyzstan's local self-government system made it far more likely that state officials at the village level were life-long members of the community. Moreover, it shows that their financial independence from Bishkek made them heavily dependent on the local population. A paucity of local funds meant that the mobilization of local contributions—cash, labor, and other materials—became an essential part of local governance, a tendency that was reinforced by the requirements of international donors. The result is that everyday village governance in Kyrgyzstan requires the direct participation of local residents, and also places local officials' own social networks at the center of this process. Thus, local officials in Kyrgyzstan became even more socially embedded in local communities, reinforcing moral economies of mutual obligation and reciprocity that local officials themselves participate in. The process of local governance became increasingly personalized, informal, and independent from the central government over time.

In Kazakhstan, though, a system of appointments at the village level and a total lack of financial independence meant not only that village-level authorities were less likely to be from the community that they were appointed to, but also that the community itself played virtually no role in everyday governance, thus placing social space between the “officialdom” of the state—in the personae of the local official—and the rest of society. Chapter four ties these broader differences in state-society relations to specific differences in local government institutions and concludes with an ethnographic study of local governance in each state to demonstrate this

contrast in fine-grained detail. The key point is that these changes were endogenous to the process of state formation itself: the social ties between state officials and local populations were either strengthened or weakened through the institutions that central authorities created at the local level after independence.

Chapter five broadens the argument to show that these different patterns of local social ties have a broader effect on state-society relations. Using interview data from field research in both states and national polling data from government and non-governmental organizations, two clear patterns of state-society relations emerge. In Kyrgyzstan, ordinary people show the highest levels of trust for local versus national officials while in Kazakhstan the opposite is true. In both chapters four and five I also discuss the role of President Nazarbayev's political party in local governance in Kazakhstan, and show how—purposefully or not—it has tended to undermine the local social bases of local authorities while strengthening people's ties to the party, and to the president himself. In Kyrgyzstan, “local” cadre took on practical importance for ordinary people giving the distinction of local versus non-local distinctly political overtones; the system of local government in Kazakhstan, by contrast, made this an unlikely outcome.

This set the stage for differences in each state's center-periphery politics of cadre appointment and administrative centralization. In chapter six, I return to the politics of regional cadre appointment and cadre rotation. Building on the different patterns of state-society relations forged by differences in the systems of local self-government, which are laid out in chapters three through five, I describe the specific ways in which cadre rotation was thwarted in Kyrgyzstan but accomplished in Kazakhstan, thereby undermining efforts to centralize administration in the former, but not the latter. I do so by using events data from specific contentious episodes surrounding regional appointment and representation.

In Kyrgyzstan, efforts to remove or replace socially embedded cadre at the provincial level could be met by powerful local resistance, and sometimes local populations have removed or replaced appointed governors with their own “people’s governor” instead.²⁷ Sometimes, in the face of local protest, central authorities acquiesced, leaving in place state cadre that they did not choose. In Kazakhstan, however, the president’s formal appointment authority has rarely been questioned. When it has, the president easily bests his rivals without public backlash. The result is that Kyrgyzstan’s regional governors who challenge central authorities remain in power and obtain high levels of independence; in Kazakhstan, they end up in jail, or in self-imposed exile. More frequently, though, they accept their own subordination, stay quiet, and follow orders. Put differently, regional personnel in Kazakhstan are better integrated into the state’s administrative bureaucracy while those in Kyrgyzstan remain embedded in regional and local communities, thus undermining state centralization. The short narrative at the opening of this chapter—which shows the contrasting fates of two regional officials in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan when they challenged the central government—is typical of this broader pattern and will be outlined in extensive empirical detail in chapter six. It summarizes the core contrast in the two states’ trajectories of state formation: central authorities in Kazakhstan control cadre while their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan do not.

²⁷ A “people’s governor” is a locally selected leader who is installed into the governor’s office against the will of central authorities. Invariably, people’s governors in Kyrgyzstan have deep local roots, relatively wide social support in their regions, and, in many instances, years of experience as officials in the local governments of their home villages.

Chapter 2: Centralization, Cadre Rotation, and the Politics of Regional Appointment

“Cadre shuffling will always continue. With regard to the current government – this is just a category of people who happen to occupy it right now. Cadre changes are the most widely discussed question. Who is removed and who is appointed, such is the topic for much gossip. I want to say from my own enormous life experience in leadership that succession [in office] is always necessary. Therefore, I am always trying to make sure that succession [of officials] always happens.” Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan, interview on live television, as reported by local press, December 13, 2015 (Tengrinews 2015).

“... The rotation (transfer) of state servants, occupying different categories of state office, is carried out with the goal of achieving the more effective use of the potential of state servants according to the demands of the state [...] State servants can be transferred to work in another locality, or in another state organ or institution [...] if circumstances require such measures to prevent serious harm to the public service.” Kyrgyzstan’s Law on State Service, Article 28.

I. Introduction

In the opening section of the previous chapter, I described the contrasting fates of two high-level regional appointees in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. These cases represent broader patterns of center-periphery politics in these two states: provincial and local officials in Kazakhstan who challenge the central government end up in jail, or exile; their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan end up in power. These two patterns represent contrasting outcomes in state formation, defined by differences in central authorities’ control over cadre, and, therefore, over state administration.

More specifically, these patterns reflect political struggles that revolve around the power of regional appointment and representation, raising a series of questions about how that power is used: Who is to govern the regions on behalf of the state? Whose interests will they represent? How are they to be selected? Under what conditions can they be removed? Who will have the power to appoint and remove them? I define the struggle over how these questions get answered as the politics of regional appointment.²⁸ The outcomes, in turn, reflect broader patterns of center-periphery relations, administrative control, and centralization during the processes of state

²⁸ I might also call this the politics of cadre appointment. I use the terms cadre, personnel, agent, bureaucrat, functionary, and official with the intention that they should have the same meaning.

formation. They also, I argue, tell us a lot about the processes of bureaucratization. As I described in chapter one, the process of bureaucratic centralization often entails the dislocation of local elites from local social contexts, integrating them into the state's administrative hierarchy. Thus, differences in how the above questions get answered reflect different trajectories and patterns of bureaucratic centralization and state formation in these two states.

In this chapter, I do three things. In the first section, I lay out the ways in which the politics of regional appointment have manifested themselves during the process of state formation in different historical and regional contexts. In all of the cases described here, the appointment of regional personnel has been a political struggle defining relations between center and periphery. Central authorities adopt appointment policies to ensure the loyalty of their personnel, but differing social and political environments can sometimes constrain their ability to achieve this goal. This, in turn, defines levels of centralization, for it determines who will govern the regions on behalf of the state, and to whom they will be loyal. One theme pervades the appointment strategies for maintaining the subordination of regional personnel: more often than not, central authorities seek to ensure the loyalty of regional officials by restricting the kinds of social relationships they can develop with the populations they are appointed to govern. This will provide the context through which I analyze regional appointment politics in post-Soviet Central Asia.

In the second section, I discuss cadre appointment policies and politics in the Soviet context. Regional appointment policies had a particularly salient profile in the former Soviet Union, including within the states that are the empirical focus of this study. I describe the ways in which cadre appointment policies were used by central authorities in the Soviet Union to centralize power, bureaucratize the party-state, and subordinate regional elites. I do so for two

reasons. First, I show that cadre policy was a fundamental aspect of state policy in Soviet governance, including the center's governance of the regions. Second, I seek to establish the historical context for strategies of cadre appointment in the immediate post-independence period, between 1991 and 2013. Two aspects of this post-Soviet context are particularly relevant: First, the centrality of appointment powers in Soviet governance helped to reinforce the value of appointment powers for political actors. In post-Soviet states that have constitutionally structured appointment powers analogous to the Soviet system, the value of controlling certain offices remains high, for it enables actors to install loyal cadre below them. Second, following a broad consensus in prior scholarship, I show that Brezhnev's cadre policies had a noticeable localizing effect on regional administration. I argue that this created unique challenges for the leadership of post-Soviet states after independence. Newly independent Soviet states were born with entrenched and already-established regional elites with whom central authorities had to contend when centralizing power and establishing their own authority in the regions. They had to develop new cadre policies to ensure the loyalty of their own agents. Thus, I suggest that "cadre shuffling" in the post-Soviet context should be understood as a distinct reaction to Brezhnev's "stability in cadres" policy.

Lastly, I present empirical evidence from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan showing distinct differences in central authorities' abilities to achieve their preferred cadre policies. I do this by looking at differences in each state's realization of its constitutionally mandated appointment powers and by analyzing their relative successes or failures in implementing officially stated preferences for cadre policy, which entail the shuffling and rotation of regional personnel. Using an original database of governors' biographies and career trajectories in every province (*oblast*) from 1991 to 2013, I show that Kazakhstan has effectively achieved a cadre rotation policy while

Kyrgyzstan has succeeded only for short periods, typically facing resistance by local populations to the appointment of “outsiders” in their regions and localities. The result is that central authorities in Kazakhstan are better able to choose their own agents in the periphery and, therefore, have agents that are more loyal to the center. This both reflects and defines Kazakhstan’s relatively higher levels of state centralization, administrative control, and bureaucratization.²⁹

II. The Center-Periphery Politics of Cadre Appointment and State Centralization

The central authorities of unitary states face a common challenge: to govern multiple regions from a single capital city. To do so they must appoint personnel to the various regions of the state who will act on their behalf. Control emanating from the center partly rests on the degree to which regional appointees are subordinate to the authorities in the capital city, carrying out orders and directives as commanded, and operating as agents of the state. When the state’s own officials have loyalty to other social forces, or strike out on their own, the power of central authorities outside the capital city will be highly constrained, and maybe non-existent. This section shows that the aspiring rulers of centralizing states have often used their authority to recruit, appoint, and remove cadre to ensure loyalty and subordination. In particular, appointment and relocation of regional officials has often been employed with the goal of disembedding cadre from local social contexts, thus better ensuring their dependence on higher authorities.

Machiavelli, for instance, argued that policies of regional appointment were central to rulers’ power in the regions (Machiavelli 2003: 19-21). He defined two possible modes of

²⁹ To reiterate a point made in chapter one that highlights the functional similarities between patrimonial and rational-legal administration in state hierarchy, I use the term bureaucracy here somewhat generically. I address this in more detail in the concluding section of this chapter.

regional administration: one in which central authorities appointed their own officials as agents of the state and the other in which they worked with pre-existing local elites who were then tasked with governing the regions they lived in. He advised aspiring rulers to follow the first model, which was the one used in fifteenth-century Turkey. There, regional authorities were appointed as ministers by the prince's "favor and permission." The result, which reinforced this power, was that a Turkish ruler could send "different administrators" to the regions and "change and move them around at his pleasure" without facing any backlash (Ibid.: 19). That is to say, the Turkish ruler could rotate and shuffle personnel, thus precluding their ability to form meaningful social ties to any particular region or locality, ties that might undermine their loyalty to the center. The prince in Turkey controlled cadre, and this constituted control over the state.

Regional administration in fifteenth-century France, however, followed the second model. There, central authorities relied on barons with deep social ties governing communities "who recognize them as lords and have a natural affection for them" (19). Unlike in Turkey, where leaders chose their own favored administrators, French rulers relied on pre-existing local elites with independent sources of power in the regions that they governed. As a result, they found themselves in a continual struggle for power with their own cadre. The "official" character of French regional authorities was compromised. As Machiavelli wrote, they were "beloved" by their own (local) subjects, and had "their own prerogatives" that "the king [cannot] take away except at his peril" (Machiavelli 2003: 19-21). The Turkish model of cadre appointment, Machiavelli concluded, was more conducive to rulers' centralized control of administration.

Machiavelli's conclusions about center-periphery relations suggest that the impulse toward centralizing state control stands directly at odds with localism, or the degree to which

local officials are socially embedded within, and represent, the communities that they govern. Indeed, insomuch as the process of state formation has been characterized by the centralization of state administration, central authorities have adopted cadre policies that explicitly undermine the local social ties of regional officials. Burbank and Cooper show that rulers of empires typically manipulated appointees' social ties, noting that the nature of such ties could compromise their loyalty (2010: 13-14). Barkey notes that state makers, when seeking to develop unified and centralized control, must establish "an administration loyal to the center and staffed by officials independent of kinship, tribal, and other class or cultural groups. Representatives of the center are sent to the periphery and slowly overcome the rule of regional institutions and elite" (Barkey 1994: 3). State control over cadre, she notes, was ensured by strengthening officials' ties to the center while simultaneously breaking their ties to the provinces, a practice that "was maintained by such practices as rotation of regional offices" (26).³⁰

Likewise, the rulers of the Roman and English empires would transfer personnel directly from the metropole into peripheral territories. These officials "were expected to act in the imperial interest" precisely because they remained "dependent on linkages to home" (Burbank and Cooper 2010: 14). In this way, regional officials' social ties to the center would displace local elites' social ties to the periphery. For centuries after Charlemagne's rule over Europe, successive conquering princes and kings would "replace the existing local rulers with their own friends, relations or servants" as "representatives of the central ruler" (Elias 2000: 198). In early modern Europe, state rule was analogous to family rule, whereby patrimonial forms of authority took on a distinctly familial (and gendered) flavor in what Adams dubbed the "familial state"

³⁰ Likewise, "the state ensured the loyalty of its servants as it rewarded them through incorporation, and it rotated them to keep them from developing alternative allegiances" (233).

(Adams 2005). In the patrimonial state described by Weber the ruler appoints only “personal dependents,” or socially non-embedded “aliens” of whose “obedience he can be absolutely sure” (Weber 1978: 1013-1031). The administration of the state, based upon the ruler’s own household, is administered by those “nearest to the ruler,” such that loyalty is “based on a strictly personal relationship to the ruler” (1030-1).³¹

If rulers could not appoint their own family, they at least sought to avoid appointing socially embedded local elites. They would sometimes appoint slaves or “other people detached from their communities of origin” to regional outposts (Burbank and Cooper 2010: 14). The weak social connections they were expected to have there was considered to better ensure their loyalty to the center. Ottoman sultans, for instance, took boys from Christian families, raised them in the palace, and groomed them to become the empire’s most powerful regional administrators (Ibid.). The Ottomans borrowed this tactic from others. Previously, as the Islamic empire expanded into increasingly broader territories, the *caliphs* had done the same: “the *caliph* depended on making people without social standing or kinsmen into the dependent instruments through which he exercised power over subjects” (Ibid., 76-77). Prior to the rise of the Islamic empire, the Byzantines and Persians had ruled their vast empires in the same way (Ibid.).

Another strategy of regional appointment that can undermine local social ties is to forbid officials from governing the regions that they were born in, appointing them, instead, to serve in places where they are less likely to have any family, friends, or other acquaintances. Under the centralized rule of China’s Qing dynasty (1644-1912), where “all local officials [...] were agents

³¹ As outlined in chapter one, patrimonial and bureaucratic forms of administration are two different ways of solving the problem of loyalty. The former incorporates a ruler’s kin or quasi-kin relationships into the state while the latter expunges agents’ social relations altogether seeking to undercut loyalty to social groups while institutionalizing loyalty to the center as a “loyalty to office” (Weber 1978: 959).

of the central government,” this was institutionalized as the “law of avoidance” (Chu 1962: 1, 21; Watt 1972: 20). According to the law of avoidance, local officials were prohibited from serving in their own home province, or even in a neighboring province if it was within 500 li of their hometown (Ibid.).³² Moreover, individual officials could not be appointed to serve in the same locality, district, or even province with other members of their clan or extended family (Chu 1962: 21-22). The express purpose of the law of avoidance was “to check officials from utilizing existing personal contacts in the districts” where they were appointed (Watt 1972: 20).

Sending personnel from the center to the periphery does not ensure their loyalty indefinitely, of course. For if left in one place too long, socially disconnected officials can put down roots and develop the very kinds of corrupting social connections that central authorities seek to avoid. Elias describes how over the course of centuries in medieval Europe “the same patterns and trends show themselves over and over again in [the] apparatus for ruling” (2000: 198). Close friends and relations of the ruler were sent to the regions to govern as outsiders; then, overtime, they became socially embedded and were more likely to challenge the authority of the king in the name of “their” region. Where rulers could not break out of this cycle, they ended up with states that were highly decentralized. Particularly in the German territories of Europe, Elias describes Otto’s successive military conquests: “Wherever he could he tried to replace the descendants of lords installed by earlier emperors, who now opposed him as local leaders, with his own relations and friends” (201). Within as little as one generation, though, those relations and friends would claim their domain as hereditary property, seeking political independence from the prince who appointed them there (Ibid. 197-203).

³² 500 li is approximately 250 kilometers, or 155 miles, not a short distance considering the time period in question.

In addition to appointing officials to regions where they will be outsiders, then, rulers have also used strategies to prevent those same officials from losing their outsider status by serving in one region for extended periods of time. State rulers might rotate personnel across different regions on a regular basis, thereby ensuring that social connections to any one of them remain fragile. Another strategy is to break up appointees' tenure in regional posts with regularized rotation into and out of positions within the central government itself, such that a single official's career might take place in multiple regions, punctuated by regularized sojourns in the capital city. Collectively, I call these strategies "cadre rotation" or "cadre shuffling."³³ They are defined by a common logic: to enhance the loyalty of regional cadre by undercutting the social ties that might foster loyalty to local communities or other sub-national networks.

For example, in addition to the Qing dynasty's "law of avoidance," described above, policies on promotions and relocations in imperial China used tenure in office as a factor, making it the only criterion not directly related to job performance. Every three years the Chinese government would conduct a general assessment of regional officials' work, known as the "great reckoning." Eligibility for promotion and relocation was based primarily on merit, but in the absence of outstanding job performance, service within a single province for three to five years proved sufficient for transfer to a new position (Chu 1962: 32-35). That is, tenure exceeding five years was, by itself, considered grounds for relocation. The normal term in any regional post was three years (Watt 1972: 59). The law of avoidance, along with the enforcement of short tenures and regularized transfers, says Watt, "implies a striking imperial distrust of local administrative power, or local society in conjunction with local administration"

³³ I adopt this term from its usage in the post-Soviet context. Cadre shuffling is not confined to regional administration, though I focus on that here. Central authorities might also rotate or shuffle personnel within the central government itself, by moving them among different ministries, for example.

(Ibid.: 22).³⁴ Similarly, rulers of the Mongol empire—which at its height spanned all of Eurasia, from Moscow to Beijing—kept local officials in check by continually “moving them around the empire” (Burbank and Cooper 2010: 107-108).

It was not only in historical empires that cadre rotation was used. One study of cadre management in contemporary China notes that the Communist Party favors high turnover rates in personnel because “shorter tenure reduces the time available for officials to build up an identity with their current positions and to form local political alliances” (Huang 2002: 70). Likewise, the “official explanation for the rotation practice sets forth an explicit *control* rationale.” If officials know that they are “to be rotated to different positions” then they will “gain little by over-aggressively pursuing the interests associated with their current positions” (Huang 2002: 72). In fact, provincial officials in China are sometimes relocated to provinces with vastly different characteristics, requiring different skill sets, suggesting that rotation and loyalty sometimes trump competence and knowledge (Huang 2002: 73).

Indeed, Benedict Anderson describes how the centralization of modern states went hand-in-hand with the “internal interchangeability of men and documents,” and required the recruitment of state officials who had no independent power in the regions. He goes on to compare the spatial mobility of Europe’s early bureaucrats with their predecessors, the socially embedded nobility. The rotation of regional bureaucrats across territory ensured that they remained without meaningful social ties in the periphery, became interchangeable, and contributed to the unification of a centralizing state apparatus.

Sent out to township A at rank V, [the bureaucrat] may return to the capital at rank W; proceed to province B at rank X; continue to vice-royalty C at rank Y; and end his pilgrimage in the capital at rank Z. On this

³⁴ To skip briefly ahead to one of the case studies used in this dissertation, I note here that Alikhan Baimenov, the Chairman of Kazakhstan’s Agency for Civil Service Affairs, cites the historical origins of cadre rotation in imperial China. In China “rotation took place even 2,000 years ago,” according to Baimenov (interview with author, July 10, 2014).

journey there is no assured resting-place; every pause is provisional. The last thing the functionary wants is to return home; for he *has* no home with any intrinsic value (Anderson 2006: 55, emphasis in original).

Thus, any single region will see multiple functionaries come and go, none of them putting down roots: "...official A from province B administers province C, while official D from province C administers province B" (ibid.: 56). While the itinerant bureaucrat is chronically detached from local communities, she becomes socially assimilated to the language, norms, values, and customs of the capital city instead. This too unifies the center while distinguishing it from the periphery. The "center" begins to emerge not only as a physical place, but as culture and identity, a set of values, and as a symbol of state power (ibid.; Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 987; Geertz 2000: 121-146). Indeed, "inner thrust of absolutism" in Europe, says Anderson, was "to create a unified apparatus of power, controlled directly by, and loyal to, the ruler *over against* [*sic*] a decentralized, particularistic feudal nobility" (Anderson 2006: 55).³⁵

In the context of what has been discussed above, we should note that the modern state bureaucracy mitigates the effects of local social ties by externalizing them from the institutions of rule, or at least claims to. As discussed in chapter one, the rulers of a rational-legal bureaucracy govern through a hierarchical staff defined solely by their offices, as ministers and administrators, not by their social position as barons or lords. According to Weber, the defining feature of the modern bureaucracy is that it "separates the bureau from the private domicile of the official and, in general, segregates official activity from the sphere of private life" (Weber 1978: 957). This requires a cadre selection process favoring elites who are un-swayed by their own connections to society, if they have any at all.

Thus, in the modern bureaucracy potential ties to social forces are severed while loyalty to the center is institutionalized as a "loyalty to an office," which is enmeshed in a legal

³⁵ Emphasis in original.

administrative hierarchy as a subordinate position. The “modern loyalty to an office,” says Weber, “does not establish a relationship to a *person* [...] but rather is devoted to *impersonal* and *functional* purposes” (Weber 1978: 959).³⁶ The ruler of the modern bureaucratic state can be better assured that the subordinate office itself produces loyal and reliable agents, regardless of who those agents are, for their own social ties, to the extent that they have any, have been neutralized by the office itself.³⁷

The picture painted by Weber is purposefully oversimplified as an “ideal” type. But even if taken with a grain of salt, it appears that the modern bureaucracy would solve some challenges of regional appointment in central authorities’ favor, facilitating centralization. Indeed, European states, over time, gradually adopted the bureaucratized form of centralized rule, making it one of the defining features of modern statehood. Citing France as the classic case, Tarrow notes that the center’s penetration of the periphery was accomplished primarily through “the development of a loyal corps of civil servants who, through the process of routine administration, eroded the power of independent communes and lords” (1977: 48).

Likewise, Tilly links bureaucratization and centralization in describing the emergence of modern states in Europe (Tilly 1992). Focusing strictly on the staffing of a state’s military institutions, he notes that rulers first relied on independent elites and then, over time, moved toward a system in which appointees were increasingly defined by the officialdom of state office (Tilly 1992: 28-30). Centralization, in this sense, entailed the movement from indirect to direct rule (103-114).

³⁶ Emphasis in original.

³⁷ Cadre rotation is a prominent cadre policy in non- or poorly bureaucratized administrative systems precisely because local social ties remain a problem for central authorities. I suggest, though, that cadre rotation can have a bureaucratizing effect insofar as it has the effect of disembedding personnel from local social contexts.

In newly independent states, this process has sometimes proven to be difficult. Rulers might seek to centralize and bureaucratize administration, but they do not always succeed in doing so. This is because the determination of who governs the regions and how they are selected is not simply a matter of choosing a particular strategy of rule, the preferred institutional design, or the right policies of elite recruitment and appointment. Whether and how central authorities appoint their own favorites to the regions to play the role of bureaucrat—if they have the power to appoint them at all—remains a fluid political question. A ruler might desire to build a centralized bureaucracy only to find that political reality does not allow it. This is because consolidating and controlling power over the state often brings central authorities into conflict with regional elites, and, perhaps also, with local communities (Barkey 1996: 3; Tilly 1992: 98-103; Scott 2009). As Weber notes, “the ruler is always confronted with the indignant opposition of the native aspirants to office and sometimes also of the subjects” (Weber 1978: 1027). In the places where this is true, attempts by central authorities to regulate the social relations of local officials through policies like cadre rotation continues to color relations between center and periphery.

Migdal, for example, writes about the problems of state power in newly independent, post-colonial states. As a result of colonial rule, the authorities of newly independent states found themselves in political struggle with regional “strongmen” as they attempted to expand the reach of the central government into society. Migdal highlights a paradox in the center-periphery relations that unfolded as a result of this process: In order to expand state power into society, the rulers of these new states typically must rely on already-established local elites and notables. But, by relying on local notables, rulers risk giving up their own control, sometimes even facilitating direct challenges to the central government (Migdal 1988: 206-237).

As a way out of this paradox, rulers rely on a number of “strategies for survival.” Among these are attempts to undermine the local social bases of state officials. To accomplish this, “the powers of appointment and removal from office in state leaders’ hands proved an important tool” for rulers (Migdal 1988: 214). Migdal cites cadre rotation (or what he calls “the big shuffle”) as one of the key ruling strategies for central authorities in post-colonial settings as they seek “to prevent threatening centers of power from coalescing” (214). In cases as varied as Haiti, Pakistan, Egypt, and Mexico, Migdal catalogues the “forced circulation of elites” and “the rapid rotation of individuals” throughout different parts of the state apparatus, to isolate them from their social bases of support, or sever those ties altogether (215-217).

A second strategy of rulers in this context is to rely more heavily on their own family and friends (Migdal 1988: 217-223). In order to further undercut the centrifugal pull of regional strongmen, central authorities increasingly rely on their own dependents to serve in important state offices, giving some states “an almost familial character” (217). Uncertain of regional elites’ loyalty, rulers “have continued to use kinship ties as an important criterion for recruitment to state posts” (218). They might also rely on other kinds of personal ties, binding the periphery to the center through appointing officials with “common regional origins,” or shared ethnic, sectarian, or tribal backgrounds (ibid.). Here social ties to the center displace the ties officials might have with the periphery.

In both of these strategies, like those described above, the rulers of newly independent states seek to avoid relying on socially entrenched local elites because their independent social bases might undermine loyalty and subordination to the center (Migdal 1988). Migdal’s point, however, is that rulers do not always have the power to do as they please. Central authorities

engage in political struggle with regional elites and cannot overcome them easily, at least without the possibility of facing a significant backlash that could threaten their hold on power.

Indeed, the process of centralization and bureaucratization in Europe was full of conflict precisely because socially embedded regional elites resisted usurpations of their power and privilege. In the mid-seventeenth century, French authorities finally sought to centralize power along the lines that Machiavelli recommended, by stripping authority from the provincial nobility and giving it instead to a new class of state officials, the Intendants. The Intendant, unlike the landed nobility, wrote Tocqueville, “was never a native of the province to which he was posted,” and obtained his post not “by right of birth, or by election,” but because he was “chosen by the government” to “act as its provincial agent” (Tocqueville 1955: 32-40). The social disruptions that rippled throughout the countryside as a result of this, however, would come back to haunt authorities in Paris. To the “great lords” of provincial France, the Intendants were “the creations of a usurped authority” (36). According to Tocqueville, the displacement of the landed elite and the subsequent disappearance of the reciprocal services that they offered peasants was one of the driving forces behind the French Revolution (ibid.).

It is essential to note, however, that the Napoleonic reforms of 1800 did not eliminate the regional ruling apparatus of the old regime; rather, they built upon it.³⁸ In the end, the French Revolution marked the center’s victory over the periphery. The Napoleonic prefectural system “expressed the radical idea that the state represented the national will against the fissiparous tendencies of the provinces” and fully integrated all of France’s regions into a single state administration (Tarrow 1977: 51). Authorities in Paris appointed prefects to each of the country’s new territorial-administrative *departements* where they served as the region’s highest

³⁸ This was Tocqueville’s main point—the supposed innovations of the revolution had their roots in the old regime.

official. Even though the prefect was a bureaucratic agent of the center in the periphery, officials in Paris have proven cautious not to allow the prefect to develop independent sources of power. During the Third Republic “prefects were rotated with every change in government” (Tarrow 1977: 56). Even in the Fourth and Fifth Republics, among a myriad of factors officials use when considering prefectural appointments and promotions, “one rule seems to be almost universally respected; no prefect is appointed to a *departement* where he has close relatives, property or particular interests” (Machin 1977: 176). In fact, notes Machin, the prefect who seeks to settle down and buy a home within the *departement* he is appointed to “is almost inevitably disappointed: he is always moved to another *departement*” as a result (Ibid.). That is to say, even in post-World War II France central authorities have utilized the principles of cadre rotation as a means of controlling appointed regional officials.

The Napoleonic prefectural system, it should be noted, is not simply one more example of how cadre shuffling is employed. It serves as the prototype of regional administration for modern centralized states, including the Soviet Union, to which I now turn.

III. The Politics of Cadre Appointment in the Soviet Union

In this section I discuss the politics of regional appointment in the Soviet Union. I do so for two reasons. First, the Soviet Union provides us with another general case to illustrate the politics of cadre appointment during the process of centralization. Here, as in the examples above, the social ties of regional and local officials often make central authorities wary as they attempt to govern the periphery. Second, it provides the historical context for the empirical cases of this dissertation: post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. One aspect of this history in particular is important to note. As noted in numerous other studies, the politics of cadre

appointment in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are shaped by the policies that were put in place during the Brezhnev era, which had an overall localizing effect on cadre recruitment (Jones Luong 2002; Collins 2006; Hale 2015: 53-57).

In the Soviet Union, perhaps more than anywhere else, the system of cadre selection was viewed as integral to state power. Rulers in Moscow tightly controlled all major appointments through the Communist Party's "leadership management system," the *nomenklatura*, which was a "list of positions whose ranks are confirmed by higher authorities" (Harasymiw 1969: 493; Voslensky 1984: 1). The Communist Party and the Soviet state had the same five-level territorial-administrative organization. Put simply, the Soviet Union consisted of republics, within each republic were provinces, within each province were districts, and within each district were numerous villages and cities.³⁹ Typically, the *nomenklatura* at each level was determined by the level directly above it. When Moscow found the performance of a particular regional administration to be lacking, though, it would assert direct control, usurping its appointment power and "transfer[ing] that jurisdiction to its own *nomenklatura*" (Harasymiw 1969: 507). Thus, center-periphery relations were not restricted to relations between Moscow and republic-centers, but between Moscow and all sub-union levels of the party and state, including, for example, provinces, districts, and villages.

But, "far from being a mere administrative device," writes Rigby, the *nomenklatura* was "a basic factor in the distribution and exercise of power and privilege in Soviet society" (Rigby 1990: 6-7). The verticalism of state power in the Soviet Union was built upon its cadre recruitment and appointment system, and the "political control of cadres," as managed through

³⁹ In the case of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan the dissolution of the union in 1991 made each republic an independent state. Below this level, the main territorial-administrative divisions were preserved, now in a four-level system—republic, province, district, village/city. Though the *nomenklatura* no longer exists, the main structure of appointments follows the same logic; the republic appoints to the province, the province appoints to the district, and so on. I discuss this below in more detail.

the *nomenklatura*, was seen as intimately tied to the “political reliability” of those cadres—that is, the degree to which they were loyal to and carried out the political priorities of the Communist Party and the state. When the Communist Party faced administrative problems, writes Harasymiw, “the answer [...] in every critical instance [was] political centralization, that is, greater party control over personnel” (Harasymiw 1969: 507). As in many of the cases described above, authorities in Moscow often rotated personnel in order to ensure their dependence on the center and preclude the development of strong social ties in the regions. The “ruling group” in Moscow, wrote Fainsod, “endeavors to prevent the growth of ‘family relations’ between the controlled and the controllers by frequent shifts of personnel,” which was just one of a “variety of ingenious devices” used by the ruling class to “make its control operative” (Fainsod 1963: 418).

In addition to loyalty, however, Soviet strategies of cadre recruitment, appointment, and shuffling were based on two other logics. First, contrary to the anti-localism common in the regional appointment strategies described above, Lenin’s theory of nationalism led him to favor the recruitment of local cadre rather than sending out administrators from Moscow. That theory, in short, posited that non-Russian ethnic groups would rebel if expressions of their national identity were repressed, as was done under the preceding imperial regime.⁴⁰ The resulting cadre policy of *korenizatsiia* (nativization) sought to empower titular nationals to govern their own republics, which tended to have an overall localizing effect on cadre recruitment practices.

Second, the Soviet leaderships’ economic priorities—agricultural expansion and rapid

⁴⁰ An observer of tsarist Russia described the position of an appointed governor as “a military commander quartered on a subjugated people, more than a public officer among his fellow subjects” (George Trevor, *Russia Ancient and Modern*, as quoted by Rigby (1978, fn. 5)). Early on the Bolsheviks favored local selection of governors, an impulse that quickly withered away under the centralizing imperatives of the Communist Party leadership, as I discuss below.

industrialization—often required the recruitment and appointment of highly specialized personnel, sometimes making loyalty to the party a secondary concern.

During the entire course of the Soviet period, these three goals—loyalty, nativization, and economic development—led to conflicting priorities in cadre recruitment, which, in turn, led to frequent changes in strategy: if local officials displayed too much localism (*mestnichestvo*), central authorities began to favor cadre rotation; but too many transfers could undermine the work of regional officials, which thwarted industrialization, leading to longer tenures and recruitment of specialists. Though cadre policy changed in small ways every few years, the broadest and most significant changes in the strategies of cadre appointment and control were associated with successive changes in top Soviet leadership, most notably in the transfers of power among Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev.

The ways in which competing priorities were balanced over time has a two-fold significance with regard to center-periphery relations in the post-Soviet period. First, Soviet cadre policies allowed for much higher levels of local recruitment than we might expect, especially considering that one of the *nomenklatura*'s ostensible purposes was a “check on localism” (Miller 1983). Second, the Soviet Union collapsed at the end of a 25-year period that happened to be marked by disproportionately high levels of local recruitment, even by Soviet standards. This was the result of Brezhnev’s “stability in cadres” policy, itself a reaction against Khrushchev’s penchant for cadre shuffling. As part of the Gorbachev-era reforms, attempts were made to uproot the entrenched local elites of the Brezhnev era, who were viewed by central authorities as irredeemably corrupt (i.e., insubordinate), but the center quickly gave in when local communities mobilized to preserve the status quo (Critchlow 1988, 1991; McGlinchey 2011). This means that the immediate post-independence period has been one in which the

central authorities of newly independent states have had to develop loyal cadre in the face of highly entrenched local elites. This informs not only the cadre policies that they have sought to adopt, but also contextualizes the overall value that political actors assign to the power of appointment itself—being able to control who will serve where, and in whose interests they will do so.

The full history of cadre politics in the Soviet Union has been covered by other recent studies, treating it mainly as a glimpse into the mechanics of patronage—loyalty in exchange for jobs (McGlinchey 2001: 51-66; Hale 2015: 47-57). To save space, I focus primarily on the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, which are the most significant for understanding the immediate post-Soviet period.

However, there is at least one aspect of the Stalin years that is worth noting here. Stalin faced many of the practical effects of Lenin's nationalities policy, which included the insubordination and disloyalty of local cadre. In fact, the revisionist history of the Soviet Communist Party's successive purges, in addition to Stalin's "Great Terror," suggests they were driven by the perceived need to eradicate disloyal and ineffective cadre in regions and localities (Getty 1985). If *korenizatsiia* was a "rooting" of cadres within regions and localities, then Stalin's purges were a violent and radical form of "uprooting."

In accordance with the logic presented in the previous section of this paper, evidence suggests that native local cadre in Central Asia, partly as a result of Lenin's preference for local cadre recruitment, tended to ignore, reinterpret, or subvert those directives that contradicted with the social norms and expectations of the society that they lived and worked in (Massell 1974: 249-311). Tellingly, it was the top central administrator tasked with overseeing the Soviet policy of women's emancipation in Central Asia, Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, who was soon reassigned as

the party's "chief purger" (Massell 1974: 249-311).⁴¹ The purge of 1928-1929 took place across the entire Soviet Union, but it started in Central Asia, and was explicitly linked to native cadres' failure to implement policies related to the emancipation of women (Massell 1974: 318).

Massell notes that native Central Asian cadre were among the hardest hit in this purge, losing approximately 25% of their ranks, compared with 10% Union-wide (Massell 1974: 249-311). Between 1930 and 1938, a total of seven successive purges had "destroyed almost all the fragile local Communist Party cadres in all the Central Asian republics" (Rywkin 1990: 108). In just one purge, in 1937, the vast majority of surviving local cadre were replaced: more than half of local party officials in primary party organizations (at the village level) and 70.8% of district party committees (ibid.). The longstanding leader of the Uzbek Republic, Faizullah Khojaev, was purged in 1937 and later executed. In the following year, three different individuals were appointed and removed to succeed him, all of them "liquidated as enemies of the people" (ibid.). Every member of Kazakhstan's Politburo was shot while so few members remained in Turkmenistan that a quorum could no longer be reached (ibid.).

The result was to enhance the power of Moscow in Central Asia: "native party cadres, after the storm of 1937-38, became weaker and less efficient than ever and, consequently, more dependent on outside (Russian) guardianship" (Rywkin 1990: 108). Indeed, this was precisely the point. Lenin's concern for native local cadre was being turned on its head and nationality policy itself was revised to fit a cadre policy that served administrative centralization above all else: a "growing suspicion of the Soviet Union's 'national periphery' led to a corresponding tendency to rely on the 'Russian core'" (Martin 2001: 413). As chaotic and violent as the purges were, at least one aspect was consistent and unambiguous. Among the shifting categories of

⁴¹ In relation to this role, Yaroslavsky authored the book *Kak Provodit Chistku Partii (How to Conduct a Purge of the Party)*, published in 1929.

purge targets—which included “class-aliens,” “double dealers,” “degenerates,” “careerists,” and “underminers,” among others—one appeared on all of the lists: “violators of discipline who fail to carry out party decisions” (Getty 1985: 49).

Khrushchev: Cadre Shuffling and Reorganization

Khrushchev famously denounced Stalin’s purges at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, but this did not prevent him continuing to centralize power by utilizing the party-state apparatus that Stalin had created. Rather than fight insubordinate local cadre with terror and purges, Khrushchev adopted an “experimental style” of cadre management based on the continual and unpredictable institutional reform of regional administration (Miller 1971: 80). This, in addition to the adoption of a cadre rotation policy, effectively ensured that regional and local officials had abbreviated and insecure tenures. Officials were regularly being transferred from center to periphery, and across regions, while, simultaneously, particular regional and local administrative structures were being created, combined, or eliminated. Thus, Khrushchev did not merely shuffle officials across different regions; he also shuffled the very institutions and offices that those officials inhabited. As one study notes, “the presence of an official or a post on a *nomenklatura* list clearly did not guarantee a secure future, since the post could be abolished and the incumbent redeployed” (Hill and Lowenhardt 1991: 233-34). This insecurity of tenure would be a means of mitigating against the development of localism.

At least formally, though, many Khrushchev-era administrative reforms had an element of administrative decentralization. Khrushchev frequently spoke about the value of local initiative to enhance efficiency in production and governance. But he never truly promoted activism at the local level. When he demanded that officials and managers get “closer to

production,” he was referring to the center, not the periphery. Getting closer to production typically entailed “the transfer of personnel from upper to lower levels of the bureaucracy, the transfer of chief administrators and trusts from Moscow to the provinces and regions they were charged with supervising, the transfer of scientific researcher institutes to the countryside or to the provinces, and the shifting of regional coordinative personnel [...] for the sake of closer supervision of day-to-day affairs” (Breslauer 1982: 43). The agricultural departments of district-level party committees were eliminated. In their place, outside “instructor groups” were created and sent to the countryside; each individual instructor was “permanently attached to one or two [collective farms] and was expected to live in one of them” so that they could “exert continuous pressure” and “mobilize local Party members” (Miller 1971: 83).⁴² In short, central authorities relied less on local cadre, and more on the transfer of officials from center to periphery.

Perhaps the most famous of Khrushchev’s reforms was the replacement of over 140 central or regional ministries with newly created regional economic councils (*sovnarkhozy*) in 1957. The *sovnarkhozy* overlapped with the administrative territories of *obkom* first secretaries,⁴³ thus significantly enhancing the power of regional executives at the expense of central ministries (Fainsod 1963: 395). Fainsod notes that a more regionalized approach to economic production had long been resisted because elites in Moscow feared “that any substantial relaxation of central controls would result in localism running rampant” (ibid.: 396). After the reforms were implemented these reservations proved to be justified. The *sovnarkhozy* tended to hoard money and resources in their region, placed the needs of their own plants ahead

⁴² This created its own set of challenges since district-level party secretaries had no interest in travelling around or living in the rural areas of their districts and typically ignored orders to do so. “[I]t is perhaps understandable,” notes Miller, “that many of them did not wish to move themselves and their families from the relative comfort of the raion [district] centers” (86). At a meeting of the Central Committee in 1954 Khrushchev complained that “many raikom secretaries visit the machine-tractor stations and the *kolkhozy* only on the fly, as rare guests. They go there, hold a conference, and run home to the raion center” (ibid.).

⁴³ The *obkom* first secretary is a position roughly equivalent to governor.

of national plants, and had little regard for the larger national strategy if it did not give their region maximum benefit. In sum, they did not follow orders and “sought to create self-contained regional empires instead of meeting national needs” (Fainsod 1963: 396). Khrushchev’s response was recentralization and increasing controls over regional officials. Between 1960 and 1961 the highest officials of the party’s regional apparatus were purged; nearly half of all *obkom* and *kraikom* first secretaries, who controlled the *sovnarkhozy*, were “replaced or transferred” (Miller 1971: 92; Breslauer 1982: 98-99). In 1960 and again in 1962, the Central Committee consolidated disparate regional *sovnarkhozy* into larger units. In Central Asia, for example, all of the *sovnarkhozy* were replaced by a single organization, which was “designed to strike a blow against excessive localism” (Fainsod 1963: 397).

Brezhnev’s “Stability in Cadre” Policy

While Khrushchev’s regular shuffling of cadre may have mitigated against the development of localism, it also undermined the ability of regional officials to do their jobs. At least this was the consensus among the elites of the Brezhnev era (Rigby 1978: 7). The major failures of Khrushchev’s leadership—most prominent among them economic stagnation—were attributed to the instability of cadre tenure in the periphery. A prominent Central Committee journal lamented that “[t]he frequent restructurings and reorganizations have entailed repeated mass reallocation of officials” and that “this switching around of cadres has not allowed them to concentrate on the decision of long-term questions of economic development of the oblast, krai, or raion.”⁴⁴ Rather than treat “frequent changes of [cadre] as a virtue,” as a leading party paper

⁴⁴ Quoted in Rigby (1978: 7)

complained,⁴⁵ an emerging value of the Brezhnev leadership was “the desirability or necessity of administrative stability” (Breslauer 1982: 153). The new cadre policy, based on longer and more secure tenure, would become known as the “stability in cadres” or “trust in cadres” policy.

The goal of Brezhnev’s stability in cadres was not necessarily to ensure loyalty and subordination, but to facilitate better quality work, develop a pool of more experienced personnel, and to soothe the spirits of disgruntled regional officials. This entailed a new kind of thinking about insubordination and disloyalty. Brezhnev regarded the work of regional officials as difficult, and acknowledged that failures and mistakes were not always the result of conscious insubordination.⁴⁶ The new refrain of elite in Moscow was that “deviance would not be equated with corruption or sabotage, and that Soviet officials would enjoy physical security and job security,” so long as they were not dishonest or incompetent (Breslauer 1982: 153). The Brezhnev leadership, writes one author, “bent over backward” to restore trust in cadres, which included “an atmosphere of stable routine” characterized by “the remarkable absence of leadership turnover” (Miller 1971: 99).

A study of Soviet regional leadership during the Brezhnev years notes that the rate of turnover of *obkom* first secretaries had already decreased in 1965 while, by the late 1970s, only nine regions of the Russian Federation (RSFSR) had a first secretary who was changed twice; only two had a secretary who was changed three times (Rigby 1978: 12). Moreover, this coincided with increases in the levels of local recruitment. Rigby shows that, during the Brezhnev years, the vast majority of *obkom* first secretaries were being recruited from within the *oblast*, whereas most of Khrushchev’s appointments came from outside (ibid.: 13). This is a

⁴⁵ *Partiinaiia zhizn'*, as quoted in Rigby (1978: 6).

⁴⁶ Brezhnev himself was appointed by Khrushchev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan in 1955 and was already recalled to Moscow by 1956. He was tasked to oversee the Virgin Lands campaign, which proved to be an abysmal failure (Olcott 1987: 226-228).

trend that accelerated over time: between 1965 and 1971 approximately two-thirds of first secretaries were chosen from within the region; between 1971 and 1976, five-sixths were (ibid.: 14). Coding for career, birth, and education, one study notes that the *obkom* first secretaries who were “actual regional natives” nearly doubled after 1964, from 23 to 41 percent (Moses 1974: 230). In sum, stability in cadre coincided with the localization of cadre selection, more along the lines of cadre policy under Lenin.⁴⁷

Thus, Brezhnev’s solution to the perceived chaos of the Khrushchev era succeeded in creating secure tenures and stable routines for provincial and national officials alike, but it did so “with well-known results”—namely, increasing levels of localism and the proliferation of cadre who “took advantage of their enhanced authority to line their own nests and to recruit successors of a similar disposition” (Hill and Lowenhardt 1991: 234). For example, the Communist Party First Secretaries who were appointed to the five Central Asian Republics between 1959 and 1969 remained in power until the mid-1980s.

These exceptionally long tenures “enabled them to put their personal stamp on the republican machinery as in a fiefdom, appointing their followers to senior posts at republican, oblast (province) and raion (district) levels” (Critchlow 1988: 145). They had become deeply entrenched in overlapping networks of social, political, and patronage relations and had acquired substantial local followings (ibid.). So, too, did their own appointees, who governed the *oblasts*, which would be the largest sub-national administrative territories once the republics became independent states in 1991. The governors of *oblasts* in Central Asian states, in turn, were able “to develop close personal ties and professional networks within their regions, to build loyal

⁴⁷ In fact, the Brezhnev elite revived a quotation of Lenin’s as a way of critiquing Khrushchev’s cadre rotation. But now the emphasis was on organizational efficiency, rather than nativization of cadre: “Do not start everything over again from the beginning, do no reorganize right and left, but learn how to make the best use of what has already been created. As few general reorganizations as possible...” (quoted in Rigby 1978: 6-7).

followings among local leaders as well as the regional population, and to form a strong allegiance toward and affinity for their own oblasts” (Jones Luong 2002: 71).

One of the major elements of Gorbachev’s *perestroika* reforms was to route out entrenched regional elites, whose “local-interest networks” had “seriously eroded Moscow’s ability to enforce directives” (Critchlow 1988: 142). The catch-all word to describe the insubordination of local elites became “corruption.” But, as Critchlow argues, the corruption that local elites were accused of was not limited to narrow self-interest and personal enrichment; local officials frequently acted “in the interest of their localities,” for example, by using resources for building projects that were not authorized by the center (144).

At the 1986 Party Congress, a new cadre rotation scheme was announced, described as the “exchange of experienced staff between the republics and the centre” (Critchlow 1988: 154). In 1990, at the Twenty-Eighth Party Congress, the Khrushchev-era rule of “systematic turnover” of cadre was officially re-adopted (Hill and Lowenhardt: 1991: 239). But after the long Brezhnev-era, these reforms were too little, too late. Local elites were so deeply entrenched that they were able to mobilize local supporters against their own removal, using appeals to “local patriotism” to resist firings and transfers (Critchlow 1988: 154). Personnel who had been officially removed would recruit their supporters for letter-writing campaigns, the signing of petitions, and other appeals to Moscow; more often than not they were successful in getting new appointments in a “revolving-door fashion” that officials in Moscow regularly complained about (ibid.). In some cases local mobilization was less subtle.

In 1986, public protests broke out in the streets of Almaty, the capital of the Kazakh Republic, when Gorbachev tried to unseat D.A. Kunaev, Kazakhstan’s First Secretary since 1960. Gorbachev’s pick to replace Kunaev was Gennady Kolbin, an outsider who was

“parachuted in from Moscow” (Cummings 2005: 16). When the protests spread further, Gorbachev relented. In the end he succeeded in negotiating Kunaev’s retirement and appointed, instead, a prominent insider in Kazakhstan’s republic-level politics, the incumbent prime minister, Nursultan Nazarbayev.⁴⁸

It is possible that Gorbachev’s reforms might have succeeded if they had been given more time, but the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. The newly independent states, as a result, would effectively inherit the entrenched regional elites that Brezhnev’s “stability in cadres” policy helped to incubate and grow. New central governments and ruling elites would need to overcome these regional and local elites in their attempts to centralize power, and often adopted cadre shuffling policies to do so, with differing levels of success. In the next section I discuss the politics of regional appointment in the post-Soviet era, focusing primarily on Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, the latter of which has been more successful at maintaining its own regional appointment powers and subordinating cadre. I present evidence below that will show it has also succeeded in implementing a cadre rotation scheme while Kyrgyzstan has failed to do so. I argue that this represents Kazakhstan’s overall higher levels of administrative integration and centralization in comparison to Kyrgyzstan, where the central government regularly battles regional elites and local communities over who will govern the regions.

⁴⁸ Though they were both top officials in the Kazakh SSR Nazarbayev and Kunaev were rivals, not allies. According to Gorbachev’s written account of the episode, Kunaev urged him to transfer Nazarbayev to Moscow, or send him abroad—“Kunayev painted an extremely negative picture of [Nazarbayev], constantly repeating: ‘This is a dangerous man. He must be stopped.’” (Gorbachev 1995: 330-1). Thus, in taking over the reins of the state there no reason to believe that Nazarbayev had the full cooperation Kunaev’s allies, his appointees in the center and in the periphery, as some have suggested (see, for example, McGlinchey 2011).

IV. Post-Soviet Contexts: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

The prior section showed two main things. First, that the power of appointment in the Soviet Union was a key element of Soviet hierarchy and administration. Second, as a result of Brezhnev's stability in cadres policy, the end of the Soviet era was marked by the increasing entrenchment of regional and local elites within the communities that they governed. This set of facts serves as the context within which I analyze cadre politics and centralization in the post-Soviet era.

In this section I wish to say two things about the post-Soviet context. First, in post-Soviet states where administrative hierarchy is modeled after the Soviet-style prefectural system—namely, where regional governors are appointed by the center and have some power to appoint their own subordinates—there is continuity in the value that elites place on the power of appointment itself. In such settings the politics of regional appointment continues to shape relations between center and periphery. Second, I suggest, following a consensus within the literature on post-Soviet Central Asian politics, that the result of Brezhnev's stability in cadres policy meant that the new national leaders of Central Asian states had to contend with entrenched regional elites in their quest to centralize power (Jones Luong 2002; Collins 2006).

Just as Brezhnev's stability in cadre policy was a reaction against Khrushchev's penchant for rapid and unpredictable cadre shuffling, the leaders of post-Soviet states have tended to adopt cadre policies in reaction to Brezhnev's stability in cadre, namely, rotation and shuffling of officials. In post-Soviet discourse, cadre rotation (*rotatsiia kadrov*) is often described not only as a way to eliminate disloyal or insubordinate cadre, but also as a weapon in the "struggle with corruption" (Razuvaeva 2012). Corruption might be common in post-Soviet states, but central authorities do not invoke the term to refer exclusively to officials pilfering public resources or

taking bribes for their own self-enrichment (Critchlow 1988). It is also understood to refer more broadly to the multiple and extra-official dealings local officials engage in with their friends, family, and other local acquaintances. It is precisely these kinds of extra-official social ties that central authorities seek to undermine with cadre rotation, thereby better centralizing administration within the state's hierarchy.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, cadre rotation policies were adopted in numerous newly independent post-Soviet states, not only in Central Asia. In Russia, for instance, the struggle to appoint and rotate regional cadre has been a recurring aspect of center-periphery politics since 1991. In the early 1990s, authorities were still able to manipulate appointments in the *nomenklatura* to prevent national independence movements in the periphery from gaining real traction (McCauley 1997: 79-81; 99-102, 120-128). In 2004, Vladimir Putin turned back some Yeltsin-era reforms, reestablishing the “single chain of command” by reclaiming the formal power to appoint regional governors directly, rather than have them chosen through elections (Baker 2004). Several scholars have argued that loyalty—though not necessarily competence—has been the main criterion for the selection of regional cadre in Russia since the reestablishment of gubernatorial appointments in 2004 (Chebankova 2005; Reuter and Robertson 2012). It was at this juncture that Russia's provincial governors came to be seen as “representatives of the president” rather than representatives of their regions (Kryshtanovskaya and White 2009: 287).

Cadre appointment in post-Soviet Russia has also been characterized by the regularized rotation of personnel. In 2011, in the third year of his presidency, Dmitrii Medvedev announced that “one must not sit in one place [...] the person who wants to continue in service needs to be moved around – some horizontally [to different regions] and others vertically [to higher or lower

levels]” (Medvedev 2011). “For the last three years,” he noted, “I changed half of the governors – in some places because of disturbances or problems, and in some places simply because rotation is necessary” (Ibid.). At the end of Medvedev’s presidency, in 2012, the direct election of governors was granted as a concession to a growing political opposition. But, Putin swiftly reinstated the appointment of governors when he resumed his presidency less than one year later. In 2013, now as prime minister, Medvedev announced that “any executive, either at the regional level or [...] on the federal level, must undergo rotation, that is, he must change his place of work” (RIA Novosti 2013).

Likewise, in Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili undertook a series of reforms that included the wholesale replacement of his predecessor’s entrenched administrative personnel. Rather than ushering in a period of democracy and openness as many Western analysts believed, it was a strategy adopted by central authorities to ensure the loyalty of their own staff (Timm 2012: 174-177). The “arbitrary nomination, suspension and re-appointment of state elites” served to prevent cadre from developing too much power in sub-national organizations. Timm writes of Georgia that “[t]he unpredictability of rotation ensures that actors seek to hedge their power base not within the subsystem they currently command but towards the ruling elite,” making it “a vital means to ensure loyalty” (Ibid. 176). The provincial appointment policies of President Kuchma in Ukraine also showed high levels of “leapfrogging,” or “frequent reshuffling” (Matsuzato 2001: 424-430).

In contrast to Russia, Georgia, and Ukraine though, elites in Central Asia were rarely recruited to serve in union-level posts during the Soviet era and tended to spend their entire careers within their own republics (Laitin 1991; 1998: 59-82). The result, some have argued, is that, at the moment of independence, Central Asian regional elites were even more deeply

entrenched than in other post-Soviet states (Burg 1986; Jones Luong 2002). The national elites of newly independent Central Asian states, like their counterparts elsewhere, sought to adopt cadre rotation policies as part of an effort to centralize power.

Before discussing the politics of regional appointment in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, a few things are important to note. First, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are both unitary non-democratic states in which provincial governors are appointed to represent the central government in the regions, not the populations living there.⁴⁹ Second, the formal constitutional provisions for the appointment of governors is the same in each state: central authorities have the authority to appoint their own governors, and to remove them at will.⁵⁰ Thirdly, each state has declared, with varying levels of formality, that it is official policy to rotate personnel across regions (*po gorizontali*) in accordance with the logics described throughout the previous sections of this chapter.

In Kyrgyzstan, provisions for the rotation of cadre are formally written into law. Article 28 of the Law on State Service, titled “the rotation (transfer) of state officials,” says that “the rotation (transfer) of state servants, occupying different categories of state office, is carried out with the goal of achieving the more effective use of the potential of state servants according to the demands of the state,” and “also lowers the risk of corruption.” The law goes on to state that “state servants can be transferred to work in another locality, or in another state organ or institution [...] if circumstances require such measures to prevent serious harm to the public service.” The determination of what constitutes “harm to the public service” and the means by

⁴⁹ As if to make up for their failure to do this in practice, the position of governor in Kyrgyzstan was formally renamed in the aftermath of revolution in 2010. They are now formally known as “Special Representatives of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Provinces.” I will refer to them simply as governors. According to the Constitution of Kazakhstan (Article 87(3)), every governor, in addition to every appointed executive head that serves under the governor, is “a representative of the President and the Government of the Republic.” Officially, they are called *akims*, but I will refer to them here as governors.

⁵⁰ See Article 87(4) of the Constitution of Kazakhstan and Article 89(7) of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic.

which it can be preempted are made by officials who have the authority to appoint; namely, those in the capital city.

We know, moreover, that both of Kyrgyzstan's first two presidents, Akaev and Bakiev, pursued policies of cadre rotation, seeking to appoint personnel from the south to positions in the north, and vice versa (Anderson 1999: 40; Roy 2000: 115; Collins 2006: 243-244; Ramas 2013: 136, 139). This was not done arbitrarily. Akaev, himself a northerner, tended to appoint northerners to the south and Bakiev, who was a southerner, tended to appoint southerners to the north. In both cases the logic was the same: each president would seek to displace locally entrenched elites with cadre to whom they themselves had ties (for Akaev see Collins 2006: 243-244).

But in doing so, successive Kyrgyz presidents faced formidable opposition from local elites and local populations. As early as 1992, when President Akaev sought to remove Bekmamat Osmanov from his post as the governor of Jalal-Abad *oblast*, he faced intense local resistance, at least according to what few written accounts of the episode exist. Though he ultimately succeeded in getting Osmanov to resign, the "strength of local feeling" forced him to replace Osmanov with a "representative of another powerful local family," rather than with one of his own loyal cadre; Osmanov, meanwhile, remained a prominent and powerful figure in the region (Anderson 1999: 40). Akaev encountered similar constraints on his appointment authority in subsequent years, as did his successors. This means that authorities in Bishkek have rarely been able to implement cadre rotation completely, or for extended periods of time. Overall, the center-periphery politics of cadre appointment in Kyrgyzstan have been characterized by consistent resistance to the appointment of outsiders in the regions, or the removal of embedded regional elites, or both. It is worth noting that the "Aksy events" of 2002,

in addition to the revolutions that toppled both Akaev and Bakiev in 2005 and 2010, respectively, were led predominantly by regional elites (Radnitz 2005; 2006; 2010). Moreover, the immediate cause in all of these cases was a dispute over regional elites' access to office. I discuss the empirical details of these and other contentious episodes of regional appointment politics in chapter six.

Kyrgyzstan's current government continues to grapple with the same problems. Three years after the April Revolution of 2010, Prime Minister Satybaldiev proposed a series of controversial reforms aiming to restore and strengthen the “vertical of power,” or the central executive's control over the executive heads at each lower level of territorial administration, for example governors of provinces and *akims*⁵¹ of districts (Satybaldiev 2013a; 2013b; National Council 2013: Sec. 2.1). At the district level, one proposed bill would empower a permanent “manager” (*rukovoditel*) of local state administration to “realize the unity of state policies in the sphere of state service” by helping to organize “the appointment, shuffling, rotation, and removal from state service, those occupying posts in the state administration,” among other things (Satybaldiev 2013a, Art. 12-1).⁵² In connection with these proposed changes, the Deputy Director of the State Cadre Service, Bakhtiarjan Fattakhov, explained that his office was helping to draft a bill strengthening the institution of cadre rotation as “an important part of a campaign against corruption.” According to Fattakhov, the bill would ensure that “one person cannot continue to work in one place. People need to be moved around and work in new places and this will reduce the risks of corruption.”⁵³

⁵¹ In Kyrgyzstan an *akim* is the head executive of a district (*raion*), which is one administrative level lower than governor.

⁵² By making this a “permanent” position, the bill stipulates that it is not tied to the fate of the *akim* of the district. The manager of the district apparatus would be appointed by the governor of the *oblast*, who answers directly to the president and prime minister.

⁵³ Interview with author, November 18, 2013.

In Kazakhstan, the policy of cadre rotation is less formally institutionalized under law, but still publicly (and privately) acknowledged by state officials. Moreover, cadre rotation is discussed by analysts, written about in the press, and noted in countless studies on Kazakh politics, even if only obliquely.⁵⁴ One study notes that, “frequent cadre rotation” has “kept *akims* from either becoming too popular with constituents or entrenching themselves” in local social and economic structures (Junisbai 2010: 256). Zauresh Battalova, a high-profile opposition leader and former Senate Deputy, notes that “you can see that *akims*’ positions are rotated, especially on the *oblast* level, and you can see they all make up one list—the same names—with people appointed to different regions.”⁵⁵ A 2013 report by *Freedom House* notes that, to “further exert control,” President Nazarbayev “has continually shuffled *akims*, not allowing them to spend more than a few years in office and rewarding them with a better position for their compliance” (Dave 2013: 273). A former regional and local official himself noted that, despite having an official four-year term, “any *akim* can be changed whenever the president wants. Everything depends on the central government.”⁵⁶

In an interview on live television in mid-December, 2015, President Nazarbayev indicated that rotation was a virtual requirement for anyone working in state administration:

Cadre shuffling will always continue. With regard to the current government – this is just a category of people who happen to occupy it right now. Cadre changes are the most discussed question. Who is removed and who is appointed, such is the topic for much gossip. I want to say from my own enormous life experience in leadership that succession [in office] is always necessary. Therefore, I am always trying to make sure that succession [of officials] always happens (Tengrinews 2015).

⁵⁴ Until very recently two major websites in Kazakshtan—*Tengrinews* and *Zakon*—both had a prominent link on their homepage for “rearrangements” (*perestanovki*). There, readers could stay up to date on every new round of dismissals and appointments in the government, center and periphery, which occur on an almost daily basis.

⁵⁵ Interview with author, June 26, 2014.

⁵⁶ Berik Abdugauly, former *akim* of Ulytau *raion* (Karaganda *oblast*), deputy *akim* of Karaganda *oblast*, *akim* of Arkalyk city (Kostanai *oblast*), and Advisor to the First Deputy Prime Minister. Interview with author, June 20, 2014.

Alikhan Baimenov, the Chairman of Kazakhstan's Agency for Civil Service Affairs, elaborated more precisely on the logic of cadre rotation, echoing the themes outlined in the first sections of this chapter.⁵⁷ First, he said, cadre rotation has an integrative effect that is essential for a unitary state. By moving people to different regions “we hope that there will be regional interpenetration, exchange of experiences and ideas across regions, and cultural harmony.” He also described this as the fostering of “professionalism and the development of corporate culture.” By “corporate culture” the Chairman was referring to an environment that would have “a positive effect on the real content of a unitary state.” When officials serve in multiple regions, they will learn that they work for a single entity (Kazakhstan) and not for any particular region. Second, cadre rotation is “an anti-corruption measure.” By appointing people “from one region to another,” it prevents them from obtaining too much personal power in any region or state agency. Relatedly, the Chairman defended the center's power of appointment itself, explaining that regional and local elections would have a disintegrative effect on the state without actually giving any voice to the masses. This is because, if elections were instituted, “the influence of informal local relations” would play “a big role in choosing local officials.”⁵⁸ In the interests of preserving and creating a strong unitary centralized state, appointment powers must be retained in Astana and utilized to systematically rotate cadre across regions and between ministries. This, at least, is the official line.

The data show, however, that despite adopting essentially the same policy—one based on the regular and systematic rotation of regional personnel across regions—only Kazakhstan has

⁵⁷ Interview with author, July 10, 2014.

⁵⁸ In 2013, Kazakhstan did initiate an “experiment” in which the heads of villages were selected via election. But the elections were indirect, being held among members of the village council. Since every village council is filled with members of the president's *Nur Otan* party, critics consider this as much a form of indirect appointment as indirect election. In any case, executive heads of districts and provinces (to which Chairman Baimenov was referring) continue to be appointed.

achieved this policy in practice. Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, continues to face pushback by regional elites and local populations, significantly constraining the formal appointment authority of the central government. Using a database of governor biographies in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, encompassing all appointments from 1991 to 2013, I coded for instances in which an individual governor was appointed multiple times to serve in different regions.

In Kazakhstan there were 111 governors appointed to 16 different administrative provinces between 1991 and 2013 (See Table 2.1 below).⁵⁹ Of these, 44 appointees had previously been appointed as the governor of another region. To put that differently, nearly 40 percent of all governor appointments entail the rotation of personnel from one province to another. But to say this somewhat understates its prevalence because every appointee who falls into this category was appointed somewhere for the first time; thus, the number of appointees being rotated across regions can never approach one hundred percent. The 40 percent of all governors who have been rotated across regions represent second, third, and even fourth terms as heads of different provinces in the course of a single individual's career.⁶⁰ I take this as evidence for the successful implementation of cadre rotation in Kazakhstan for provincial governors.

⁵⁹ I include the 14 currently existing *oblasts* and the two cities with *oblast* status, Astana and Almaty, where the *akim* is appointed according to the same process as in any of the other *oblasts*.

⁶⁰ To illustrate, consider the biography of Krymbek Kuserbaev. Kuserbaev was appointed as the governor of West Kazakhstan *oblast* (2000-2003), and then as governor of Mangistau *oblast* (2006-2011), and then as governor of Kyzl-Orda *oblast* (2013). In my dataset the first appointment is not coded as cadre rotation because it was Kuserbaev's first post as governor and he had not previously served as a governor of any other province. However, the second and third appointments are. It is also worth noting that Kuserbaev served in various high-level posts within the presidential administration and central ministries. Thus, his stints in the regions were mixed with long tenures in the capital city, a common career trajectory for many of Kazakhstan's governors that shows their close ties to the center.

Table 2.1: Appointment of Governors to All Provinces (*oblasts*), 1991-2013⁶¹

Oblast (province)	# of governors	# with prior appointment in central government	# with prior appoint. as gov. of a diff. province
Kazakhstan			
Akmola	9	5	3
Aktobe	7	1	2
Almaty city	5	4	3
Almaty oblast	7	4	3
Astana city	5	4	2
Atyrau	6	4	2
East Kazakhstan	11	8	6
Jambyl	6	4	2
Karaganda	4	3	2
Kostanai	6	2	1
Kyzylorda	7	5	2
Mangistau	9	5	2
North Kazakhstan	7	3	3
Pavlodar	9	7	5
South Kazakhstan	8	4	4
West Kazakhstan	5	3	2
Country total KAZ	111	66	44
% of country total	100%	59.5%	39.6%
Kyrgyzstan			
Batken	11	4	2
Chui	10	6	3
Issyk-kul	12	5	1
Jalalabad	17	4	2
Naryn	13	6	1
Osh	13	10	1
Talas	9	1	2
Country Total KYZ	85	36	12
% of country total	100%	43.4%	14.1%

⁶¹ Sources: These data were drawn from a variety of newspapers and other websites that keep biographies on high-level officials in each state. These included: www.knews.kg, www.centrasia.ru, who.ca-news.org, www.vb.kg, stanradar.com, www.zakon.kz, bnews.kz, and biografia.kz

Coding: (1) As prior central government posts I include here only high-level positions. This includes any position in the presidential administration, in the prime minister's office, or top-level positions within a government ministry (as minister or deputy minister). (2) Within the category "prior appointment as governor to another region" I also counted prior appointment to (a) Soviet-era equivalent posts, e.g., a top-level officials in the *oblast* committee (*obkom*), provided it was in a different region than the present appointment (b) positions as deputy governors of a different region. For both (a) and (b) such information was not always available so there might be cases that exist but were not recorded; however, these should be equally distributed across provinces in both states. Finally, I only included prior appointments to defunct provinces if they were territorially distinct from the present province in question. (3) For governors of Kyrgyzstan's oblasts I include illegal installment of "people's governors." Thus, the data includes instances in which governors were installed--for either long or short terms--without formal approval of the central government, or *ex post facto* confirmation. Since the data set is supposed to capture the politics of regional appointment, leaving these cases out would inaccurately portray Kyrgyzstan's central government as having total mastery over these offices.

The research done by Schatz on appointments in Kazakhstan paints a complementary picture. Schatz includes a large range of officials in his dataset—not limited to provincial governors alone—and codes for their personal origins rather than their regional destination as appointees. What he finds is that all high-level appointments in Kazakhstan, including governors, are disproportionately chosen from the south and southeastern parts of the country, the home region of President Nazarbayev. This is also the region surrounding Almaty, the state capital until 1997. Schatz’s point is to show that choices for appointment in Kazakhstan depend on direct ties to the president (2004: 95-112). If we assume for a moment that all regions in Kazakhstan have the same total number of appointees, then it must be true that a disproportionate number of appointees in the western, northern, and eastern regions of the country are outsiders, hailing from the south and southeast. To the degree that cadre from the south and southeast are likely to have closer ties to the president—as Schatz contends—we can ascertain that regional appointments in Kazakhstan are characterized by the transfer of officials from center to periphery.

Even though Schatz presents these data as evidence for the role of clan-based networks, he comes to conclusions that frame Nazarbayev’s main concerns in terms of center versus periphery, in accordance with the logics discussed in this chapter with regard to regional appointment: Nazarbayev, driven by a fear of regionalism, “rotated *oblast* akims frequently, rewarding those who were particularly loyal and relocating those who appeared to challenge his central control [...] [t]hrough this rotation, Nazarbayev sought to undermine regionalisms that could compete with the power of the center, not to mention his personal power [...]” (Schatz 2004: 104).

In addition to rotating governors across different regions, governors' career trajectories show that the majority of them—nearly 60 percent—held high-level posts in the central government before being appointed to the provinces (see Table 2.1). Moreover, repeated appointments to different provinces, in accordance with cadre rotation, is often broken apart by appointment to posts in the central government itself. The leader of a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Almaty that deals with issues of regional governance observed that, “some people are moved from the *akim* of the region to the ministry, and then from the ministry, again, to the *akim* of some region.”⁶² For example, one prominent ally of the president, Danial Akhmetov, was appointed as the governor of East Kazakhstan *oblast* in November 2014. His immediate prior post was as the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, which he held from 2012 to 2014. Prior to this, he was Kazakhstan's Minister of Defense (2007-2009), Prime Minister (2003-2007), the governor of Pavlodar *oblast* (2001-2003 and 1993-1997), and the governor of North Kazakhstan *oblast* (1997-1999). The career trajectories of other prominent elites show a similar pattern. See, for example, Akhmetzhan Esimov, Umirzak Shukeev, Imangali Tasmagambetov, Kazhmurat Nagmanov, Shalbai Kumakhanov, and Krymbek Kuserbaev, among others (for Kuserbaev, see previous footnote).

In contrast, the governors of Kyrgyzstan's provinces tend to be appointed to a single *oblast* throughout their careers. There, 85 governors were appointed to seven different administrative provinces between 1991 and 2013 (see Table 2.1).⁶³ Among these, 36 (or 42.4% of the total) had previously been appointed to a high-level post in the central government. But,

⁶² Interview with author, April 2014 (Int1_23).

⁶³ I include Kyrgyzstan's seven current *oblasts*, but not Bishkek or Osh cities. Unlike Kazakhstan's two major cities—Almaty and Astana, which are governed as *oblasts*—the appointment of personnel to Bishkek and Osh has been so hotly contested that the center has, at times, conceded and allowed elections. This means that not every mayor of Kyrgyzstan's two major cities was an appointee at all. This is, in itself, a reflection of the center's lack of control over regional cadre; in chapter 6, I discuss the contentious case of Osh city in extensive detail.

what is most striking about the Kyrgyz case is that there were only 12 cases in which a governor who had served in one province was then later appointed to a different province. Put differently, we can say that the rotation of governors across regions, though an officially stated policy preference and provided for by law, actually occurred only 14.4 percent of the time. But, moreover, in at least four of these twelve instances, the central government faced public backlash in the province that was set to receive an outsider and either to overcome public resistance to install their choice, or concede to public demands by installing a local favorite. This means that in one-third of all cases that the central government attempted to rotate cadre across regions, it was met by resistance in the periphery. In addition to this, there were at least nine instances in which local populations unseated the central government's appointed governor and (unofficially) replaced him or her with a local favorite or "people's governor" (*narodnyi gubernator*). In some of those cases the government arrested the pretender; but in others they conceded, leaving in place a person to govern a province on their behalf that they did not want or choose.

Zhusubek Zheenbekov, for example, a native of Jalalabad *oblast*, seized control over the governor's office during the Tulip Revolution of 2005, with the help of his supporters. After the revolution, the newly installed president, Kurmanbek Bakiev, retroactively confirmed the appointment, officially sanctioning a choice made in the periphery, not in the center.⁶⁴ Later, in January 2006, Bakiev tried to relocate Zheenbekov to Talas *oblast*, a province in the north. This change was met by a powerful local resistance, both in Talas and in Jalalabad.⁶⁵ Bakiev met with Zheenbekov's supporters in Jalalabad, trying to convince them that the change was

⁶⁴ It is worth noting that Zheenbekov was (and still is) a member of Bakiev's rival political party, the SDPK, making it likely that Bakiev was merely conceding to a reality over which he had no control, rather than affirming his own preference.

⁶⁵ The choice of Talas was probably not random. The incumbent governor of Talas, Iskenderbek Aidaraliev, was the only Akaev-era governor to survive the 2005 revolution; hence, Zheenbekov faced hostile protests upon his arrival in Talas as did Aidaraliev in Jalalabad.

necessary. As a presidential spokesperson explained to the press, Bakiev was “replacing [Zheenbekov] as part of a policy of [cadre] rotation” (RFE/RL 2006). Zheenbekov served as governor of Talas for almost one year, and was then given a post in the central government as First Deputy Minister of Emergency Situations. After a second revolution in 2010 that toppled Bakiev, Zheenbekov was again selected by a local “people’s assembly” (*kurultai*) as the governor of Jalalabad. In the four-way contest that ensued, he voluntarily ceded the post to his friend and political ally, Bektur Asanov (also a Jalalabad native). Later still, in March 2014, Zheenbekov was formally appointed as governor of Jalalabad *oblast*, making it the third time he was chosen for the post, but only the first time he was formally selected by the government, indicating that, perhaps, the central government had modified its selections based on local popular demand. Notably, conceding to popular demand is itself a constraint on the center’s ability to select whomever it wants, particularly if it prefers candidates from outside the region.

In chapter six, I discuss these and other contentious episodes of regional appointment in more detail. For now I simply want to establish a basic fact about outcomes in the cases of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Despite having identical formal authority for the appointment and removal of provincial governors, and despite having nearly identical cadre rotation policies to move their governors across regions, central authorities in Kazakhstan have achieved their goals while their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan face frequent battles with regional elites; moreover, these are battles that they often lose.

What does this mean? I suggest that Kazakhstan’s success and Kyrgyzstan’s failure in implementing cadre rotation is a measure of each state’s overall level of centralization and administrative control. There are two ways in which this is true. First, cadre rotation is a state policy. If the central government is unable to implement its policy in the face of regional

resistance, it means that the center lacks power over the regions. As with policy in any other realm—agriculture, taxes, development, housing, etc.—the state, if it chooses to do so, must have its way in all of its regions; when it cannot, it is an indication of weakness emanating from the center. Thus, I use the relative success or failure of cadre rotation policies as a measure of bureaucratic centralization, or the degree to which regional cadre are actually subordinate to central directives. By this measurement, Kazakhstan has achieved a higher level of bureaucratic centralization—central authorities there have integrated regional administration under a central apparatus, can place loyal agents where they wish and remove those who are insubordinate, or those who simply do their jobs poorly.

In addition, though, I would like to suggest that the relative success or failure of cadre rotation is more than a mere measurement of state centralization. In the context of the first two sections of this chapter, we can conclude that cadre policy is not like other kinds of policy because it is policy about the organization of power in the state itself. Cadre policy is designed, in part, to regulate administrative relationships between the central and regional arms of the state vis-à-vis each other and in relationship to society.

Thus, the failure of Kyrgyzstan's government to successfully achieve cadre rotation is not merely a measurement of its limited power and centralization; it is also a possible recursive cause of it. The inability to achieve cadre rotation now means the limited ability to maintain the loyalty and subordination of regional cadre later. As Huskey and Iskakova note about Kyrgyzstan, localism helps to bolster the position of regional officials by creating a “‘posse’ of guardians who can be mobilized to descend on the capital with yurts and banners to defend their native son or daughter against attacks by the [central] authorities” (2010: 252). In contrast, the well-known analyst, Dosym Satpaev, says of Kazakhstan that, “the regions are tightly connected

to Astana. The ties are very strong. The *akims* are actually part of the same bureaucratic system as the central government and they play their roles as some kind of regional ministers.”⁶⁶

Before proceeding, one other issue needs to be addressed. A skeptical reader might wonder if the appointment of loyal cadre to the regions in Kazakhstan can be considered bureaucratization at all. Is Nazarbayev truly engaged in administrative centralization, or is he merely bolstering his own personal power? Put differently, is he building a state, or a dictatorship? I have two answers to this question. First, this analytical distinction, while important, does not mean that these two processes are incompatible. As other studies have noted, the projects of state building and authoritarian consolidation are not mutually exclusive and may even be overlapping (Slater 2010). The national authorities in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan might seek to rotate cadre as a means of bolstering authoritarian regimes, but that does not mean this is the only outcome, nor does it mean that it is the primary purpose.

Second, personalized bureaucracies are still bureaucracies, even if they are not rational-legal ones. State bureaucracies come in a variety of forms. As I outlined in chapter one, and in early sections of this chapter, the unifying feature of different kinds of bureaucracies is administrative hierarchy, which entails the integration of a socially disembedded cadre. This unifying feature can be seen in patrimonial and rational-legal bureaucracies alike. Ledeneva’s study of the Russian *sistema* makes this point repeatedly: the informal power networks that form the basis of state governance constitute a type of bureaucracy insofar as it stands apart from the personal whims of the dictator (2013: 82, 90, 245-6). That is, the bureaucracy may be personalized, but it is still a structure, or *system*. National authorities make decisions that are widely obeyed, yet even they are unable to fundamentally transform or reshape the system itself.

⁶⁶ Interview with the author, April 2014.

This is what Ledeneva refers to as “the leadership trap,” which helps to illustrate that even a patrimonial bureaucracy has an autonomous character (25). Thus, we should not confuse the absence of a rational-legal bureaucracy with the lack of bureaucracy itself, nor should we assume that a patrimonial bureaucracy is indistinct from the dictator who rules it.

The data and measurements I have presented here apply only to the highest sub-national administrative territories in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan—the province (or *oblast*)—with which central authorities have the most direct connection. Though the *oblast* structures of each state are mostly the same, as are the powers and policies for appointing personnel there, the *oblasts* sit atop different kinds of state structures below them. It is in the institutions governing villages and cities, I argue, that different kinds of social forces are mobilized or marginalized, creating the potential for upward pressures on the *oblast* level that manifest themselves in the politics of regional appointment, as I have outlined here. Importantly, the continuing predominance of “localism” in Kyrgyzstan’s politics is not the persistence of a pre-modern traditionalism, nor is it a self-perpetuating legacy of the Brezhnev era. I argue, instead, that it is an endogenous aspect of Kyrgyzstan’s post-Soviet state formation.

Brezhnev’s stability in cadre may have fostered the proliferation of entrenched elite at all levels—the republic, province, district, and village—but in Kyrgyzstan, the system of local self-government that was established after independence effectively institutionalized this localism into the state, integrating it into everyday village governance even as the state seeks to stamp it out in the provinces. In Kazakhstan, by contrast, the system of local government effectively undermines local social forces, expunging local social ties from the state. What we observe at the province level, then, is a reflection of state-society relations forged at lower levels of state administration, which have sometimes bubbled up into observable contentious episodes over

regional appointment. In the next chapter, I focus on the differences in each state's institutions of local government, the origins of these differences, and the broader effects that they have on state-society relations within the larger four-level administrative system that was inherited from the Soviet Union.

Chapter 3: Institutions of Local Government

“Let me explain my work to you: I am the representative of the president and the government in this territory [...] It is my job to carry out the state policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan and explain the policies of the president of Kazakhstan, his orders, his decisions...I must spread his message in order to improve the social and economic life of the population.”

- Village head (*akim*), South Kazakhstan *oblast*, Kazakhstan⁶⁷

“I personally hate when officials from Bishkek try to interfere or tell me what to do. I do not allow it. As for the *akim* [head] of the district, he has no power over me and I have no power over him.”

- Village head (*ayil okmotu*), Naryn *oblast*, Kyrgyzstan⁶⁸

I. Disaggregating the State

In the previous chapter I showed that Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have the same formal territorial-administrative system governing relations between center and province: they are both unitary states; central authorities have the formal authority to appoint and remove provincial governors; provincial governors are appointed as the representatives of the central government in the regions, not as representatives of the populations living there; and, both states have a policy of cadre rotation with regard to their provincial governors, seeking to move them across regions in order to prevent them from developing deep social ties in any one of them. But, I also showed that Kazakhstan has actually realized its cadre rotation policy while authorities in Kyrgyzstan’s central government have struggled to do so because of resistance in the provinces themselves. I take this as a measure of Kazakhstan’s higher levels of administrative centralization, reflecting broader differences in the trajectories of state formation between these two states during the post-Soviet period.

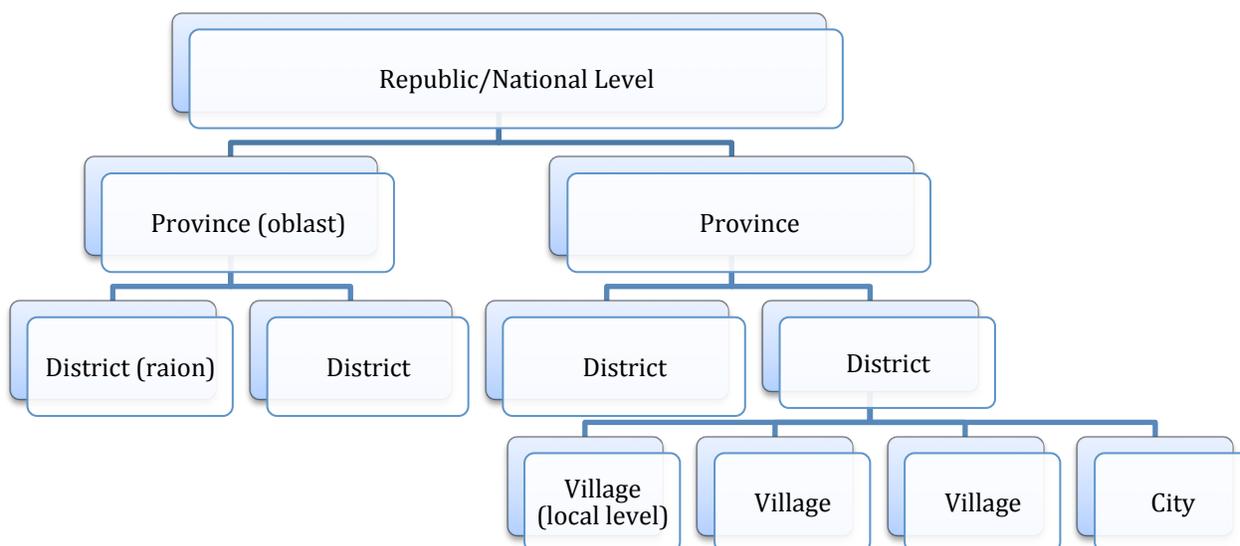
But why, given similar starting points in 1991, has one state achieved administrative centralization while the other has failed to do so? The crux of my argument is that differences in the institutions of local government in each state have fostered different kinds of social relations

⁶⁷ Interview with author, May 15, 2014, KAZ_Int1_27.

⁶⁸ Interview with author, July 19, 2013, KYG1_Int1_31ii.

between local officials and the populations that they govern, and it is this that has shaped communities' preferences for local versus non-local cadre in their more encompassing provinces and regions.⁶⁹ Put differently, the politics of regional cadre appointment differ in each state because the broader territorial-administrative system that each state's provincial institutions are connected to also differ, as do the state-society relations that each system reproduces. Despite inheriting the same four-tier administrative system from the Soviet Union, and the “power vertical” that held it together, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan departed in how they organized the very lowest level of state administration, in villages and small cities. In this chapter I focus on these local-level institutions.

Figure 3.1: Territorial Administrative Levels in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan



This image depicts the 4-level territorial-administrative state structure in Kazakhstan and Kazakhstan. The state is divided into provinces (*oblasts*), each province is divided into districts (*raions*), and each district includes multiple villages and cities. Throughout this dissertation, I distinguish between the national-, provincial-, and district-, and

⁶⁹ Throughout this chapter I make a sharp distinction between “local” and “provincial” levels of government. In all instances I use the term “local” and “local government” to describe the lowest levels of state organization in villages and small cities. Provinces are larger and more encompassing territories that might include several hundred different villages (or “localities”).

village-levels. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are organized roughly the same way at the provincial and district levels. The key difference is at the village level: Kyrgyzstan has a system of local self-government in villages and small cities while Kazakhstan has a system of local state administration. The differences between these two systems of local government are described in this chapter.

The ways in which these different levels of the state fit together have enhanced the coherence of the national state in Kazakhstan, but undermined it in Kyrgyzstan. This raises ontological questions about the study of state development. What we ordinarily call “the state” has not developed as a singular cohesive entity in post-Soviet Central Asia. Rather, different parts of the state—defined here as different levels of the territorial-administrative system, divided into provinces, districts, and villages—have developed differently, have interacted with each other differently, have incubated different kinds of state-society relations, and, ultimately, have caused the kinds of observable outcomes in center-periphery relations (at the national and province levels) that I described in the previous chapter. I focus on the local level—on the institutions of local government, in villages and small cities—as the sites at which significant differences in state formation emerge. The different kinds of state-society relations incubated at the local level, in turn, create different social contexts in which provincial and national-level administrators must operate, and in which center-periphery relations are defined.

The reason that different kinds of local government institutions have affected levels of administrative centralization and shaped the overall coherence of the state, I argue, is because they forge different kinds of state-society relations. In Kyrgyzstan, the institutions of local government have allowed and even encouraged local-level officials to utilize social ties when doing their jobs. In effect, the process of local government has institutionalized deep and overlapping social relations between local officials and the communities that they govern, building those relations into the apparatus of the state in its localities even as authorities in Bishkek seek to stamp out those same kinds of social relations in the provinces. This

contradiction undermines the coherence of the national state and circumscribes the center's influence in the periphery, thwarting efforts to achieve administrative centralization and bolster state control over cadre.

In contrast, Kazakhstan's institutions of local government cauterize and neutralize multiple and overlapping social relations between local populations and local officials, fostering a very different style of state-society relations and enabling central authorities to hold more sway in the provinces of the state, better incorporating all of its territory into a singular and coherent administrative structure. Thus, I suggest that different styles of state-society relations—defined here by the social relations between local officials and the populations that they govern—are endogenous to the process of state formation; they are forged, in part, by the creation of new institutions at the local level. This affects how people understand and interact with the state, even at the provincial and national levels. It affects, for example, how ordinary people and local elites respond to state policies like cadre rotation, among other things.

In chapters 4 and 5, I discuss how the institutions of local government shape different kinds of state-society relations in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. In this chapter, I simply give an overview of the historical development of the institutions of local government since the collapse of the Soviet Union. I do so for two reasons. First, since I argue that the divergence in the development of the institutions of local government explains broader differences in state formation and the relative coherence or incoherence of the national state itself, understanding why these states adopted different institutions at the local level is crucial. I show here that the reasons were largely exogenous. Because Kyrgyzstan was heavily dependent on international donors, it adopted many of the neoliberal reforms that these donors favored, including the development of a decentralized local self-government system in its villages, towns, and cities.

Second, the institutions of local government contextualize the social role played by local officials in the village. It is the institutional context in which they do their jobs that shapes the kinds of relationships they have with their co-villagers; partly determines their moral, social, and official responsibilities; and affects the kinds of interactions that ordinary people have with the state itself, in the personae of their local officials. What are the institutions of local government in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan? How and why do they differ in each state? In this chapter, I answer these questions; in the next two, I address the broader effects that these institutions have on local social ties, state-society relations, and on the development of the state itself.

Throughout this chapter I understand local government to be the lowest level of public administration in a state's territory and regard variations in the institutions of local government as different kinds of local government systems. That is, I define local government solely by the territorial level at which it operates. Thus, I take Kyrgyzstan's system of "local self-government" and Kazakhstan's system of "local state administration" as variations of local governance because they are two different ways of organizing governing structures at the lowest level within a state's territory. The institutions of local government are the formal rules and organizations that structure the roles, responsibilities, powers, and processes of the government and its officials at the lowest level of the state.

To preview what follows, I will show that Kazakhstan has effectively maintained a Soviet-style system in which the "power vertical" descends from the capital city directly into villages and cities; just as the executive heads of districts are appointed by the governor of the province, the executive heads of villages and cities are appointed by, and subordinate to, the executive head of the district where they are situated. Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, has adopted a series of reforms since 1991 that have decentralized power to the local level. Village-level

officials are elected by the populations they govern and have the ability to make their own decisions about what problems to solve and how to solve them without consulting any higher authorities within the state. Moreover, they can secure finances for their work independently of the central government. However, revenue streams from third-party sources come with conditions, including the requirement of a “local contribution,” which entails mobilizing local populations to participate in local governance and the implementation of village projects. In the next two sections, I describe the historical development of these institutions in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, respectively. In the final section of this chapter I discuss the role that international organizations played in the development of local self-government in Kyrgyzstan.

II. The Institutions of Local Government in Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan began a process of political and financial decentralization in the early 1990s, developing a western-style system of local self-government. It did so in fits and starts with central authorities sometimes rolling back or stalling reforms when they could. Even still, a number of key formal institutions are now well established. I intend to focus primarily on two of them, representing the political and financial aspects of decentralization, respectively: the elected local executive (*ayil okmotu*⁷⁰) and the independent local budget. I focus on these because I consider them to be the most significant in explaining how villages in Kyrgyzstan are governed, particularly in comparison with Kazakhstan. But I will also briefly discuss the elected village council (the *ayil kenesh*) and multiple community-based “user associations.” Taken

⁷⁰ *Ayil okmotu* literally means “village government,” but it refers both to the entire apparatus of the executive organ of government in the village (including its full staff) and also to the individual head of the *ayil okmotu*. That is, the “head of the *ayil okmotu*,” a position roughly equivalent to a village mayor, is often simply referred to as “the *ayil okmotu*.” Strictly speaking, the “village government” does not always correspond to a single village. In areas with lower population densities, multiple villages might be incorporated under a single village government, which has just one *ayil okmotu* and one village council. For the sake of simplicity I will use the term “village” and “village government” as singular entities.

together, this bundle of institutions forms the core of Kyrgyzstan’s system of local self-government, making it unique among the other states in the region.

Table 3.1: Institutions of Local Government in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (village-level institutions)

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan
Local Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appointed - No decision-making authority - Resources controlled and allocated by higher state authorities - Represents the president 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elected - May decide “issues of local significance” - Access to independent sources of finance - Represents local communities
Local Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes (members elected)
Community User Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes
Independent Local Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes

In reviewing these reforms in Kyrgyzstan, one dominant theme emerges. It was not the mere existence of these institutions that mattered so much as the way in which they were created, which has had a significant impact on how they operate. The successive acts and decrees that established the institutions I will discuss below often lacked substantive direction on how they should function once they were created. Local communities were given the right to address

“issues of local significance” without being given specific instructions for how to do so.⁷¹ The result is that local authorities—primarily the *ayil okmotu*—are supposed to represent the interests of local communities, address local problems, and secure the necessary capital and labor to do so on their own, without the help of higher-level state authorities. With a mandate to do *something*, but given an ill-defined menu of options for how to do anything, this sphere has become the creative domain of local officials in conjunction with the populations that they govern. The *ayil okmotu* was created by law, but governs by improvisation. And this, as I will show, happens through regular interaction with the communities in which they live and work.

The reason for this highly formalistic approach to creating new institutions has much to do with the impetus behind their creation. As I discuss in the final section of this paper, decentralization in Kyrgyzstan was driven largely by international donors. In many instances laws were written and decrees were issued in order to keep money rolling in; less thought was given to the substance or implementation of reform itself, and sometimes central authorities later eliminated reforms they did not like. This means that the overall historical trajectory of decentralization has been uneven, the implementation of certain reforms half-hearted, and the overall goals poorly defined.

The crucial outcome I want to underline here is that Kyrgyzstan’s villages are run by highly independent local authorities who are given few guidelines for precisely what job they should be doing, when or how to do what job, or even what their main responsibilities are. At the same time, the laws are clear that they should address local problems in collaboration with the local population. This is reinforced by the conditions attached by lenders to local communities, as I discuss below. Intentionally or not, the ambiguity surrounding the purposes

⁷¹ The quotation comes from the constitution (and various other sources of law) and designates the sphere of activities for which local governments can take responsibility.

and functions of local authorities has fueled their independence and autonomy from the central government while simultaneously bolstering their ties to local communities.

The Foundations of Local Self-Government and the Ayil Okmotu

The foundation of Kyrgyzstan's local self-government system is itself indicative of the substantively hollow decrees and legislative acts that followed. Article 7 of the state's first constitution (1993) states that "local self-government in the Kyrgyz Republic is exercised by local communities, which govern issues of local significance according to the law and at their own initiative." The language for this provision was adopted from the European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985) (Fattakhov 2013: 8). The European Charter, however, describes the rights of "local authorities," not "local communities" (Article 3, Section 1).⁷² In Kyrgyzstan, the creation of local authority would, itself, need to be specified in subsequent reforms.

In any case, the overall importance of Kyrgyzstan's first constitution was minimal and should not be overstated. The other states in the region also included vague aspirational principles of local self-government in their constitutions after independence.⁷³ Article 89 of Kazakhstan's constitution, for example, says that "[t]he Republic of Kazakhstan recognizes local self-government, providing the population with independent solutions to questions of local significance."⁷⁴ The difference between Kyrgyzstan and other states in the region is that Kyrgyzstan was the only country in which these constitutional provisions were not a complete

⁷² Article 3 (1) of the European Charter of Local Self-Government says that "Local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population."

⁷³ All of the post-Soviet Central Asian states participated in the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which passed a Declaration on Principles of Local Self-Government in 1994.

⁷⁴ Article 89, Section 1. Article 89, Sections 3 and 4, provides for the precise powers and organization of local self-government to be determined by subsequent law. As I discuss below, however, subsequent law in Kazakhstan undermined the very idea of local self-government, severely limiting the independent decision making authority of local officials.

dead letter. There, the vague constitutional provisions for local self-government were further developed through subsequent legislation and presidential decrees, which were adopted between 1994 and 2009, under the guidance and tutelage of international donor organizations.

In August 1994, the president of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, issued a series of decrees, including “On the Reform of Local Self-Government in the Kyrgyz Republic,” which stated his desire and intention to implement local self-government reforms. A subsequent decree issued that same month created a Commission on Local Self-Government Reform. The Commission developed the basic principles for reform that the president announced in a decree just one month later. This later decree established local councils (*ayil kenesh*) at the village level with members chosen through direct elections (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2001: 527). Nevertheless, the decree did not specify any of the powers or rights that the local councils would have, or even which public issues could be defined as “local” versus “national.” The president had effectively “declared the right to self-government without providing the newly emerging institutions with real powers” (ibid.).

This trend continued in subsequent reforms. New institutions were created, but their powers and functions were poorly defined. In 1996, again by presidential decree, executive administrative offices (*ayil okmotu*) were established in villages (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2001: 527-528). As under the Soviet system of appointments, the head of the *ayil okmotu* was initially appointed by the top executive (*akim*) of the district in which the village was situated, with the approval of the village council. But, between 1996 and 2001, direct elections for *ayil okmotu* were rolled out in different localities; by 2001, all 453 *ayil okmotu* were directly elected by local populations (UNDP 2012: 121). After coming to power through a revolution in 2005, however, President Bakiev eliminated direct elections and instituted a system of indirect elections instead,

which began in 2008 and have remained in effect since then (ibid.: 124). Currently, the *ayil okmotu* is elected by the village council, the members of which are elected by the population, as mentioned above.

Like the establishment of the local council two years prior, the decree establishing the *ayil okmotu* did little to specify the *ayil okmotu*'s formal role or purpose. Communities' right to "self-government" was reiterated, new formal institutions were created to fulfill those rights, but the precise powers of these institutions were never clearly defined in relation to the central government. Even today these ambiguities have not been addressed. As a former director of the National Agency on Local Self-Government Issues noted in 2013, "the first and biggest problem" with local self-government in Kyrgyzstan "is the fact that there is no strict division or boundary between state services and local self-government issues."⁷⁵ That is, the precise differentiation of responsibilities between the local and central government has never been clearly articulated by law (Ibraimova 2009: 58-59, 73-74). Indeed, the proponents of local self-government in Kyrgyzstan frequently criticize the central government "for failing to implement a coherent long-term strategy on local government development" (Marat 2012: 310).

Despite this, the institution of the *ayil okmotu* has taken on a prominent role in villages across Kyrgyzstan. The ambiguity surrounding their formal institutional role has, perhaps inadvertently, provided them with great leeway to do as they see fit, often finding creative ways to solve local problems. They are given further impetus to do so, no doubt, by the consistent but vague proclamations from the central government that it is their "right," and the right of the local community, to be self-governed. Interestingly, more than one *ayil okmotu* head told me that he

⁷⁵ Interview with author, August 2013 (KYG1_Int1_10).

was not a state official at all, an understanding that is objectively false but serves to illustrate a lack of clarity about precisely what their formal role is.⁷⁶

Bakhtiyar Fattakhov, a political ally of President Akaev who held several ministerial posts directly related to the development of local self-government,⁷⁷ described the reasons for the *ayil okmotu*'s importance, despite the state's failure to define its functions. Fattakhov argues that the *ayil okmotu* was desperately needed because the privatization of Soviet-era state and collective farms had eliminated the position of farm chairmen, the institutional figureheads who controlled the economic and social resources of the village. "As a result," writes Fattakhov, "nobody was occupied with the maintenance and development of village infrastructure" (Fattakhov 2013: 8). In the early years of the post-Soviet period, then, villages completely lacked an institution that was responsible for maintaining the most basic public services. The result was "a period of anarchy" that "gradually brought about the destruction of social infrastructure" and "the lowering of the quality of life" in rural areas (ibid.). It was in this context that the *ayil okmotu* took on its real significance at the local level:

...in the person of the *ayil okmotu*, the inhabitants of villages, at last, received an organ [of the state] that was occupied on a day-to-day basis with questions about the organization of life in the village. 460 rural boards—*ayil okmotu*—became the real organizers of social-economic life in local communities (ibid.).

After the creation of village councils and village executives in 1994 and 1996, respectively, the president continued to issue numerous decrees, many of which were little more than concept papers laying out the problems with the reforms already undertaken, or searching for the path forward.⁷⁸ In 1999, the president issued a decree called "The Concept for

⁷⁶ At this juncture it is worth recalling that Kyrgyzstan is a unitary state. The salary for every public official who receives one, including all *ayil okmotu*, is paid directly by the central government in Bishkek.

⁷⁷ Fattakhov served as Deputy Minister on Local Self-Government Issues, which became the National Agency on Local Self-Governance after the Tulip Revolution in 2005. He then had a short tenure as the director of this agency; he was appointed in 2010, but was then deposed that same year as the result of a second revolution in April.

⁷⁸ It is also worth noting that the independence of the *ayil okmotu* was bolstered by changes in the status of local property between 1996 and 1998. A decree in 1996 transformed land that had not yet been privatized into municipal

Developing Local Self-government from 1999 to 2001.” Despite its forward-looking title, the decree merely described problems with the reforms to date, without identifying clear solutions to them (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2001: 528). Among the problems described were that local councils were inefficient and lacked clear procedures to implement any decisions; it also noted that *ayil okmotu* had begun to overshadow the role of local councils (Ibraimova 2009: 55).

All in all, the period between 1994 and 2001 was characterized by the creation of institutions with poorly defined powers and responsibilities, but with a mandate to independently address “issues of local significance.” An accounting of the reforms between 1994 and 2001 summarized the contradictions and ambiguities in Kyrgyzstan’s system of local self-government accordingly:

There is no complete set of normative legal acts based on a uniform understanding of the nature, content and forms of national policy on the decentralization of government and the introduction of new relations between the center and regions. There is no set limit on the powers to be redistributed in favor of local self-governments, nor is there an official register of functions by territory [...] The ambiguous delineation of powers and responsibilities among bodies of different branches and levels of government poses another major problem (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2001: 529).

Under a new round of reforms beginning in 2000, the position of the *ayil okmotu* was bolstered by the creation of community user associations. Community user associations were established through a series of World Bank programs and decentralized the governance of specific issue areas to the village level. To illustrate some of the ways in which this has affected local governance and the role of the *ayil okmotu*, I will briefly describe the governance of pastures. The Law on Pastures (2009) placed the governance of all pasture land under community associations of pasture users (“pasture user unions”), which are governed by an executive body, the “pasture user committee,” each of which has its own chairman (Crewett

property, put under the authority of village officials; it did the same for “social infrastructure,” which included local roads, schools, and parks (UNDP 2012: 121). Then, a constitutional amendment adopted in October 1998 established “community property” as distinct from state or private property (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2001: 528).

2012).⁷⁹ The pasture user unions include the entire community of users, but their jurisdiction corresponds with the jurisdiction of village governments and the *ayil okmotu*.

This gives the *ayil okmotu* more expansive influence because it implicates him or her in the management of pastures in at least two different ways. First, the law establishing pasture user committees formally requires that the *ayil okmotu* be included as a member; thus, every *ayil okmotu* is simultaneously a member of the corresponding pasture user committee, thus expanding his or her official duties beyond the executive office of the village government. Second, and perhaps more significantly, the *ayil okmotu* has become the *de facto* executive agent of the committees. Even though each committee has a chairman, neither the committees nor the chairmen have any formal powers to enforce their decisions. Thus, as a matter of practice the *ayil okmotu* is called on to settle disputes between the pasture user committees and individual shepherds within the community. The chairman of one pasture user committee put it accordingly:

The laws are not written well. They are raw. This is the main problem. For example, people don't pay for using pastures but the law does not give us anything to do about it...so there is little we can do. In these cases we go to the *ayil okmotu*. Then together we will go to the person's house and demand that they pay. So we always try to work together with the *ayil okmotu*.⁸⁰

This not only suggests an increasingly larger role for the *ayil okmotu*, but is also an indicator of the stature that many *ayil okmotu* heads enjoy. After all, the *ayil okmotu* has no more formal authority to collect money for pasture use than the chairmen of pasture committees; informal mechanisms alone enable an individual *ayil okmotu* able to do this—status, respect, and

⁷⁹ Prior to this, pastures were divided according to the multi-tiered administrative structure of the state. Nearby pastures were governed by village authorities, more distant pastures were governed by district authorities, and the most distant and remote pastures were governed by provincial authorities. This meant that any shepherd wishing to graze animals on distant pastures—which is common practice, especially in the summer—would require authorization from three different authorities, a process that proved to be too burdensome and was, therefore, rarely followed and, ultimately, abandoned (Crewett 2012).

⁸⁰ Pasture Committee Chairman, Jumgal *ayil okmotu*, Jumgal *raion*, Naryn *oblast*, July 22, 2013 (KYG1_Int1_40&41).

some level of social support from within the village. Thus, the community user associations draw on the *ayil okmotu*'s social role in the village while simultaneously bolstering and expanding it.

The idea and structure of the pasture user unions were based on already existing organizations within the country and are part of a broader trend toward decentralizing governance. The “water user associations,” for example, have been under development since at least 1994 and advanced tremendously in 2000 with assistance from the World Bank.⁸¹ Water user associations are small community-based organizations that govern the use of water for irrigation within a locality. Like the country's 454 pasture user unions, the 481 water user associations correspond to the administrative boundaries of *ayil okmotu*. Community Drinking Water User Unions serve the same function for drinking water. Taken together, these community based user associations expand the role of the *ayil okmotu* and multiply his or her connections to co-villagers. Thus, based strictly on his or her formal institutional role in the village, the *ayil okmotu* might have links with individual co-villagers that are defined in a number of different ways. Importantly, these multiple links deriving from the *ayil okmotu*'s formal institutional position are in addition to multiple ties he or she is likely to have with friends, families, and other ordinary members of the community, ties that are often activated during the process of village governance, as I discuss below.

The Independent Local Budget (or Financial Decentralization)

The final institutional component of local government in Kyrgyzstan that I will discuss here is the independent local budget. The creation of local budgeting powers occurred in parallel

⁸¹ World Bank programs to assist in the development of water user associations included the On-Farm Irrigation Project (Parts I and II), the Agricultural Investments and Services Project, and the Agricultural Productivity Assistance Project.

with the reforms described above, but its greatest impetus came between 2003 and 2004. By an independent local budget, I refer not only to the ability of local officials to raise and spend their own revenue, but also to their ability to receive financial and other resources from third parties, without approval or input from the central government. In fact, because of the marginal local tax bases in Kyrgyzstan, it is the ability to acquire funds from third-party sources that have mattered most in village financing.

The first step toward creating financial independence for local officials was a presidential decree in March 1996 establishing that local governments could “create extra-budgetary funds to solve essential issues of local importance” (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2001: 528). Later, in September 2003, the parliament eliminated budgetary transfers from local budgets to district and provincial budgets. Henceforth, district and provincial budgets would be created solely through transfers from the center while village-level budgets would be completely independent, thus creating a “two-level” budget system that formally delineated the financial autonomy of villages (UNDP 2012: 34).⁸² These reforms were implemented over subsequent years and were fully in effect by 2007.

But the most significant aspect of financial independence in Kyrgyzstan is the ability of local governments to secure funding directly from international donors, without the approval or input of authorities in Bishkek. In fact, with the collaboration of international donors there are now permanent non-state financial institutions in Kyrgyzstan that work directly with local officials and local communities. Among the most well-known of these is the Agency for the

⁸² In fact, the village governments still receive sizeable transfers from the central government to pay the salaries of local officials and teachers in what are called *kategorialnye* grants. Local officials have no discretion over how to use these funds. Nevertheless, this money is still considered part of the “local budget,” thus highly inflating the revenue that local officials appear to have available to them. Most of the village officials I spoke with during this research said that *kategorialnye* grants from the central government to pay salaries comprised between 50 and 90 percent of their entire budget.

Development and Investment of Communities [*sic*], known by its Russian acronym ARIS.⁸³

ARIS was created in 2003 through an initiative by the World Bank, in collaboration with President Akaev. ARIS receives money in the form of grants from foreign governments and international donor organizations and distributes this money directly to local communities and local authorities. The distribution of money to local communities occurs primarily through an application process—local communities request money from ARIS in project proposals. But ARIS also distributes funds for projects that they initiate themselves; for example, in their Agricultural Investment project, 450,000 *som* (nearly \$10,000 in 2012 exchange rate terms) were distributed to every pasture committee in the country.⁸⁴

The availability of third-party financial support in Kyrgyzstan gives local authorities and local communities the ability to secure funds without having to rely on the central government. In fact, this is precisely the purpose. ARIS states explicitly that its funding “will enable local communities and institutions” to “reduce their dependence on higher levels of government” by “strengthening local capacity to select, design, and implement viable investments” (ARIS 2015). Thus, unlike their counterparts in Kazakhstan, local authorities in Kyrgyzstan have the ability to make decisions about what problems to address, and how to address them.

But, the significance of third-party financial support is not limited only to this. In fact, the conditions imposed on the use of this money are arguably more significant than the money itself. The standard protocol for the release of these funds to localities is to require a “local contribution.” That is, local communities are expected to pay at least a portion of the expenses of any project, either through cash payment, labor, or other in-kind contributions (Earle 2005).

Reliance on local contributions was already a practice by March 1996 when the president

⁸³ *Agenstvo Razvitiya I Investirovaniya Soobshchestv (ARIS)*.

⁸⁴ Pasture committees are responsible for maintaining certain forms of infrastructure, for example, any roads or bridges leading to or from remote pastures.

recommended that local governments “mobiliz[e] inhabitants for relief and restoration programs” (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2001: 528). Thus, even in the absence of outside funding, local officials have relied heavily on the cooperation of village inhabitants to provide the resources necessary to fix local problems. Sometimes the local contribution is the only contribution. In most instances the only realistic way to fix a road is to recruit volunteers who can bring their own shovels. But, by requiring local contributions in exchange for badly needed funds, international organizations have helped to institutionalize this practice more deeply.⁸⁵

The local contribution that donors require is typically nominal, sometimes as little as five percent of the cost of the project. This is because the purpose of the local contribution is not to raise revenue, but to encourage direct community involvement in local governance. To the parties involved—donors, officials, and ordinary people alike—this is known as social mobilization. The objective is to encourage ordinary villagers to work with their local government and take a hands-on role in identifying and solving local problems (Earle 2005). As a project coordinator from ARIS put it, “The main goal of our projects is not the implementation itself, but to teach local communities to rationally use the wealth of the country. We teach them how to use the money that they collect themselves for the improvement of infrastructure and for maintaining pastures [...] we’re interested in social mobilization, which is why we work at the local level, in the village.”⁸⁶

Similarly, the objective of the World Bank’s First and Second Village Investment Projects (2004-2006 and 2006-2014, respectively), which distribute money directly to *ayil*

⁸⁵ Arguably, the practice of mobilizing voluntarily labor has a long history in Central Asia. The Soviet-era *subbotnik* and the “traditional” Kyrgyz and Kazakh practices of *ashar* and *asar*, respectively, all entail voluntary labor contributions to the community. What is unique in the post-Soviet period is that the institutions of local government in Kyrgyzstan formalized and institutionalized these practices while those in Kazakhstan eliminated them.

⁸⁶ Interview with author, August 5, 2013 (KYG1_Int1_6).

okmotu and localities, is not only to help develop local infrastructure, but “to assist the Recipient with improving governance and capacity at the local level” (World Bank 2014: 29).⁸⁷ The Bank’s International Development Association (IDA) notes that its projects in Kyrgyzstan “generate community-level capacity for tackling local development concerns” by focusing “at the grassroots level” and “helping communities and local authorities work together” (IDA 2015).

This creates an integral role for the *ayil okmotu*, who is typically at the forefront of this mobilization, activating his or her local social ties to secure the local contribution—both cash and labor—in order to obtain the funds from donors needed to fix roads, schools, and other village infrastructure. ACTED, an international NGO that provides resources for village infrastructure projects, relies on local communities to do all of the labor themselves. An ACTED project coordinator, speaking about the organization’s work, said that “this all requires community work and community mobilization, and the *ayil okmotu* is at the center of this mobilization. We cannot ask villagers to do these things. It is the *ayil okmotu* who goes into the community and explains the project and gathers support and makes the mobilization happen.”⁸⁸ As a high-level USAID official noted, “some *ayil okmotu* have gotten quite good at generating their own streams of revenue based almost purely on their personality and connections. These officials have the ability to initiate their own projects and act on their own without consulting the central government.”⁸⁹

As this testimony suggests, the *ayil okmotu* will not succeed in securing funds for local projects if he or she does not have a base of support from within the community, which includes the *ayil okmotu*’s own friends and family, in addition to other personal acquaintances (Earle

⁸⁷ This project was implemented by ARIS at a cost of \$49.9 million.

⁸⁸ Interview with author, September 2013.

⁸⁹ Interview with author, July 15, 2013 (KYG1_Mt1_34)

2005). As one villager in southern Kyrgyzstan noted, “the *ayil okmotu* cannot do it himself. There is no way he could do anything without local contributions. If he is going to solve any problem at all he must get local support – he is dependent on people to do anything.”⁹⁰ Thus, reciprocity is built into the institutional relationship that the *ayil okmotu* has with local communities and the social relationships that *ayil okmotu* maintain with co-villagers are politically activated and institutionalized through the process of village governance.

In sum, local authorities in Kyrgyzstan have access to financing independent of the central government, and can use this money to tackle an agenda that is generated within the community, not in Bishkek. This, in addition to the various other local self-government initiatives described above, gives them a great deal of autonomy and decision making authority in villages vis-à-vis the center. However, this money comes with strings attached, strings that tie local officials to the communities that they govern. This is not to say that conditionality creates social ties between local officials and local communities; rather, it makes those social ties a crucial aspect of village governance, in effect institutionalizing them within the state at the local level.⁹¹ Put simply, the practical aspects of village governance require local officials to activate and utilize their own social networks if they are to accomplish any goals, thus further strengthening those ties while simultaneously politicizing them. In this way state formation at the local level in Kyrgyzstan has differed dramatically with Kazakhstan, as I will now demonstrate.

⁹⁰ Interview with author, October 1, 2013; Bazar Korgon *ayil okmotu*, Bazar Korgon *raion*, Jalal-Abad *oblast*.

⁹¹ Earle argues that donors’ emphasis on local mobilization stems from the mistaken Western-oriented view that post-Soviet states lacked any grassroots community-oriented social fabric simply because they did not have well-developed “civil societies” in the neoliberal sense. Thus, the “community-based” approach to solving local problems was linked not only to donors’ focus on political decentralization, but also “civil society” development (Earle 2005; see also Petric 2005).

III. The Institutions of Local Government in Kazakhstan

At around the time that central authorities in Kyrgyzstan first began establishing an independent role for village executives with the creation of the *ayil okmotu* in 1996, their counterparts in Kazakhstan began institutionalizing the total subordination of village executives with the creation of a new constitution in 1995. In both countries, subsequent decrees and legislative acts reinforced these divergent trajectories. In Kazakhstan the bundle of laws and decrees issued between 1992 and 2001 subordinated village-level officials to higher-level executives, diminished or eliminated their ability to make and implement their own decisions, and ensured their financial dependency on the central government. Moreover, village-level officials in Kazakhstan are appointed from above, not elected by the local population. In total, this means that local populations in Kazakhstan are almost entirely excluded from the process of local governance and have relationships with local officials that have little or no political significance, if they have any relationship with them at all. Local officials themselves, in turn, are almost entirely upward looking; that is, the only significant relationships they develop in the course of doing their jobs are with the higher-level officials of the state who appoint, instruct, and monitor them (refer again to Table 3.1 above).

As I just noted, Kazakhstan's 1995 constitution helped to establish the subordination and dependence of village-level authorities. In fact, the constitution of 1995 merely cemented and consolidated a series of laws and decrees, passed and issued between 1992 and 1995. In January 1992, a law established "undivided authority" between the executive heads at different levels of administration, thereby making the heads of village-level governments directly accountable to the president or province-level administration (Makhmutova 2001: 411-412).⁹² This was

⁹² *The Law on the Suspension of the Validity of Some Constitutional Norms during the Transition Period* (1992)

reinforced one month later by a presidential decree which, “for the first time,” established “a uniform structure of executive administration from the president to the heads of local administration” (ibid.: 412).⁹³

Kazakhstan’s first constitution in 1993 left several questions about local government subject to subsequent legislation. By the end of that year the “Law on Local Representative and Executive Bodies” established new institutions, and clarified the powers of others. First, the law stipulated that representative legislative bodies (*maslikhat*) could be formed at the province and district levels, but not at the village level. While the *maslikhats* at these higher levels would consist of members directly elected by the population, the use of the term “local self-government,” which had been used previously in a vague aspirational sense, was omitted entirely; the *maslikhat* was defined as “an assembly of representatives of the citizens of a town or rural district” rather than as an element of local self-government (Makhmutova 2001: 412).⁹⁴ The same law further ensured that local self-government in Kazakhstan would not be realized by explicitly stating that the executive heads of local administrations were to be the direct representatives of the president, not local communities (ibid.).

The constitution of 1995 is often identified as the starting point of Kazakhstan’s successful centralization (Olcott 2002: 87-88; Cummings 2005: 3-4).⁹⁵ In fact, it merely consolidated these earlier laws. Article 87, section 1, states that “local executive bodies shall be part of a unified system” and should “guarantee the implementation of general state policies of the executive power.” Accordingly, section 3 states that the head of the executive body at any

⁹³ *Decree on Improving the Organization and Activities of Public Administration Bodies under the Conditions of Economic Reform* (1992).

⁹⁴ In fact, elections for the *maslikhats* is a highly controlled process. Only candidates approved by the corresponding *akim* are eligible to receive votes. I discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

⁹⁵ This is partly for reasons having to do with other aspects of government structure. For example, in addition to consolidating the subordination of village-level officials, the 1995 constitution also enhanced presidential powers in relationship to the legislature and judiciary; see references above for more detail.

sub-national level “is a representative of the President and the Government of the Republic.”

This is understood to apply to the executive heads (*akims*) at all sub-national levels of the government, in provinces, districts, villages and cities.⁹⁶ The constitution is unambiguously clear, then, that local officials are not intended to represent local communities. Rather, they are in localities to implement the central government’s policies and represent its interests.

Two presidential decrees issued in 1998 and the Law on Local Public Administration (2001) further defined the precise powers and responsibilities of local authorities (Makhmutova 2001, 2006; Wilson et al. 2002: 403). They did so by limiting their power and independence. In reference to the 2001 law, a prominent opposition leader pointed out that, “even though it is called the Law on ‘Local’ Administration, it is really only about the power of the central government.”⁹⁷ For example, the law states that sub-national government bodies—at the province, district, and village levels—cannot make any decision that contradicts the central government or that “impede[s] the creation of uniform” state policies (Makhmutova 2001: 415).

To ensure that all local initiatives conform with policies already established by the central government, the president has the power to nullify decisions of any *akim* for any reason, or for no reason at all; likewise, the *akim* at each administrative level has the power to nullify the decisions of any lower-level *akim* within his or her jurisdiction (Makhmutova 2006: 279-80; Cummings 2000: 11-12). Thus, village-level *akims* are triply subordinated and can have their decisions vetoed at the district, province, and/or national levels.

⁹⁶ In Kyrgyzstan the term *akim* is reserved for the executive head of the district-level of government. In Kazakhstan, however, the term *akim* describes the executive head of every level of government; there is a provincial-level *akim*, a district-level *akim*, and a village-level *akim*. The village-level *akim* is the institutional equivalent to the *ayil okmotu* in Kyrgyzstan. It is the executive head of the lowest level of government. Whenever possible I identify *akims* in Kazakhstan according to their level of administration. As in the discussion above, the term “local” will refer only to the village level. Accordingly, I use the terms “local *akim*” and “village-level *akim*” interchangeably.

⁹⁷ Burikhan Nurmakhamedov, Vice Chairman of the opposition party *Ak Zhol*, interview with author, March 28, 2014.

But, in practice, this rarely happens because village-level *akims* do not have the opportunity to make decisions in the first place. All local initiative must first be approved by higher levels of administration, if they are approved at all. This is because Kazakhstan has a centralized budget and does not give local authorities any power to determine how money can be spent. As a political scientist in Almaty put it, “the decision making process at the local level is insignificant—you cannot decide how to use money that you do not independently possess.”⁹⁸ Rasul Zhumaly, a former state official, noted that the village-level *akim* is given nothing of his own “except maybe a little office and a formal position.” Anything else “he must obtain or receive through the permission of the upper levels, from the district or provincial *akim*.”⁹⁹ Similarly, Pavel Lobachev, the president of an independent research institute in Almaty (“Echo”), notes that “the *akim* in the village has nothing. If he wants to change something he must go to the district *akim* to seek approval. Then, the district *akim* can decide to approve the project or not. The village *akim* cannot decide anything by himself.”¹⁰⁰ More often than not, the village-level *akim* in Kazakhstan is simply given instructions from above. The current legal framework on local governance, then, “weakens local initiatives” and “lowers the activity of the population in deciding questions of local significance” (Burlakov and Kaikenova 2004: 74).

In total, executive authority in Kazakhstan is strictly hierarchical such that “every level of administration is subordinate to the higher level and takes no responsibility for its actions before the population” (Burlakov and Shimshikov 2004: 62). The “vertical of power” extends from the capital city, through provinces and districts, down to the village and “ensures that implementing decisions are directed from the higher bodies to the lower ones” (Makhmutova 2006: 279). A

⁹⁸ Interview with author, March 20, 2014, KAZ_Int1_6

⁹⁹ Interview with author, April 23, 2014

¹⁰⁰ Interview with author, April 2, 2014

Kazakhstani political scientist in Almaty described it as “the presidential vertical,” because “every *akim* is a representative of the president and works for the president.”¹⁰¹ The result, Cummings notes, is that “only the centre is recognized as the legitimate tier of government” such that the entire system is, in practice, “characterized by a single authority” (Cummings 2000: 11). This differs dramatically from Kyrgyzstan’s system of local self-government which “liquidated the vertical subordination of local organs of power,” giving them autonomy to solve problems of “local significance” on their own (Fattakhov 2013: 8).

As I noted in chapter two, central authorities in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have the formal authority to appoint provincial governors. The selection of village-level executives, however, is not the same, fitting into the broader differences in institutional development at the local level described above. In section two of this chapter, I noted that the village-level executive heads (*ayil okmotu*) in Kyrgyzstan are elected. In Kazakhstan, however, they are appointed by the executive head at the next highest level of administration. Thus, in Kazakhstan, the president appoints the governors of provinces, the governors of provinces appoint the executive heads (*akims*) of the districts within their province, and the *akims* of provinces appoint the executive heads of the villages within their district (also known as *akims*). Furthermore, “the President of the Republic has the right to release *akims* from office at his own discretion” (Article 87, Section 4).¹⁰² The result is that, unlike in Kyrgyzstan, village-level officials are “not accountable to citizens but to those who have power and authority to hire and fire them”

¹⁰¹ Interview with author, April 1, 2014, KAZ_Int1_8

¹⁰² Article 87, Section 4 states that the president will directly appoint provincial governors and the mayors of Almaty and Astana. The *akims* of “other administrative-territorial units,” namely, districts, villages, and smaller cities, “shall be appointed or elected to office on the basis of the president’s determination.” Thus far, this has been done via appointment, as I have just described. But, in a number of instances central authorities carried out “experiments,” allowing for a small number of village-level executives to stand for election; in every instance they considered the experiment to be a failure and eliminated the practice. But, in 2013, for the first time, there were indirect elections for village-level *akims* nation-wide. Nevertheless, this was still a highly controlled process. The district-level *akim* alone determined the nominees, and the district-level *maslikhat* (filled overwhelmingly with members from the President’s political party) were permitted to “elect” one of them.

(Bhuiyan 2010: 667). All of these measures further reinforce the subordination of local executive heads, reduce the independence of village-level officials, and marginalize local populations from local governance. As I will discuss more deeply in the next chapter, these different institutional configurations shape the kinds of social relationships that local officials can develop with the inhabitants of the villages that they govern.

Overall, local government in Kazakhstan has been described as “dependent local government,” which is defined as a system in which “the central government designs policy, [and] local government implements [policy] with funding allocated by the central government” (Bhuiyan 2010: 660). In fact, the primary purpose of village officials within Kazakhstan’s administrative system is to realize the policies crafted by the central government, exclusively with money allocated to them for that purpose. This differs dramatically, then, with Kyrgyzstan’s system of local self-government, in which local officials have independent decision making power, independent sources of revenue, and can implement their own policies in collaboration with the local population.

Table 3.2: Models of Center-Local Governmental Relationships¹⁰³

Issue	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
	LG	CG	LG	CG	LG	CG	LG	CG
Responsibility for policy design		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Responsibility for policy implementation	X		X		X		X	
Responsibility for policy funding		X		X	X		X	
Category	Administrative decentralization		Dependent local government (Kazakhstan)		Delegate local government		Local self-government (Kyrgyzstan)	

¹⁰³ Adopted and modified from Bhuiyan (2010). LG = local government; CG = central government

The testimony of local officials in both countries reflects the institutional role that they play within the larger state structure in which they are situated. Summarizing his main duties, a village *akim* in southern Kazakhstan said simply: “Let me explain my work to you: I am the representative of the president and the government in this territory [...] It is my job to carry out the state policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan and explain the policies of the president of Kazakhstan, his orders, his decisions... I must spread his message in order to improve the social and economic life of the population.”¹⁰⁴ The head specialist on “internal policy” at the *akim*’s office noted, similarly, that, “the main job we have is to spread the law and the policy of the president of Kazakhstan... to explain it to the population.”¹⁰⁵

Their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan view their role differently. One *ayil okmotu* described his relationship to higher-level state authorities accordingly: “I do not have to listen to the *akim* [of the district] or the president. They don’t have any power over the *ayil okmotu*.”¹⁰⁶ A resident of Bazar Korgon village in southern Kyrgyzstan said that the role of the *ayil okmotu* is “to support people’s needs and fix problems within the village.”¹⁰⁷ Often, local officials in Kyrgyzstan see the central government as an adversary that stands in the way of fixing village-level problems. As one *ayil okmotu* angrily declared:

All the officials at the higher levels are corrupt. In the Ministry of Finance and Energy... I paid money but the electricity is still cut. This is because they don’t work, because they are corrupt... and all of them just eat and drink everything. We have to kick their asses! All of them! Why don’t the Ministries work together? Because they don’t have any brains!¹⁰⁸

These reflect different understandings of local officials’ relationship to the state, and to local populations. See, for example, local officials’ diagrams of government structures with

¹⁰⁴ Interview with author, village in South Kazakhstan *oblast*, May 15, 2014, KAZ_Int1_27

¹⁰⁵ Interview with author, village in South Kazakhstan *oblast*, May 5, 2014, KAZ_Int1_3

¹⁰⁶ Interview with author, village in Naryn *oblast*, July 19, 2013, KYG1_Int1_30

¹⁰⁷ Interview with author, Bazar Korgon village, Jalal-Abad *oblast*, October 16, 2013, KYG1_Int1_49

¹⁰⁸ Meeting between *ayil okmotu* and residents, Issyk-Kul *oblast*, July 17, 2013.

commentary, provided in Diagrams 3.1a, b, c, d and e. Importantly, these understandings, along with the practical realities of village governance within the institutional context described here, shape the social relations that local officials have with their co-villagers. The next chapter will address these social relations in detail, linking them to the institutional structure of state at the local level as I have just detailed.

IV. Historical Context: An Exogenous Divergence

As I have already noted, the main reason for the differences in the development of institutions of local government in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan was that Kyrgyzstan was far more dependent on international donor organizations than Kazakhstan and these donors favored and promoted a decentralized system of local self-government in villages and cities.¹⁰⁹ But, Kyrgyzstan's high level of dependence on international donor organizations explains not only the origins of its system of local self-governance. As I hinted at above, it also explains why those institutions operate the way that they do. In other words, the activities of international organizations explain both why Kyrgyzstan has (and Kazakhstan does not have) a system of local self-government, and also why the formal laws that Kyrgyzstan's system of local self-government is built upon are sometimes fuzzy and ambiguous. The lack of vision and clarity surrounding the formal aspects of institutions like the *ayil okmotu* is the result of the fact that authorities in Bishkek created those institutions without being fully committed to their realization, and perhaps even without having a clear sense of how they would be used going forward.

¹⁰⁹ Since 1991, Kyrgyzstan's relations with international donor organizations have encompassed a broad range of issues from macroeconomic reform and privatization to legal reform and democratization. Unless otherwise noted, the focus of this section is exclusively on the reform of local government, itself a sub-set of a broader international democratization agenda.

Since becoming independent, Kyrgyzstan has consistently relied on grants and loans from foreign countries and international donors. Even at the earliest stages of independence, observers noted that, “the country is too small and too poor to become economically viable without considerable outside assistance” (Olcott 1996: 87). In a way, this is merely a continuation of its dependent financial position within the Soviet Union, when the Kyrgyz Republic relied heavily on transfers from the union level (Petric 2005: 323). At the time of the Soviet Union’s dissolution, cash subsidies from Moscow accounted for 29.3 percent of the republic’s total revenue (Zhukov 1996: 114). The crisis of the immediate post-Soviet period was that these cash subsidies suddenly vanished. So, too, did access to subsidized fuel and manufactured goods, along with funding for various union-funded social programs (Howell 1996: 56). By 1992, Kyrgyzstan was already on the brink of bankruptcy and turned to the International Monetary Fund for an emergency aid package. In exchange for a \$23 million loan and \$39 million in credit from the IMF, and an additional \$60 million “soft loan” from the World Bank, authorities in Bishkek agreed to a host of standard neoliberal macroeconomic adjustments, including the elimination of subsidies, price liberalization, privatization of enterprises and land, and the creation of a new national currency (Cooley 1999: 120-21; Abazov 1999; Petric 2005).

While conditions imposed by lending institutions helped to bring the economic crisis to a halt, it led to widespread corruption and embezzlement as officials often took direct ownership over newly privatized assets (Cooley 1999: 131-135). It also resulted in even higher levels of poverty for ordinary people, who saw their incomes decrease even as social benefits and subsidies were eliminated (*ibid.*; Baimyrzaeva 2005: 30). Kyrgyzstan’s GDP decreased every year until 1996. In 2002, it continued to experience negative growth, making it the only country in the entire Commonwealth of Independent States to do so (Zhukov 2005: 298). By 2003,

Kyrgyzstan's per capita GDP was only 65 percent of its 1990 level (ibid.). As part of a broader global shift in lending behavior, failures of this kind led international donors toward a new approach. If macroeconomic reform did not have the intended consequences, it was because the existing political institutions of government were ineffective, wasteful, and corrupt. The focus shifted to "good governance," which included an emphasis on political and financial decentralization (Baimyrzaeva 2005, 2010, 2011; Fraser 2009: 67-68).

A host of new organizations flooded into the region to provide "technical assistance" in response to the new international perception that "important organizational changes were needed in the bureaucratic organs" of the state itself (Cooley 2000: 36). Instead of simply giving financial assistance, these international donor organizations provided "advice and expertise for transforming various sectors" (ibid.). This included, for example, the drafting of new legislation, research, and educational programs for government officials at all levels. But it also entailed funding, typically to run informational programs, support local NGOs, "train" government officials, and organize community outreach programs.

In Kyrgyzstan, the two organizations that provided the most significant levels of technical assistance in crafting and implementing reforms for the development of local self-government were the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and USAID, which worked in conjunction with a host of local NGOs. But, many other organizations were actively involved, including the World Bank (as mentioned in earlier sections of this chapter), the Asian Development Bank, the European Union, and the Swiss Fund of International Cooperation, among others. International donor organizations did not merely recommend particular reforms; they were actively engaged in crafting legislation, lobbying government officials, and implementing projects to facilitate their realization.

As a former Deputy Minister on Local Self-Government Issues in Kyrgyzstan put it, the UNDP was “the number one partner” and worked directly with the president to write the National Strategy for Political Decentralization.¹¹⁰ The UNDP formally launched its Political and Administrative Local Governance Program in 1998. The primary purpose was to advise Kyrgyzstan’s national leaders on the best ways to develop a system of local self-governance. Damira Sulpieva, the Local Self-Government Component Coordinator at the UNDP in Kyrgyzstan, who has been with the organization since the early 1990s, says that the main role UNDP played at the time was in bringing in international consultants to act as “political advisors” for the government. Together with the government, she says, “we did much work for the promotion of local self-governance,” and “within those [UNDP] programs we can say the entire legal basis for local self-governance was formed.”¹¹¹

But, the UNDP played an even more direct role than this, working with *ayil okmotu* and local populations on “social mobilization” projects. In these programs, the UNDP fostered the development of community-based organizations that would participate directly in the activities of local governments, alongside the *ayil okmotu*.¹¹² This activity started in 1998, and intensified between 1999 and 2001; it continued until the Tulip Revolution in 2005, a year after President Akaev, seemingly enamored with the program, declared it to be the “Year of Social Mobilization and Good Governance” (IMF 2004: 16). As a spokesperson at UNDP explained:

First of all, we built capacities of the heads of *ayil okmotu*, of municipal servants, we tried to explain to them what social mobilization would give them. And, of course, many of them were able to see it with their own eyes. The community-based organizations [program] had a micro-capital component through which we granted a number of funds, big funds, to local communities, and through these community-based organizations they rehabilitated their own infrastructure, or built new objects of infrastructure. However,

¹¹⁰ Interview with author, KYG1_Int2_1

¹¹¹ Interview with author, August 6, 2013.

¹¹² For the sake of clarity, these community-based organizations are not the same as the community user associations that I described above. A community user association (like those for pastures and water use) are formal organizations created by law; community-based organizations are informal.

we didn't only want people to rehabilitate infrastructure. We wanted people to govern, to manage that infrastructure after it was built or rehabilitated.¹¹³

Between 1994 and 2000, the UNDP spent a total of \$12.5 million on its decentralization initiatives in Kyrgyzstan (McGlinchey 2011: 93); in the period from 2000 to 2004, they spent \$8.1 million (OECD 2006).

The second biggest role was played by USAID, primarily through its funding of local NGOs that promoted local self-government. The most prominent of these was the Urban Institute. A former member of the Urban Institute in Bishkek, who has worked on issues related to local self-government for twenty years, noted that the role of the Urban Institute “was very big, especially in framing laws and amendments, and in bringing in the international experience in order to explain how the development process should proceed.” He noted, moreover, that organizations like USAID have directly helped to shape the functioning of institutions after their creation. “There is a very big difference between the apparatus of the *ayil okmotu* today compared to 1996 [...]; the educational and training programs for *ayil okmotus* and their employees has increased their capacity...this was because of the work of donors.”¹¹⁴ A USAID report notes that the organization has been “engaged actively in strengthening the policy and legal framework for local self-government, while working directly in and with local self-governments to enhance their ability to make good use of the authority and resources that they have” (Conway 2008: 7).

¹¹³ Interview with author, KYG1_Mt1_32. Along these lines a UNDP report notes that “with the support of the UNDP and other international organizations, [Kyrgyzstan] is working on the establishment of community organizations and local development foundations that work closely with [local self-government] structures. The process of social mobilization and the establishment of community organizations and local NGOs allows the involvement of the population in the management of issues of local significance” (UNDP 2012: 34).

¹¹⁴ Interview with the author (KYG 1_Mt1_20).

The Incoherence and Ambiguity of Reform

As I mentioned several times above, the incoherence and ambiguity surrounding the local self-government reforms in Kyrgyzstan is partly explained by the fact that the impetus for them came from outside the country. As others have correctly noted, “the Kyrgyz government lacked a clear concept for the realization [of local self-government] from the start” (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2001: 528). Indeed, it was not their concept at all. Put simply, donors’ collaborators in the Kyrgyz government knew that their patrons favored the development of certain institutions, but they did not always have a perfectly clear idea about what these institutions were supposed to do, or how they should operate. In many respects, the central government’s support for local self-government was more of a slogan than a development program (Mukanova 2009: 201, 204-206). It was a way of securing needed funds and did not necessarily reflect a genuine commitment to the reform process. As one study notes, “Most progress was accomplished in producing various types of legislation and strategies, and establishing different organs to oversee their implementation. But, implementation of those documents and strategies was minimal or superficial” (Baimyrzaeva 2010: 289). Nadezhda Dobretsova, one of Kyrgyzstan’s most vocal proponents for local self-government, complains that only a handful of officials in Bishkek “really understand the role of local self-government in our system.”¹¹⁵

Bekbolot Bekiev, formerly a member of USAID’s Urban Institute, attributed the progress toward developing a system of local self-government to the work of donor organizations, not the government. In fact, he said, officials in the government never truly understood the purpose of the reforms. Many were skeptical or outright hostile toward them.

People who work in the state generally have a negative attitude toward international initiatives, but make an effort [publicly] to show that they support it [...] USAID’s project for the development of democracy was

¹¹⁵ Interview with author, August 2, 2013.

not evaluated positively by the administration. I can even tell you frankly that some representatives of state organs even see such work as espionage and as harmful to the country.¹¹⁶

The UNDP's own comprehensive report on local self-government in Kyrgyzstan notes repeatedly that the government was often an intransigent partner. It states that, "the key lesson that we can draw from the 20-year history of the development of LSGs"¹¹⁷ in Kyrgyzstan is that the government "is inclined to yield to the temptation of controlling the decision-making process from above" (UNDP 2012: 31). The report blames national authorities for their lack of commitment, and for their inability to flesh out basic reforms with more substantive legislation. Addressing national elites' continuing reservations with local self-governance, the report notes the following:

As before, arguments for maintaining and even centralizing power receive greater attention in politics. As such, local self-government is perceived as a threat to the authority of the center, and a factor breeding separatism. This brings about the adoption of conflicting decisions, including at the legislative level, the lack of effectiveness of reform, and even a rejection of some positive results. Therefore, overcoming the tendencies of centralization of authority and resources is the main problem (UNDP 2012: 38).

Given its lack of genuine commitment to the reforms, it is not surprising that the central government, at every turn, failed to clearly define the power and authority of local officials. It helps to explain why the reforms were uneven, with elites in Kyrgyzstan's national government sometimes seeking to roll back or eliminate certain reforms, such that the nature and trajectory of each institution has followed an incoherent historical development. It is the reason why substantive issues regarding the power and independence of local government were left unresolved, inadvertently giving local officials quite a bit of flexibility to determine things for themselves. But this leaves us with the question of why authorities in Bishkek went along with the reforms at all.

¹¹⁶ Interview with author, August 20, 2013.

¹¹⁷ LSG stands for "local self-government."

While I stress that institutional reform at the local level in Kyrgyzstan was exogenous, it would be too strong to suggest that it was entirely so. Authorities in Kyrgyzstan were not forced to do anything. None of the reforms related to local self-government were undertaken through highly formal and explicit contracts of the kind that might accompany IMF conditionality. The influence of donors promoting local self-government was more informal, and required willing and cooperative partners among the Kyrgyz elite. First among these was Askar Akaev, president from 1991 to 2005. In a version of the “Great Man” theory of history, conventional wisdom holds that Akaev was personally committed to the reform process and was the driving force behind privatization, democratization, and decentralization (Olcott 1996: 87-91; Anderson 1999: 23-62; Spector 2004; Gleason 1997: 95). Proponents of this view highlight Akaev’s unique personal attributes and liberal ideology. Trained as a physicist, he was thrust into the role of president without any prior political experience and was only a half-hearted communist to start. During the 1980s he was a prominent supporter of Gorbachev and *perestroika*. After Kyrgyzstan became independent, he had a more open-minded and liberal approach in comparison with his counterparts and predecessors. This led him to voluntarily and whole-heartedly adopt the advice and guidance of international organizations (*ibid.*).

Still, this perspective ignores the economic, political, and historical context of Akaev’s presidency. Akaev was financially dependent on international donors as a matter of fact, not by choice. Unlike other countries in the region, Kyrgyzstan needed donor money and Akaev had to make concessions in order to get it. Baimyrzaeva notes that “[o]verall, it appears that much of the reform was produced and remained to please donors and continue securing their funds” (Baimyrzaeva 2011: 559). In this light, Akaev’s personal views and background were not as important as the political and economic context he faced as the president of Kyrgyzstan in the

immediate post-Soviet period. So while Akaev may have initiated some liberalizing reforms, he did so at a time when few other options were available to him.

It seems, moreover, that a lack of financial resources led to the prioritization of reform at the local over the national level. Evidence suggests that President Akaev saw concrete advantages in giving localities responsibility for their own affairs. The simple fact was that Bishkek could not shoulder the financial burden for them. Referring to the creation of local self-government, an Akaev ally noted that “the donors did not force us to do it, but we also didn’t refuse because we did not have the money to contribute to development in local areas [...] we were weaker [than our neighbors] and decided to develop this way, with the help of donors.”¹¹⁸ Likewise, Makunova notes that it was “because of increasing fiscal pressure” that the central government “found it politically appropriate to transfer responsibility for its functions to LSGs to solve regional and local tasks” (Makunova 2009: 204). Thus, even if Akaev might have preferred to maintain centralized political control over localities, the financial position of the central government was so strained that ridding himself of the responsibility might have been a relief. The villages were, quite literally, told to fend for themselves. From the perspective of donors, this was an appropriate and even commendable logic. As the UNDP put it, central authorities had “freed themselves from having to solve a whole range of issues and problems of local significance” in villages and towns, “giving them the opportunity to pay more attention to matters of national significance” (UNDP 2012: 34).

Conversely, it is notable that—despite his reputation as a liberal reformer—Akaev was consolidating presidential power in the capital city even as he was adopting local self-government reforms in villages. As one study points out, the reforms that were most fully

¹¹⁸ Interview with author (KYG1_Int1_10).

implemented “affected lower levels of government, and ignored the highest levels” (Baimyrzaeva 2010: 289).¹¹⁹ Indeed, by all accounts presidential power increased during Akaev’s tenure. It seems that implementing reform at the local level was a way to appease donors while still enabling the president to marginalize the parliament and attack both political opponents and the press by manipulating the courts (International Crisis Group 2001; Freedom House 2003). Many of those who had praised Akaev for his open-mindedness to Western norms were soon disillusioned by his energetic accumulation of presidential power.¹²⁰ This narrative fits within broader trends in regime transitions during the post-Cold War period: authoritarian rulers democratize only as much as is necessary to meet Western expectations or demands, though not enough to complete a full transition to democracy (Levitsky and Way 2010). In Kyrgyzstan, the democratization that did take place occurred primarily at the local level, as described above.

If the main goal of local self-government reform was to appease international donors, it appears to have worked. Kyrgyzstan, despite all of its objective failures and massively high levels of corruption, remains a magnet for international donors in comparison to its neighbors. Akaev’s multiple concessions on local government reform led many western observers to conclude that it was the only country in the region that had any hope of transforming itself into a western-style liberal democracy. A high-level official at USAID privately acknowledged that

¹¹⁹ Ironically, the vast majority of reforms establishing local self-government were created in the most highly centralized way possible, through presidential decree. Even more ironic is that this is part of what informed Akaev’s reputation as a liberal, winning him praise from numerous western commentators.

¹²⁰ While failing to note the influence that international donors may have had on Akaev’s proclaimed liberalism, western observers were quick to highlight the nefarious influences of Kyrgyzstan’s neighbors on Akaev’s (supposedly) nascent authoritarianism at this time. Akaev’s “lurch toward authoritarianism,” writes one analyst, “can be traced to a meeting between the heads of state” of the other Central Asian republics in 1994. At this meeting, “pressure from Uzbekistan to agree upon an ‘Asian development path’ apparently persuaded Akaev to abandon” his liberalism. As a result Akaev “disbanded the parliament, forced the resignation of the government, cowed the judiciary, shut down the opposition press, set up a new electoral commission, and announced new parliamentary elections” (Gleason 1997: 99).

the an estimated 60% of all external budget support for the central government gets siphoned off into officials' salaries, both legitimately and illegitimately. The only reason donors have “not completely given up” is because Kyrgyzstan is “still viewed as a hopeful case.” Compared to its neighbors, it is “still more open, more democratic, and more willing to work with outsiders.”¹²¹

In sum, Kyrgyzstan developed a system of local self-government in order to appease donors and keep a stream of foreign revenue flowing in. Kazakhstan, in contrast, was not dependent on foreign aid and, therefore, was well insulated from the demands of western governments and international organizations. Not only did oil revenue create a source of financial independence, but the existence of known oil reserves also led many western governments to mute their criticisms of the Kazakh government. That is, Kazakhstan was under less pressure to reform and was better able to withstand what little pressure was applied, in comparison with Kyrgyzstan. As one high-level official in Bishkek put it: “Why didn't all the other countries—like Russia and Kazakhstan—go this way? Because they had wider financial opportunities.”¹²² Adil Nurmakov, a political scientist and journalist in Almaty, noted that it was only because of oil and gas that Kazakhstan could avoid coming under Western pressure for political reform. Kyrgyzstan, he noted, “had nothing to give except decentralization—that was the ‘oil’ that they could give to the west.”¹²³

As the director of USAID's local governance and decentralization initiative during the 1990s said, the Kazakh government simply refused to cooperate with them. There was no progress whatsoever because “there was no interest, no support, and no buy-in by the Kazakh

¹²¹ Interview with author, July 15, 2013 (KYG1_Mt1_34).

¹²² Interview with author (KYG1_Int1_10).

¹²³ Interview with author, March 20, 2014.

government.”¹²⁴ By the late 1990s, the USAID local government initiative in Kazakhstan was completely phased out and USAID moved all of its resources and attention to Bishkek, where real progress was being made, as outlined above. The result, then, is that Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan developed along very different paths when it came to the governance of villages, towns, and cities.

V. Conclusions

As I have shown here, the reasons for the development of different local government institutions in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are partly exogenous. Because Kyrgyzstan was highly dependent on foreign aid, it implemented the reforms that international donors favored, including the establishment of local self-government in villages and small cities. Kazakhstan, in contrast, simply did not do so; central authorities there purposefully prevented the formation of local self-government. The result is that during the 20 years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, each state began to develop along different trajectories, building different kinds of institutions at the local level. In Kyrgyzstan, elected village executives (*ayil okmotu*) were given the freedom and flexibility to make their own decisions and were encouraged to work with local communities and represent their interests. In Kazakhstan, by contrast, local village executives are appointed from above and have no authority or resources to decide what projects to implement, or how to implement them. If they were to work with the local population in carrying out the interests of the community, it would matter little, for any local initiative they sought to implement would require approval from higher levels of the state. Though, as I discuss in the next chapter, the territorial structure and function of the president’s political party, *Nur*

¹²⁴ Interview with author, April 1, 2014 (KAZ_Int1_16).

Otan, indicates that central authorities in Astana would prefer local communities have little contact with state officials at all, encouraging interface with the party instead.

Importantly, the institutional structure of government at the local level has had larger effects on the broader development of each state. This is because the different institutions of local government I have described here helped to forge very different styles of state-society relations. Kyrgyzstan's institutions of local government activate and strengthen a host of multiple and overlapping social relationships between local officials and the communities that they govern. In Kazakhstan, the institutions of local government do precisely the opposite: they isolate and insulate local officials from local populations, creating a clear legal and financial dependency on the higher levels of the state while carrying out the functions of village governance. The result is that ordinary people in each country came to interact with the state differently, developed different understandings of how problems get solved and who solves them, all of which has been personalized by interaction (or the lack of interaction) with their own local officials. More specifically, it has led ordinary villagers in Kyrgyzstan to form strong preferences for local cadre and has politicized the distinction between "local" and non-local (or "outsider") state personnel, a distinction that has much less significance in Kazakhstan. Related to this, the institutions of local government in Kyrgyzstan embed local officials within a social and institutional fabric that gives them the ability to push up against the rest of the administrative system and contest central authority at the provincial level, and sometimes in Bishkek itself.

In the next chapter, I describe these differences in local social relations showing how and why they are activated or neutralized, and the effects that this has on the central government's power in its more encompassing provinces and regions. Because the state is not a unitary cohesive actor, but is itself comprised of multiple levels that interact differently with society, the

ways in which state-society relations are shaped at the local level has consequences for politics at the provincial and national levels, ultimately affecting the degree to which the state is cohesive and centralized at all.

Chapter 4: Patterns of Local Social Ties

I. Local Social Ties and State-Society Relations

In this chapter, I seek to show that the nature and style of social relations between local officials and local populations conform to distinctly different patterns in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. My main claim is that *ayil okmotu* in Kyrgyzstan are more likely to be socially embedded members of the community than their counterparts in Kazakhstan (the village *akims*). In presenting data to support this claim, I will reference the institutional context of local governance that I discussed in the previous chapter. In Kyrgyzstan, the institutions of local government activate and strengthen multiple and overlapping social ties between village level officials and the communities that they govern. In Kazakhstan, the institutions of local government have the opposite effect; they insulate local officials from local populations, mitigate against the formation of local social ties, and weaken those ties that might already exist. This dynamic is reinforced in Kazakhstan—and perhaps partly produced—by the role of the president’s political party (*Nur Otan*) in local governance, which I will address in the third section of this chapter.

In chapter five, I build on this discussion by showing that differing patterns of local social relations have had profound effects on how ordinary people understand their relationship to the state. That is, they forge different patterns of broader state-society relations. Deep and overlapping social ties are often built upon reciprocal obligations that are not only contractual, but also moral, and enforced by the larger community; this facilitates the development of personal trust and can discipline local officials to represent local interests and work more diligently toward their realization. Less socially embedded local officials, in contrast, are not as vulnerable to these social sanctions, and are less trusted as a result. They tend to be perceived as

unresponsive to local needs and less effective in addressing them. The result is that social relationships at the local level help shape perceptions about what (or *who*) the state is, what kinds of things it can do, and how and why it does (or does not) do them. In particular, they can either animate or neutralize the political distinction between local versus non-local cadre in more encompassing districts, provinces, and regions.

Before beginning this discussion, I would like to clarify what I mean by local social ties, identify different styles of local social relations, and describe how I intend to measure and discuss them within the context of this chapter. Unless otherwise noted, the term “local social relations” is used in a relatively narrow sense intended to describe only the social ties between village-level officials and individuals within the community that they govern.¹²⁵

A great deal of the existing literature on Central Asian politics and society has looked at social ties primarily through the lens of clientelism, both between and among national elites (Hale 2015; McGlinchey 2011; Engvall 2011), and also between local elites and local communities (Radnitz 2010). In doing so, however, these authors have tended to homogenize the concept, treating the ties between patron and client as non-variable. In particular, there has been a tendency in prior work to treat clientelism in purely rationalistic terms, based on assumptions about how these ties solve instrumental and material problems for those engaged in them.

I build on this work in three different ways. First, I draw on the classic literature on clientelism, which stresses that patron-client ties vary in their degree to which they are instrumental or affective, personal or impersonal, coercive or consensual, in addition to many other factors (Schmidt et al. 1977; Gellner and Waterbury 1977; Eisenstadt and Lemarchand

¹²⁵ As in the previous chapter, I use the term “local” to refer only to the village level (not the district or provincial level) and so I use the terms “village-level official” and “local-level official” interchangeably.

1981; Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984). They also vary in the number of dimensions that tie two people together and can encompass and crosscut political, economic, and social spheres, or be limited to a single realm. As Scott says, these relations can be either “multiplex” or “simplex” (Scott 1972). In short, not all patron-client relations are of the same kind or quality.

Second, and related, I highlight the social as well as the rational elements of these ties. However, I do so with the explicit understanding that social ties are far more encompassing than patron-client ties alone, which I treat as just one of the many different kinds of ties that might define a relationship between two people. Again, I draw on the classic literature on clientelism, which describes these relations outside of strictly rational-instrumental or coercive terms and regularly invokes concepts like kinship, friendship, personal loyalty, moral obligation, and long-standing family histories that defy pure rationality.

Finally, I stress the ways in which informal social relations are shaped and influenced by formal political institutions. The emphasis on the relationship between formal and informal institutions draws on the work of Helmke and Levitsky (2004), and, in the post-Soviet context, Henry Hale (2015). The data presented in this chapter, however, focus exclusively on these dynamics at the local level, between village-level state officials and ordinary members of the local community. My main claim is that variations in the formal institutions of local government, which I outlined in chapter three, shape different patterns of local social ties, which I document below.

Measuring something as informal and opaque as “social ties” is admittedly difficult. I approach local social relations from several different angles in the hope that, together, these different approaches paint a clear picture that shows different patterns at the village-level in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. First, I draw on the specific features of local government

institutions discussed in the previous chapter to show that the varying characteristics of these institutions make personalistic and impersonalistic social ties between local officials and local populations more or less likely. In particular, different mechanisms of selection and representation—namely, elections versus appointment of local officials—shape the likelihood that local officials will be chosen from among the community or from outside. This, in itself, has a large impact on style of local social ties. Personalized and encompassing social ties, for example, depend on iterated face-to-face interaction. I suggest that local elections in Kyrgyzstan makes it more likely that ordinary villagers become local officials, entering office with already-existing social ties within the community; in contrast, the mechanism of appointment in Kazakhstan, while not precluding the selection of ordinary villagers, makes it less likely.

Second, I discuss how differences in the processes of local government reinforce or encourage interaction between local officials and the local population. Regardless of whether officials begin their jobs as long-time village residents or outsiders, the process of governance itself can either (further) facilitate the social embeddedness of local officials or discourage it. That is, different starting points do not determine different outcomes because local social relations are susceptible to change through process. Among the things that I will discuss, for example, is that Kyrgyzstan's system of local governance tends to produce longer tenures for local officials and also requires them to rely on and mobilize their co-villagers in order to solve local problems. The result is that their social ties with the community are continually activated, expanded, and strengthened during the process of local governance.

In Kazakhstan, by contrast, the system of local governance produces short and uncertain tenures for local officials and discourages iterated or regularized interaction with local communities. In building on the institutional configurations of local governance in each country

that I described in the previous chapter, I will also address the role of *Nur Otan*—President Nazarbayev’s political party—pointing to the ways in which central authorities have partly displaced local officials from local social contexts and encouraged citizens to interact with the party apparatus instead. Through all of these ways, the line between state and society gets drawn differently in each country. In Kazakhstan, local officials are unambiguously state officials, while their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan sometimes appear to be little more than ordinary members of the local community, and are, in fact, often former taxi drivers, farmers, and school teachers.

In the final section of this chapter, I present an in-depth comparative case study of local governance that focuses on one village in each state. Based on observations and interviews obtained through ethnographic field research, I show that the ways in which local officials carry out their jobs—within the institutional context of local governance—strongly shapes their social, political, and economic role within the community, partly determines the kinds of relationships that they form with co-villagers over time, and also determines what kind of local problems are addressed and how.

Throughout all of these sections I rely on ethnographic data from several villages, interviews with present and former state officials at all levels, interviews with other local analysts, and prior research from a variety of sources. By connecting all of these data together I hope to paint a reasonably clear picture showing that local officials in Kyrgyzstan are more socially embedded than their counterparts in Kazakhstan.

In the next chapter, I will show how these different patterns of local social ties, along with the different kinds of responsibilities and obligations that they produce, determine how ordinary villagers come to understand their relationship with the state in the personae of their own local officials. It shapes ordinary villagers’ sense of personal trust in officialdom, and their

perceptions of what kinds of state officials are effective and why. Following Scott, I argue that personalistic social ties produce both “trust and affection” (Scott 1972: 94; 1976). This can produce strong biases in the value of “local” versus “non-local” cadre in localities and regions and cause ordinary people to mobilize in protection of “their own” local officials against attacks by the central government, such as efforts to transfer them to a different region, rotate them across regions, or simply prosecute them for “corruption.”¹²⁶ I go on to address specific contentious episodes of regional appointment and representation in chapter six.

II. Friend or Bureaucrat? The State Official in Local Social Context

At a minimum, crosscutting and multiplex social relationships require that individuals know each other and that they know each other personally. Personal relations between two people fall short of deep and overlapping social ties, but are prerequisite for them; they are a defining aspect of whole person social relations. At a minimum, a personal acquaintance makes deep and overlapping social ties possible and is an indication that personalistic social relations might exist.

Do ordinary people know who their local officials are? Do they know them personally? Data from several different sources show that ordinary people in Kyrgyzstan are likely to know their local officials personally; people in Kazakhstan, in contrast, are less likely to know their local officials personally and may not know who their local officials are at all. A 2012 UNDP study shows that across all villages and cities in Kyrgyzstan, the vast majority of residents recognized the name of the heads of local government structures (heads of *ayil okmotu* and

¹²⁶ Radnitz’s argument, broadly interpreted, is that the protection of local elites is one of the major driving forces behind the social mobilization of ordinary people in Kyrgyzstan (Radnitz 2010). I address his arguments in chapter 6, showing the ways in which his argument and this one diverge.

deputies of village councils) in their own locality. The numbers varied across provinces, but there was a clear majority in every one.

Table 4.1. Percentage of Residents Who Recognize the Name of Village/City Local Officials by Province¹²⁷

Chui oblast	94.1%
Naryn oblast	90.7%
Talas oblast	88.5%
Issyk-Kul oblast	78.7%
Batken oblast	71.6%
Jalal-Abad oblast	70.4%
Osh oblast	60.1%

Nationwide, the percentage of Kyrgyz citizens who knew their representative in the local council hovered around 50% between 2007 and 2011 (UNDP 2012: 50-59). The report also stresses the face-to-face nature of these relations, describing them as highly personalistic:

...in every village, the elder is a personal acquaintance, and every [village] leader is known and familiar to his constituents. A survey, conducted as part of [the] research for this Report, confirms that three out of four Kyrgyz citizens (75%) personally know their mayor or head of the village municipality [*ayil okmotu*] (ibid.: 50).

Other evidence shows that these ties are both personal and deep. Speaking about the *ayil okmotu* of Bazar Korgon—Zholchiev Abdykadyr—members of the community invariably utilized a prism of longstanding personal acquaintance.¹²⁸ “All his life he has worked with people here,” noted a woman selling produce in the bazaar, “even before he was *ayil okmotu* everyone knew him for the work he did on the *kolkhoz*.”¹²⁹

Others knew him more directly. The vice principal of the local school said “I’ve known Abdykadyr for a long time, ever since we were students on the collective farm...he has done a

¹²⁷ UNDP 2012: 51.

¹²⁸ This *ayil okmotu* is situated within the *raion* (district) that bears the same name. It is located in Jalalabad *oblast*.

¹²⁹ Interview with author, October 25, 2013, KYG1_Int1_49i. As noted in the previous chapter, the territorial boundaries of local governments in Kyrgyzstan were adopted from the boundaries of state and collective farms. Abdykadyr, according to his own account, tried twice to get an education in Russia but was unable to. He started his career as a brigadier in the *kolkhoz*. By the mid-1980s he had become an agronomist. After 1991 he was temporarily the director of a cooperative farm that was formed when the *kolkhoz* was broken apart (interview with author, October 7, 2013).

lot for the community.”¹³⁰ A currently unemployed man recounted both his own work history with Abdykadyr and the patron-client ties he is known to have with others in the community: “we worked together on the *kolkhoz* and I know him well—as the *ayil okmotu* he is very well liked because he helps poor people and gives them money during the holidays.”¹³¹ The reason this man knew about these disbursements of money is that his elderly aunt was one of the recipients, creating another layer of ties between him and Abdykadyr. Whether this money came from state coffers, from Abdykadyr’s own pocket, or from some other source was not known by anyone, a fact that speaks to the blurry distinction between the *ayil okmotu*’s formal public responsibility and his private personal obligations.

In these and other instances, a personal acquaintance with Abdykadyr was taken for granted. I relay these accounts here not because informants thought their personal relationship with the *ayil okmotu* was noteworthy, but precisely because it was so unremarkable.¹³² No discussion about Abdykadyr was confined to his role as the “*ayil okmotu*” because Abdykadyr was not known to people only in this way. For example, an *aksakal* (village elder) in Bazar Korgon perked up when he heard Abdykadyr’s name and said, “he is a great man, an honest man, and a hard worker.” Surprisingly, this comment was made in the context of a broader discussion about how irredeemably corrupt and dishonest state officials are in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The officials singled out for corruption, though, were far away, in Bishkek. Local officials are different. It turns out in this particular case that Abdykadyr’s father had been a lifelong friend of the *aksakal*, and that he considered Abdykadyr as one of his own sons.¹³³ To

¹³⁰ Interview with author, October 30, 2013, KYG1_Int3_43a.

¹³¹ Interview with author, October 17, 2013, KYG1_Int1_49e.

¹³² A contextual and methodological note: Some of these accounts came from long formal interviews while others random encounters, some of which were short and casual. Both are representative of a larger sample of interviews conducted in this locality, where I spent a total of two months, from mid-September to mid-November, 2013.

¹³³ Interview with author, October 14, 2013, KYG1_Int1_4.

the *aksakal*, Abdykadyr cannot be placed in an abstract category like “state official” (whom he identifies as corrupt) because their personal relationship is far broader, richer, and deeper than this, defined by a lifetime of interactions.¹³⁴ As these few examples serve to illustrate, Abdykadyr is not only the *ayil okmotu*; to some he is also a former colleague, a classmate, a patron, or the son of a lifelong friend, among many other things. These are multiplex whole-person relationships built on personal acquaintance, and, in some instances, affection.

In contrast, the relationship between local government officials and local populations in Kazakhstan has been described as one of “estrangement” (Bhuiyan 2010: 668). Writing about local government in Kazakhstan, Makhmutova notes a social “alienation” between “authorities and the people” (Makhmutova 2004: 8). Zhanibek Khassan, formerly a specialist on local governance for the Soros Foundation in Almaty, says that “district and village level offices are often run by absentee officials, people who officially occupy these posts but who are absent most of the time and simply not interested.”¹³⁵ This lack of deep and overlapping social ties between state officials and local populations is also captured by the comments of one former high-level official: “The government—the local government and the central government—they are living by their own life, and society—teachers, local businessmen, and etcetera—they are living by their own life. And these two sides of life are very separate.”¹³⁶ Like many other ordinary people, a social worker from a village in Sairam district (South Kazakhstan province) described her *akim* strictly through the prism of officialdom, indicating a social distance between them:

¹³⁴ This tendency to elevate the local officials and complain about “officials” as abstract unfamiliar is one of the broader effects that I seek to describe. In fact, the *aksakal* went on to say that Abdykadyr would make a great president. It is, I argue, precisely this style of personalistic local social relations that leads ordinary people to trust and value their own local officials, politicizing distinctions between local and non-local cadre within the state at higher levels. I discuss this dynamic in more detail in the next chapter, focusing on the ways that local officials embedded within the fabric of a local moral economy enhances both levels of personal trust and evaluations of their work.

¹³⁵ Interview with author, March 22, 2013.

¹³⁶ Interview with author, April 23, 2014.

“The *akim* is just an official who wants to have a career. He doesn’t have an interest in local problems or people’s interests. Very few officials are really trying to change things or improve society—they just want to get a promotion so that they can get a bigger paycheck.”¹³⁷ In contrast to Abdykadyr, this *akim* is known as “the *akim*,” a nameless and faceless abstraction who is understood to act strictly according to a logic that defines the narrow category to which he belongs—he is “just an official.”

Other data suggest that people in Kazakhstan have similar relationships with members of their *maslikhat*.¹³⁸ In one study of *maslikhat* deputies in Almaty that was conducted by the Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan (MISK), 2,635 households were surveyed in five districts of the city. Across all five districts only 15% of residents could name their local deputy; 85% could not correctly identify their deputy’s name when it was read aloud. Only 4% answered that they had ever met their deputy personally. Fewer than 40 respondents out of 2,635, or less than 2%, said that they had spoken with their local deputy in the past two years.¹³⁹

Likewise, an analyst at Kazakhstan’s Institute of Strategic Studies, an official state research center under the presidential administration, noted that *maslikhat* deputies have virtually no contact with ordinary people. According to this analyst, the *maslikhat* “as a means of contact between the local government and the local population does not work” because “most of the deputies are businessmen or famous public officials who do not have time to talk or meet with the local population. There is little contact.” Members of the *maslikhats* work full-time jobs, usually as the heads of businesses and work “maybe only two or three hours a week” as

¹³⁷ Interview with author, KAZ_Int1_33b

¹³⁸ *Maslikhats* are representative-legislative organs at sub-national levels. There are no *maslikhats* at the village level, itself an institutional feature that mitigates against personalized social ties at the local level. Here I discuss *maslikhats* to illustrate an absence of face-to-face interaction between ordinary people and their formal “representatives” at the lowest levels at which they exist, in districts and larger cities.

¹³⁹ “Results of Research on the Work of Deputies of the Maslikhat of Almaty City,” The Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan, Presentation of Findings at the *Kazhol* hotel, Almaty, April 22, 2014.

deputies.¹⁴⁰ Rasul Zhumaly, a political analyst and former state official, put it this way: “I don’t know even one member of the *maslikhat*. I don’t know who they are and I am a specialist. It is the same situation in Shymkent, Dzhambyl, Karaganda, and so on.”¹⁴¹

Institutional Structure of Local Government and the Socio-Territorial Origins of Local Officials

A personalized familiarity between local officials and local residents has a lot to do with who the viable candidates for these offices are. Where lifelong ordinary village inhabitants stand some chance of obtaining office over outside elites, we can expect local officials to enter office with already-existing personalized social relationships with co-villagers. Whether they can do so is shaped by the formal institutional mechanism for selecting local officials, namely election versus appointment. More specifically, elections make the selection of an ordinary local person more likely while appointments make it easier for elite outsiders to assume local office.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, all village-level officials in Kyrgyzstan are chosen through elections. Between 2001 and 2008, the *ayil okmotu* was directly elected. Since 2008, the *ayil okmotu* has been indirectly elected by members of the local council. Members of the local council are directly elected by the population of the village. In Kazakhstan, the only village-level organ of government is the executive, the head of which (the *akim*) is appointed at the district-level. Village residents do vote for members of the district-level *maslikhat*, but, as I discuss below, these elections are tightly controlled, limiting the opportunity for ordinary village residents to run for office and virtually foreclosing any realistic chances that they can become deputies. Though the *maslikhat* is not technically a village-level institution—which, by itself, dilutes any single deputy’s ties to the locality of his or her constituents—it is the lowest-level

¹⁴⁰ Interview with the author, April 21, 2014.

¹⁴¹ Interview with the author, April 23, 2014.

organ of the state besides the village *akim* and I discuss it here (as I did above) for purposes of comparison with Kyrgyzstan.

In general, elections held at the local level allow candidates from within the community to marshal the electoral support of their kin, clan, friends, clients, and other local acquaintances. Ordinary villagers, in turn, can vote for candidates whom they already know personally, including their own friends, relatives, respected village elders, teachers, or other local notables.

I hardly mean to suggest that local level elections in Kyrgyzstan are an idealistic form of democracy, and we need not assume this in order to reach the conclusion that local village inhabitants will make competitive candidates. Even if local elections function strictly according to the logic of classic political clientelism, local candidates will have advantages over outsiders. Local patrons, after all, will be in a strong position to win by mobilizing their clients who, as the classic literature on clientelism suggests, are likely to also be their families, friends, and other acquaintances (Schmidt et al. 1977; Gellner and Waterbury 1977; Eisenstadt, S. 1981; Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984). Even if true, the key point is that the patron is local and is only able to marshal support because of the obligations of reciprocity that will benefit his or her supporters in that locality (*ibid.*). It also needs to be noted that local elections do not always result in a clear consensus over who the *ayil okmotu* should be; however, they do make it likely that whatever contest ensues will be between different local people, not between a local person and an outsider.

The twice-elected *ayil okmotu* (and lifelong resident) of Seidikum in Kyrgyzstan noted that “the election system makes it almost impossible that someone will come from outside. The election system is localized and people try to elect someone who is from here.”¹⁴² The director of a local school from a different village in this same district—who also happens to be a member

¹⁴² Interview with author, October 4, 2013, KYG1_Int1_23.

of the local council—said plainly that “[people] try to elect only friends and relatives, but at the same time they want someone who will do a good job.”¹⁴³ The *ayil okmotu* of Bazar Korgon, Abdykadyr, claimed that there was a law requiring that candidates are local residents – “people cannot be elected if they don’t live here, so outside people cannot come.”¹⁴⁴ This means that local officials in Kyrgyzstan are likely to enter office in their own village, where they already have multiple and overlapping social relationships with the friends, family, and acquaintances that they have accumulated over a lifetime. Indeed, they might be elected precisely because they have a large network of acquaintances who support them.

The appointment of village-level *akims* in Kazakhstan, however, eliminates the necessity for the explicit support of any segment of the local population. The process of appointment occurs outside the village, is controlled by people who do not live in the village, and is determined based on their interests alone. In this case, the district-level *akim* makes the appointment, limited only by the demands made by his or her bosses at even higher levels of administration. While some district-level *akims* might find it in their interest to appoint a local person to this post, perhaps in an effort to establish trust with the population or obtain local information, others will be more comfortable appointing their own confidants who could be from any village within the district, or another region altogether. In short, the institutional bias toward the selection of a local person is not the same as under an electoral system.

Sergei Khudyakov, the director of Kazakhstan’s Institute for the Development of Local Self-Government (an independent NGO), stresses that local *akims* in Kazakhstan are more often presented *to* the village rather than being selected *from* the village: “[t]hey are appointed and that’s all. The *akim* from the district simply comes to the village, like normal, and just presents

¹⁴³ Interview with author, October 16, 2013, KYG1_Int2_46a.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with author, October 7, 2013, KYG1_Int1_16. He was not able to provide the name of this law and I was never able to verify whether such a law actually exists.

the new [village] *akim* to the population¹⁴⁵ ...it can be any person, *any* person. The *akim* from the district decides this alone.”¹⁴⁶ The village-level *akim*, then, can be selected from among the population in any given locality, but there is no reason why this should happen generally, across multiple localities throughout the country.

The Vice Chairman of the party *Ak Zhol*, Burikhan Nurmakhamedov, notes that ordinary people are simply excluded from the process: “Here the leaders come from the top to the bottom, not from the bottom to the top. So the role of the population is very little.”¹⁴⁷ A former local *akim* himself noted that, “*akims* are not elected, they are appointed and take on a role like the ‘city manager’ – it’s like the manager of a company, they come and go, they either solve problems or not, but they don’t have any feelings toward the place or the people.”¹⁴⁸ Just as ordinary people can vote for their own acquaintances in local elections in Kyrgyzstan, district-level *akims* can appoint those they know themselves, people whom they can rely on and trust, and who are likely to have travelled in their own social circles.

As I started to discuss above, this social alienation between the local officials and local communities extends beyond formally appointed positions to the *maslikhat*, which is a nominally elected representative body (Makhmutova 2004: 8). There are at least two reasons for this. First, as noted above (and in chapter three), there are no village-level *maslikhats* in Kazakhstan. This means that numerous villages are represented in a single district-level *maslikhat*, diluting the degree to which deputies can truly know and interact with his or her constituents.¹⁴⁹ Second,

¹⁴⁵ Khudyakov strongly emphasized the phrase “to the population,” (*nasilen-I-YU predstavlyaet*) implicitly contrasting it with a selection “from the population.” I include this note because the emphasis is important but does not clearly translate in the text presented above.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with author, July 29, 2014.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with author, March 28, 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with author, KAZ_Int2_39.

¹⁴⁹ The creation of such a body at the district level rather than the village level is, itself, a crucial aspect of institutional design.

and more importantly, the elections for positions in the *maslikhat* are hardly elections at all, and might just as easily be defined as a mode of indirect appointment.

For instance, elections for the *maslikhat* are rarely announced in advance, and the only candidates who have any chance being elected are those who were privately informed of the election ahead of time. Ordinary village or city residents do not receive this kind of information. As one journalist in Almaty pointed out, these are “government insiders – basically people who were invited to take the seat [...] the result is that the composition of *maslikhats* across the country is made of people who are very close to the central power structures and friendly with those in power. These are not just ordinary people who choose to do this.”¹⁵⁰ Often, it is the district-level *akim* who plays the leading role in selecting candidates. Makhmutova quotes one deputy who explains why he decided to run for office. “The *akim* called me and said: ‘Let’s make you a deputy and then elect you as the Secretary of the *maslikhat*. I agreed with the *akim*’s proposal” (Makhmutova 2004: 8). The result is that *maslikhat* deputies “do not express the interests of their constituents and it appears that they are some kind of division within the *akimat*” (Makhmutova 2004: 5).¹⁵¹

In Kyrgyzstan, the prior occupations of village-level officials confirms what we might expect to observe under an electoral system for selection and representation. A list of individuals serving as *ayil okmotu* in three provinces in 2013 indicates their immediately prior occupations.¹⁵² It includes taxi drivers, school teachers, war pensioners, school directors and deputy school directors, farmers and former *kolkhoz* workers, deputies of the corresponding local

¹⁵⁰ Interview with author, March 20, 2014, KAZ_Int1_6. This journalist has tried to run for a seat in his local *maslikhat* several times and knew firsthand how futile it was.

¹⁵¹ An *akimat* is the full administrative apparatus of the *akim*. As city hall is to a mayor, the *akimat* is to the *akim*. What Makhmutova is suggesting, then, is that *maslikhat* deputies represent the interests of the *akim*, not the interests of the local population.

¹⁵² This is for all 196 *ayil okmotu* in Issyk-kul, Batken, and Chui *oblasts*. The list was acquired from the State Agency on Work with Local Self-Governance in Bishkek.

council, private business owners, and the “temporarily unemployed” (itself, perhaps, the most common occupation in Kyrgyzstan’s villages). We should not forget that the multiple informal roles that any one person might play—as a respected village elder (*aksakal*), clan member or leader, or other respected local notable—are not accounted for in official record keeping.¹⁵³ Altogether these data suggest that local officials are not only more likely to be known personally by village residents, as discussed above, they are often ordinary people themselves, coming from within the village’s own social fabric, and with relatively few ties to political and administrative elites from the outside the locality.

The single most common occupation for currently serving *ayil okmotu* in Kyrgyzstan, however, is as *ayil okmotu* of the same village. This indicates that village officials have relatively stable tenures. In 196 different positions across three provinces, 103 (or 52.6%) were filled by an incumbent village official, either the *ayil okmotu* or former member of the village council; that number is 125 (or 63.8%) if we include individuals whose prior position was within the district-level administration within the same district as his or her village. By contrast, only six individuals (or 3.1%) were previously the *ayil okmotu* of a different village, while fourteen others (or 7.1%) can be identified as having held their prior job in a state administrative position at the *oblast*-level or in Bishkek city. Indeed, as I began to suggest above, the vast majority of *ayil okmotu* in 2013 who were not themselves incumbent village-level officials held what we might call “ordinary” local jobs, including as school teachers, taxi drivers, and farmers. 40 individuals—20.5% of all *ayil okmotu* in three provinces—fall into this category. Thus, we can

¹⁵³ That is, only formal occupations are listed. However, the former job of one *ayil okmotu* in Chui *raion* (Chui *oblast*) is listed simply as “village elder.”

definitively say that incumbent village officials and ordinary people, taken together, held office as *ayil okmotu* in 143 out of 196 local governments across three provinces (73%) in 2013.¹⁵⁴

This tells us that *ayil okmotu* in Kyrgyzstan are usually local people or local officials who have held relatively long tenures. Importantly, longer tenures make deeply embedded social ties more likely because even officials who come to office as outsiders might gradually develop ties to the local community if they live and work there for an extended period of time. This is even truer in Kyrgyzstan than Kazakhstan, where these relationships are crucial to the job itself, as I started to discuss in chapter three and elaborate on below. In sum, local officials in Kyrgyzstan are likely not only to be selected from among the local population, but also to serve within that community for relatively long periods. If they did not begin their official career as a socially embedded official, they are more likely to become one over time, continually reinforcing their existing ties while building new ones.

Unfortunately, nation-wide data on village *akims*' prior occupations in Kazakhstan are not available. What limited information I am able to present here—based on direct interviews with *akims* from several villages—is hardly representative. Nor is it conclusive. On the one hand, I met and learned about village *akims* who had career paths very much like what the process of appointment suggests: non-local or partially local people with ties to state elites, not with ties to the local community. In the final section of this chapter, for example, I will discuss the work of an *akim* from a village in Akmola *oblast* whose immediately prior job was as an administrator in the district-level *akimat*, where he worked for six years. I will also describe the work of an *akim* who was appointed to a village in a rural district of South Kazakhstan *oblast* but who had previously lived and worked in Shymkent, the nearest major city. In a different village

¹⁵⁴ The prior occupations of 11 individuals were not indicated.

within this same district, an *akim* was appointed after having worked for the district-level *akimat* for ten years.

In other instances, however, I met and learned about village-level *akims* who were, in fact, lifelong village residents without any apparent ties to higher-level state elites. One *akim* in a village in Akmola *oblast*, according to his own account, was trained as a specialist in automobile mechanics, but ultimately became a farmer and was then appointed as *akim*. In another case, from South Kazakhstan *oblast*, the village *akim* had previously operated a family cattle ranch in the village, a common occupation in this region. In total, this is a limited and mixed bag of cases from which no general conclusions can be drawn.

At the same time, the institutions of local government are themselves evenly distributed across localities throughout the country. If the logic of appointment does make the selection of locally embedded officials less likely, then there is reason to believe that village-level officials in Kazakhstan have weaker ties to the villages and stronger ties to higher-level state elites than their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan. Zamir Karazhanov, a political scientist in Almaty, argues that, taken broadly, “the [district] *akim* selects the people he trusts most, and of course these are going to be people close to him, other elites. It is not possible that he’ll just trust some teacher or farmer, he doesn’t know any teachers or farmers. He hasn’t worked in that sphere so it’s illogical.”¹⁵⁵

Interviews with villagers in multiple regions in South Kazakhstan, Akmola, and Almaty *oblasts* also suggest that local *akims* tend to have relatively short and unpredictable tenures. Moreover, short tenure is perceived by local people to stand in the way of getting to know their own officials. For example, in several villages within a district in South Kazakhstan *oblast*, numerous people complained that the *akim* was “constantly changing.” People found this to be

¹⁵⁵ Interview with author, April 23, 2014, KAZ_Int1_36.

important enough that it was often the first thing anyone said when describing the local government. Throughout this district, the changing of village-level *akims* was accompanied by public ceremony, which might have made it even more memorable. Each time a new *akim* was appointed, the village square would be cleaned and decorated. Sometimes new flowers were planted. When people recalled the tenure of a local *akim*, they marked time not by the changes in *akims*' names and faces, but by the recurring public ceremonies that would take place in the square.

Our local authorities change all the time and I can't even remember their names [*familia*]. Who is the *akim* now...Kainazarov? Bainazarov? Who can remember? I don't know why they change all the time. It's hard to keep track of them. I only notice when there is a new *akim* because they change the square around.¹⁵⁶

People also tended to have an awareness that short tenures were an obstacle that stood in the way of forming personal relations with the *akim*. In another village in Sairam, a farmer recalled that the prior *akim* lived on his street, so he knew him; but he was replaced after only six months. That *akim* had worked with the district-level authorities to approve a plan to pave local roads, but it was never implemented, a fact that was also attributed to short tenure. "The akims in my village are changing quickly. I have no idea why this is happening. The district *akim* might sit for four years, but the village *akims* might sit for only a year, sometimes less."¹⁵⁷ In yet another village within this district, a woman noted that "I knew who the previous *akim* was, but they change all the time, so I don't know the new one. They're rebuilding the square, which is always what the new *akim* does."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Interview with author, May 6, 2014, KAZ_Int1_30g.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with author, May 4, 2015, KAZ_Int1_14.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with author, May 5, 2014, KAZ_Int1_30f.

III. Local Social Ties and the Process of Local Governance

While the territorial origins of local officials is one way of looking at their social ties to local villagers, it may not be as important as the institutional demands of their jobs in fostering new ties and strengthening old ones. It is not only who the local official is, but also how they do their job that brings them into (or out of) interaction with ordinary members of the local community. This, too, is partly determined by the institutions of local government, which shape what kinds of responsibilities local officials have, and whether and how they interact with the local population in carrying them out. In the previous chapter, I described differences in local government structures and processes in each state and how they differently position local officials within local communities. The institutions of local government in Kyrgyzstan facilitate and even require local officials' to politically activate and utilize their own local social networks while their counterparts in Kazakhstan are discouraged from doing so.

In Kyrgyzstan, the *ayil okmotu* is institutionally situated so that asking for favors and doling them out is a part of everyday local governance. In chapter three, I discussed how village financing in Kyrgyzstan required the mobilization of the local population to contribute cash, labor, or other in-kind contributions and that local officials were often at the forefront of this mobilization. Third-party donor organizations typically require this "local contribution" as a condition for releasing funds. They do so with the explicit purpose of mobilizing the population, and enhancing the *ayil okmotu*'s dependence on local communities. In the process of designing and implementing these projects, the *ayil okmotu* is simultaneously responding to local demands, asking for assistance in implementation, and dispensing favors. Thus, his or her local social ties—which include relations with family members, friends, and life-long acquaintances—are continually activated during the processes of village governance.

Hundreds of such projects take place everyday in villages and small cities across the country. In the last chapter, I described multiple projects funded by the Agency for the Development and Investment of Communities [*sic*] (ARIS), which has the explicit goal of fostering cooperation between local officials and their communities.¹⁵⁹ In another example, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) provided funding for the construction of medical points in twelve remote village locations. In order to do so, they depended on the ability of local government officials to mobilize the local population. Marat Usupov, the Director of UNIDO in Kyrgyzstan, noted that “the *ayil okmotu* takes a very active role in the governance of their territories and we rely on them to execute the projects. We do not have a staff to build the aid stations. This labor must be provided by the *ayil okmotu*. In most cases they must recruit volunteers, and generally they are successful at doing this.”¹⁶⁰

The Aga Khan Foundation, too, provides funds for medical points, and also the construction of kindergartens and the provision of clean drinking water, among other things. They award grants of up to \$10,000 for projects based on the proposals that members of local communities develop themselves. Like other donor organizations, Aga Khan requires a local contribution, which hinges on the ability of local government officials—*ayil okmotu*, deputies of local councils, and members of community user associations—to recruit members of the local community to directly participate in a project’s realization. An Aga Khan project manager in Osh noted that these are all “joint implementation projects” that depend heavily on the ability of local officials to manage their end of the project—they “play a big role in making this other side [of the joint implementation] work, in mobilizing contributions.”¹⁶¹ Notably, not every project is

¹⁵⁹ *Agenstvo Razvitiya I Investirovaniya Soobshchestv (ARIS)*.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with author, June 2013.

¹⁶¹ Interview with author, October 2, 2013. KYG1_Mt2_6.

successful. When it fails, it is often because the “relationship between the local community and local authorities is not good” (ibid.). Conversely, when village officials have local acquaintances who they can call for help, they succeed better at their jobs. As a high-level official from USAID in Bishkek noted, “some *ayil okmotu* have gotten quite good at generating their own streams of revenue based almost purely on their personality and connections. These officials have the ability to initiate their own projects and act on their own without consulting the central government.”¹⁶²

The *ayil okmotu* of Tuluikun (Kara-Suu district, Osh *oblast*) described multiple projects sponsored by ARIS, which provided 95% of project costs in exchange for a five percent local contribution. “Before beginning any project we have to go into the community and talk to people. People must agree in advance to help—to give money, or to agree to work—otherwise the project will not happen.” He added that ARIS could never do this themselves. “It would be difficult, very difficult because you must know the people—I’ve lived here my whole life.” Laughing, he added, “everyone knows everyone here.” In other localities throughout Kara-suu district, ARIS supported numerous projects in the same way: 1.3 million *som*¹⁶³ for the village of “Kyrgyzstan” and 400,000 for Ozkur to replace and fix electric cables; 700,000 *som* for the creation of a computer lab and 300,000 for the construction of a “chess hall” (*shakhmatnyi zal*) in Uchar.¹⁶⁴ In every instance the *ayil okmotu* relies on local support and cooperation. As one villager described, “generally the *ayil okmotu* does his best, but he cannot do much without local help. These days most of the main jobs are done by common people.”¹⁶⁵ One study even frames

¹⁶² Interview with author, July 15, 2013 (KYG1_Mt1_34)

¹⁶³ The *som* is the national currency of Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁶⁴ Multiple interviews, 2013.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with author, October 4, 2013, KYG1_Int2_49ii.

local governance in Kyrgyzstan as a collective action problem and describes the *ayil okmotu* as the solution (Ibraimova 2009: 136-7).

Even in the absence of third-party financial support, local budgets are so small that the mobilization of the local population is often the only viable way to tackle local initiatives. Sometimes the local contribution is the only contribution. The *ayil okmotu* in a Kyrgyz village succeeds at fixing the road when he knows enough people whom he can call on to shovel dirt and rock. In a village not far from Karakol city (Issyk-kul *oblast*), a group of villagers worked with the *ayil okmotu* to build a pond on a large abandoned plot that had recently been transferred to municipal property. Together they dug out a sizeable pond and even stocked it with fish.¹⁶⁶

Importantly, the ability to mobilize local social networks is a two-way street of interconnected obligations. If the *ayil okmotu* can call on volunteers to help fix a road, it is only because it is understood—even if only implicitly—that he, too, must provide his own help and assistance to others when the time comes. Moreover, individuals who volunteer labor for ostensibly public projects might be doing so out of their own sense of personal obligation to the *ayil okmotu*, perhaps for a debt that was incurred in the past, maybe even before he or she held public office.

It might also be the case that the *ayil okmotu* is simultaneously drawing on different sources of authority, stemming from his multiple and overlapping social roles in the village. In the abstract, he is requesting help from ordinary villagers, but in concrete terms he might be calling on help from his brothers, former colleagues or students, or various other kinds of clients. In these cases the *ayil okmotu* benefits from personalized forms of authority outside of his official one. An element of coercion is implied here, but personal forms of authority and face-to-

¹⁶⁶ Field notes, plus subsequent correspondence (June 2013; February 2014).

face clientelism are based on some level of trust and reciprocity, which is precisely what makes them unique (Scott 1972; Powell 1977). Just as family, friends, and close acquaintances will be in no position to refuse the *ayil okmotu*, the *ayil okmotu* will not easily be able to refuse them in turn. These are diffuse reciprocal obligations embedded in whole-person relationships that are neither public nor private alone; they are simultaneously public *and* private.

In fact, the reason the *ayil okmotu* might organize a project to fix the road in the first place is because members of the local community have demanded that it be fixed, in which case the mere organization of a crew to perform the work is fulfilling a responsibility that might be public (and “official”) in nature, but still partly driven by private obligations to particular individuals. Thus, the *ayil okmotu* is often simultaneously responding to local demands while also relying on local social support to fulfill them; favors are being asked from some in order to do favors for others, reinforcing the web of mutual reciprocity that connects local officials to various members of the community. In addition to this, though, the *ayil okmotu* might very well be carrying out small personal favors on a regular basis—providing his own labor, transportation, and even money to help others. I discuss these dynamics in fine-grained empirical detail in the village-level study that I present in the final section of this chapter.

Again, all of this is fostered by the institutional design of local government itself, which in Kyrgyzstan vaguely tasks *ayil okmotu* with the responsibility to address “problems of local significance,” as determined by the local community itself.¹⁶⁷ As I discussed in the previous chapter, local self-government, as the name implies, places the impetus for action at the community level and tasks local officials with representing and realizing the interests of that community. As one state official observed, the result is that “people learned the plain truth:

¹⁶⁷ The quotation comes from the constitution (Article 7 of the first constitution and Section VII of the most recent one), and designates the sphere of activities for which local governments can take responsibility.

local self-government is the authority [*vlast*] that they themselves form, implement, and control” (Fattakhov 2013: 8). Recent research has shown that Kyrgyzstan’s local self-government system, in conjunction with funding from external donors, has, in fact made local officials more responsive to local needs and demands (Babajanian 2015).¹⁶⁸

In Kazakhstan, however, the institutional design of local government makes local officials’ own initiatives irrelevant and virtually prevents local communities from playing any role in decision-making or policy implementation. As I described in the previous chapter, village-level *akims* in Kazakhstan do not create policy; instead, they are tasked with implementing policies that were determined at higher levels of state administration. When offering solutions for how to make local government more effective, the advisor to a local deputy did not suggest more interaction with the local population, but better communication with Astana: “Collect all unresolved problems and send them to Astana so that they can be solved through the vertical [of power] and the responsible state organs.”¹⁶⁹

The result is that the process of local governance insulates the *akim* from the needs, demands, and preferences of the local population and eliminates both the necessity and the possibility of local, bottom-up initiatives. In fact, local *akims* who become overzealous proponents or defenders of local interests are putting their careers in jeopardy and might even face criminal prosecution for “corruption” or “abusing power.” Importantly, the institutional constraints on the *akim* informs his own understanding of what his public and social responsibilities in the village are, determining what things he should do and how he should do them. As a public official who carries out the orders of state elites, there is rarely a situation in

¹⁶⁸ This study focused exclusively on village infrastructure projects stemming from the World Bank’s Village Investment Project. Despite documenting local officials’ responsiveness to local demands related to this particular program, the study raised doubts that there were any effects on government accountability more broadly.

¹⁶⁹ “Results of Research on the Work of Deputies of the Maslikhat of Almaty City,” The Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan, Presentation of Findings at the *Kazhol* hotel, Almaty, April 22, 2014.

which the village *akim* might feel that he or she owes members of the local communities any favors, or that there is an obligation to help any individual person. To quote Nurmakhamedov again:

The [village] *akims* stand only before the higher *akims* and the president, and not the population. [...] The *akim* isn't interested in village problems. He has no incentive to listen to local people and has no reason to meet them and hear their opinions. He always looks up, and takes orders from the top. So what does he need to listen to the village people for?¹⁷⁰

Others have similarly noted:

Every level of administration is subordinate to a higher level and takes no political responsibility before the population for its own activities. One can say that political responsibility is put exclusively on the central organs of power. It appears that such a system does not give local authorities any of the needed motivation for [their own] initiatives or for their full-fledged work toward the social-economic development of their own regions (Burlakov and Shimshikov 2004: 62).

As one former local official himself explained, “everything is decided without the approval [of] or consultation with the local population.”¹⁷¹ Thus, as the process of everyday local governance unfolds, existing social gaps between the village *akim* and the local population expand. And, if social relationships are maintained through reciprocal exchange, as Gullette and Werner argue, then any social relationships with co-villagers that might already exist are likely to wither away (Werner 1998; Gullette 2010a). These institutional constraints are obvious to the *akim*, but not always evident to the local community, who come to see their local official as distant and nonresponsive. When idle in his office, the *akim* might say that he is “waiting for orders”—villagers, on the other hand, are likely to say that he is “sitting around.” That is, the institutional constraints imposed on the *akim* are not always visible to the community, but his repeated failures to address their complaints are.

When describing the work of the *akim* in his village, an unemployed young man in Akmola *oblast*, put it simply—“He doesn't work.” Pointing to a fallen tree that obstructed a dirt

¹⁷⁰ Interview with author, March 28, 2014.

¹⁷¹ KAZ_Int2_39ii.

footpath in the small park where we stood, he said, “look, this tree fell over a month ago and it is still laying here. The *akim* hasn’t done anything and he’s probably never going to.”¹⁷² An older man in the village was less forgiving: “He does not fucking work. He does not do anything. He sees nothing and he does nothing.”¹⁷³ His wife added, “you can complain to him, but he won’t do anything. The government gives him money but he doesn’t fix our problems. In the winter we have no roads. There are two meters of snow and nobody to clean it. Even when there is no snow the roads are all broken, you’ve seen it for yourself.”¹⁷⁴

As I described above (and in chapter three), it isn’t the formal institutional role of the village *akim* to “see” local problems, or even to hear about them from others in the village. If something falls outside of his official duties, the *akim* is unlikely to address it. A tree that unexpectedly falls in the park is just one example. In fact, he might even be reprimanded if he were to begin taking on tasks at his own initiative, or in response to the complaints of villagers. Virtually nothing is decided in the village itself.

This means that even when the *akim* is seen to be “working,” he is rarely addressing the problems that people find important, and is sometimes doing things that are not seen as being particularly useful to anyone. The reorganization of village squares to inaugurate the appointment of a new village *akim* that was described above is but one example. Here local officials’ work in Kazakhstan fails to be recognized as such by ordinary people because it does not address what they perceive to be problems. Even though planting new flowers and beautifying public space is probably intended to solicit the good will of local residents, it tends to be viewed as a waste of time and resources, or simply self-indulgent. Zhangel'dy Shimshikov,

¹⁷² Interview with author, June 29, 2014. KAZ_Int2_45.

¹⁷³ Interview with author, July 12, 2014. KAZ_Int2_48c.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

the director of the Center for Social-Economic Research, a subdivision within the Ministry of Education and Science, puts it accordingly:

People [in a village] might demand that local officials start to clean up the roads and take away manure, but they cannot just do this, and if they do it will hurt their reputation in the eyes of the government. Other officials at the higher levels will not be satisfied by this work. They have to do as they're told. So if they're told to water all of the plants when it's raining, that is what they will be doing. Then, the people will see them and ask "why are you watering the plants if it's raining" and the *akim* can only say "this is what I was told to do." If you want to understand the work of local officials you have to remember the vertical power relationships in the country.¹⁷⁵

Indeed, I stress that the social relations that matter most to village *akims* in Kazakhstan in the course of doing their jobs are those they have with their superiors at higher levels of state administration, not with the local population. The everyday practice of village governance institutionalizes a barrier between the local population and local authorities that both parallels and reinforces the social disconnect between them. Their station at the bottom of a hierarchical system, in which they answer only upward to those who hire and fire them, "causes their independence from the demands of citizens and the inhabitants" of the village (Makhmutova 2004: 8.). Both because they are appointed and because they do not rely on the population for anything, "*akims* do not know *how or for what reason* it is necessary it secure the support of the community" (ibid.: 9).¹⁷⁶ In the final section of this chapter I compare the work of two local officials in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and show how the same mundane official act—driving to the district center—has profoundly different meanings because of the different institutional and social contexts in which it is done.

Before moving on, however, it is crucial to note that, unlike in Kyrgyzstan, there is an additional source of authority in Kazakhstan that the local population can turn to when their own officials are unresponsive. The local-level work of the president's political party, *Nur Otan*, has tended to displace local officials as the main agents to whom local people can turn for help. The

¹⁷⁵ Interview with author, July 23, 2014.

¹⁷⁶ Emphasis in original.

effect has had a tremendous impact on how ordinary people view their relationship to the state, often seeing the central government (and the president himself) as the guarantors of local interests, while local officials become pariahs who would be fired if only the president knew how poorly they worked. I do not intend to suggest that ordinary people form deep social ties with the party—which itself is an abstraction—but that the work of the party undermines any deep social ties that might otherwise develop between the population and local state officials.

Whether this “good tsar” dynamic is the purposeful outcome of state and party organization is not addressed here. But, it has certainly worked in the president’s favor, making him a local hero in people’s own struggles against local officials. In the next chapter, I will show—using both national polling data and local ethnographic data—that the ordinary people in each state have inverse patterns of personal trust for local versus central authorities: people in Kyrgyzstan trust their own local officials above and instead of central authorities, while those in Kazakhstan trust the president (and his party) much more than their own local authorities. This, as I will go on to show in chapter six, shapes how local people relate to “local” officials versus outsiders and results in the different styles of contentious politics surrounding cadre appointment that I described in chapter two.

Nur Otan and the Origins of the “Good Tsar” in Contemporary Kazakhstan

President Nazarbayev created *Nur Otan* in 1999. As one of the few full-length studies of *Nur Otan* concludes, the main reason that Nazarbayev created the party was “in order to achieve a better control of the formal sphere” of administration (Del Sordi 2012: 26). More specifically, the president was rattled by the defection of a prominent former provincial *akim* and prime minister, Akezhan Kazhegeldin in 1997-8 (Isaacs 2011: 82). I discuss this political conflict in

more detail in chapter six; suffice it to say for now that open insubordination and confrontation by a formal regional official prompted the president to take additional steps to control regional cadre.

Indeed, as this section of the chapter will emphasize, *Nur Otan* is primarily a means of monitoring and sanctioning the activities of appointed officials at all sub-national levels, particularly *akims*. This includes deliberate strategies to limit local authorities' interactions with the communities that they work in, thereby undercutting the formation of local social ties. Thus, *Nur Otan* reinforces and strengthens the formal administrative system of appointments.

Like the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that preceded it, *Nur Otan* is organized in parallel to the state. It has a central headquarters located in the capital city and subsidiary branch offices headquartered in each administrative center at the provincial, district, and village levels.¹⁷⁷ Just as the *akim* of each administrative level answers to the *akim* of the next highest level within the state administration, the chairman of each party branch of *Nur Otan* answers to the chairman of the party branch at the next highest level. When people believe that their local *akim* is not solving their problems—which, as I discussed above, he often is not—people are encouraged to go to *Nur Otan*, which can bring pressure to bear, often with positive results. I will illustrate with one brief story from a village in Sairam *raion*, South Kazakhstan *oblast*, focusing on the different roles played by *Nur Otan* and the local *akim* in relationship to the local population.¹⁷⁸

Here the provincial governor, in conjunction with district level officials, had dispatched inspectors and engineers to the village and determined that the underground gas lines needed to

¹⁷⁷ The village-level party organizations are formally called primary party organizations (*Pervichnye Partiinye Organizatsii*), just as their Soviet-era predecessors were. Some local people today even refer to the village-level branches as “party cells” (*partiinye yacheiki*), as they were known during Lenin’s time.

¹⁷⁸ I am not using the name of the village, and I have changed the names of all the informants in order to preserve anonymity.

be replaced. In fact, people had been heating their homes with coal for several years. The provincial governor released funds to the village-level *akim*, who was tasked with issuing a tender and finding a contractor to do the work.

It became immediately apparent to inhabitants of the village, however, that the person who won the tender was not qualified to do the job. The pipes that he brought to the site were old and rusty, and he worked with a crew of unskilled laborers who had no machinery. The crew proceeded to spend several weeks digging holes to find broken underground pipes. The contractor and all of his crew had come from Shymkent city and were not known by any of the residents. Because the *akim* was not a local person, but himself from Shymkent, rumors quickly spread that the contractor was a personal friend of his, and that he won the tender only because they had secretly agreed to a kickback scheme.¹⁷⁹ As one informant told me, “this is common—the *akim* doesn’t want to find the best qualified person. He just wants to find someone who will pay him the biggest share of the tender.” In this case, it was believed that the *akim* had pocketed half of the money that had been provided for the project. This cannot be verified. But, the fact that nearly everyone in the village believed it to be true demonstrates their frustration with a process from which they were completely excluded, and the perception that the local *akim* works only with and for his superiors and friends—not with or for the local population.¹⁸⁰

If the contractor had succeeded in rebuilding the gas pipes, then villagers’ anger might have remained latent. But, concerns over corruption and shoddy work were justified when after six months of work the project remained incomplete. Winter came, but many people did not provision themselves with coal as they ordinarily would have because they used their scarce

¹⁷⁹ Shymkent is the nearest urban center and considered the third major city in the country, after Almaty and Astana. It is the administrative center of South Kazakhstan *oblast*, the province in which this village is located.

¹⁸⁰ It is also a perfectly plausible and even likely scenario. Kickback schemes like the one alleged here are, by all accounts, common and widespread. One contractor dismissed the entire tender process as “*tendr shmendr*.”

resources for other things, having anticipated gas heat. People complained to the *akim* in person, and he did nothing. So several villagers gathered together and went to Zhomart, a forty-year old man who was regarded as one of the most educated the village. They asked Zhomart if he would write a formal letter to the *akim*, demanding to know when the gas would be working.

The *akim* responded promptly to the letter. In his response to Zhomart, the *akim* claimed that he had already confronted the contractor many times and threatened to refer him to the state prosecutor if the project was not finished. But, nobody believed that the *akim* would call the prosecutor for a problem in which he himself was complicit. The fact that he had not already done so was evidence enough that he never intended to. So, the problem continued for several more months. Eventually, the work came to a complete stop, leaving villagers convinced that the contractor had simply run out of money and that the project would never be completed. In total, more than a year passed after the project was first initiated.

Finally, Zhomart collaborated with other villagers to write a letter to *Nur Otan*, at the district-level branch. The letter documented the costs of the project, the amount of time that had elapsed, the old and rusty pipes, the shoddy workmanship, and the prior correspondence with the *akim*, noting his reluctance to take action and his unwillingness to confront the contractor. *Nur Otan* responded to the letter immediately. Within days they sent investigators to the village and determined that the complaints were justified. They referred the case to the prosecutor (also a party member) and the contractor was told that he had ten days to complete the project or face prosecution.

The contractor and his workers came to Zhomart's house, demanding that he withdraw the complaint. There were seven men in total, all carrying shovels, implicitly threatening violence. But, since *Nur Otan* had already been informed of the situation, he decided that he

could safely refuse the men, which he did. Ultimately, they went back to work, completing the project in one month, probably at their own expense. Today the village has gas heat, though everyone is certain that the rusty pipes will probably break again soon, and they will have to go through the entire process again. As Zhomart summarized the whole experience, “it was only because of *Nur Otan* that we have gas. They did everything. The *akim* was corrupt and the contractor was his friend, so he was never going to do anything about it. If the central government did everything itself, we would not have all of these problems.”¹⁸¹

Indeed, this story encapsulates a broader political dynamic that expresses the different kinds of relationships people have with *Nur Otan* in comparison to their own state officials. *Nur Otan* is understood to represent local interests and help people with their problems while local state authorities (*akims*) are frequently viewed as corrupt, working only for themselves. As a woman in Sairam district put it, “*Nur Otan* will take the side of the people and fight for the people’s needs and interests. The *akimat* is for taking care of official state business, but *Nur Otan* is there to solve the problems of the people.”¹⁸² Countless residents from villages throughout South Kazakhstan and Akmola *oblasts* described making regular visits to *Nur Otan* party offices seeking solutions to problems that local officials would not address; many recounted that they and others they knew would wait in long lines in order to do so, seeing this as the best possible way to address local problems.

During the May 9 Victory Day celebration in Aksukent—the district-center of Sairam—droves of teenagers and young adults arrived wearing *Nur Otan* hats and t-shirts, all gifts from the party. One man in his early twenties described this as a social movement.

¹⁸¹ Multiple interviews with the author, May 2014. Most of this story was relayed to me directly through Zhomart, but also through his acquaintances, including some of the villagers who first came to him with a request to help them write letters.

¹⁸² Interview with author, May 14, 2014, KAZ_Int1_33a.

This is the *Nur Otan* movement. The young people raise questions about the conditions where they live and they bring these issues to the party's attention. The party supports this and encourages people to make suggestions and propose ideas. I personally want to start one of these [party] groups in my district...we still don't have paved roads or a sewage system [*kanalizatsiia*]. Why don't we have this? It's a shame to live under such conditions. We wrote letters to the local *akimat*, and we also wrote letters to the president's administration and to *Nur Otan*. Only *Nur Otan* responded and they promised to come and look at the situation and start working on it.¹⁸³

As this testimony suggests, the party itself actively supports and encourages this kind of local mobilization. In fact, *Nur Otan* does not function so much as a political party—focused on mobilizing, organizing, and interacting with its own members—as a public institution, open to everyone. Sometimes it stands above (and even against) actual public servants. Stanislav Kankurov, the Deputy Chairman of the *Nur Otan* party branch in Almaty city, put it accordingly: “Why do people think that *Nur Otan* is so influential and effective? Because we position ourselves as a communication hub between the people and the government, the population and the executive. It is one of the party's aims, to achieve this communication.”¹⁸⁴

Indeed, according to the party's official doctrine, which outlines “new principles of interaction” between state and society, the party seeks “to reshape a completely new character in the relations between citizens and the state.”¹⁸⁵ And, in recent years the party has sold itself based on the concept of “public reception” (*obshchestvennaya priemnaya*)—the idea that the party has an open door and is there to field public complaints. It is, in short, establishing itself as a public ombudsman. The party recently launched an “E-party” project, which allows people to communicate directly with the party through online interfaces. Visitors to *Nur Otan*'s website, for example, will notice a prominent link in the center of the homepage for “public reception,” where one can file an appeal directly to the party, make an appointment to meet with a party

¹⁸³ Interview with author, KAZ_Int1_33d.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with author, May June 1, 2014.

¹⁸⁵ <http://nurotan.kz/ru/doktrina> last viewed March 9, 2014.

representative in their area, submit questions “about vital problems,” or become full-fledged party members.¹⁸⁶

Likewise, a party member and *akimat* employee in Shymkent city notes that *Nur Otan* organizes weekly meetings with citizens—*zasedanie po obrashcheniyu grazhdan*—where anyone can come and report problems.¹⁸⁷ Sometimes the party requires different state officials to attend these meetings and answer questions. *Nur Otan*, she says, “will solve problems right there, when they arise during these meetings. The function of *Nur Otan* is to defend people’s interests and protect the population.” The party also holds regular Open House meetings (*Den Otkrytie Dveri*), sometimes as frequently as once a week. Each meeting is open to the public and devoted to a single public issue. The relevant state officials are required to attend and answer questions. In both of these examples, the president’s party provides the only link between ordinary people and members of the state administration. And, it does so in such a way that puts state officials on the defensive while the party positions itself on the side of the citizenry.

Importantly, one of the most significant elements of *Nur Otan*’s public personae is that it is President Nazarbayev’s political party, and widely viewed as a direct channel to the president himself (Isaacs 2011: 45). Summarizing a sentiment that was expressed in different ways by countless informants, and implied by much of the party’s own literature, one former local official put it simply: “*Nur Otan* – this is the president.”¹⁸⁸ Because the party stands for the president, and because it has made public outreach a key priority, people have come to see it as the best avenue for action when their own local officials are not responsive. The editor of a small newspaper in Sairam attributed *Nur Otan*’s popularity to “the enthusiastic and energetic

¹⁸⁶ The other two prominent links on the homepage, which are sandwiched between two images of the president, are to join the party or to read the party doctrine.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with author, May 19, 2014, KAZ_Int1_2.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with author, June 20, 2014, KAZ_Int2_39.

personality of Nazarbayev.”¹⁸⁹ Even a *maslikhat* deputy noted that people prefer to interact with *Nur Otan* instead of local officials because it is “more scrupulous, more thorough...and, I would not be mistaken to say that it is even more soulful [*bolee dushevnyi*].”¹⁹⁰

But, *akims* at different levels of state administration are themselves members of *Nur Otan*. In 2007, a ban was lifted that formally prohibited state employees from joining political parties, at which time “the country’s Akims rushed to join Nur Otan [...] out of loyalty,” though this merely “made legitimate what was already informally apparent” (Isaacs 2011: 82). In other words, the administrative relationship between local and regional officials and the party is very close. Moreover, *akims* typically serve as chairmen of the party branch corresponding to the administrative territory where they are appointed as *akim*. This means that the party and government are fused together, at least according to their formal organization. How, then, can the party discipline the *akim* and why would any *akim*, in his role as party chairman, take action against the *akimat* that he or she has been appointed to run?

In fact, the party chairman is merely a figurehead. Party insiders and state officials report in private that—like the Communist Party before it—the real locus of authority in any sub-national party branch is the deputy chairman. That is, the deputy chairman is formally subordinate to the chairman, but informally the boss of the corresponding party apparatus. This is because the deputy chairman is directly appointed from party headquarters in Astana and is not responsible to the chairman of the same party branch. To the contrary, one of the deputy chairman’s ostensible purposes is to keep Astana informed about the work of the chairman, who is also the corresponding *akim*. This, again, speaks to the administrative functions of the party, helping the president maintain more control over his appointed *akims* at subnational levels.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with author, May 10, 2014, KAZ_Int1_21.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with author, July 15, 2014, KAZ_Int2_41.

In addition, *Nur Otan* still has to win elections while the *akims* themselves do not. As Hale reminds us, the national elites of post-Soviet countries are regularly engaged in “impression management.” They rely heavily on public opinion to bolster perceptions of their invincibility, and to shape expectations about the stability of their tenure (Hale 2015: 73-76). By disciplining (or appearing to discipline) corrupt local officials, *Nur Otan* simultaneously solves public problems and bolsters its reputation for honesty and efficiency. In 2008, the party initiated a nationwide anti-corruption campaign. At the local level, campaigns like this make *Nur Otan*’s activities highly visible, “ensures greater recognition with citizens,” and “adds to the perception that the party is working on behalf of the president, who is working on behalf of all the people in Kazakhstan” (Isaacs 2011: 148). By creating a responsive avenue to address local problems, *Nur Otan* provides people with at least some tangible benefit, even if it is, ironically, used against the party’s own members and the very state administrators who are supposed to provide public goods.

The key result, as Zhangeldy Shimshikov noted, is that “*Nur Otan* brings some authority to people and creates a resemblance of people’s power.”¹⁹¹ This also fits with a broader style of governmentality that others have described. Nazarbayev has worked to build a relationship with the population based on “beneficence and efficiency,” seeing its main task as “facilitating the exchanges that will meet [people’s] needs and desires by providing incentive and corrections to problems that crop up in the system” (Adams and Rustemova 2009: 1251). In comparison to Karimov’s “paternalistic governmentality” in Uzbekistan, the predominant style of state-society relations in Kazakhstan is described as “managerial governmentality” (ibid.).

¹⁹¹ Director of the Center for Social-Economic Research under the Ministry of Education and Science, Astana. Interview with author, July 23, 2014.

Whether intentional or not, the party and government are fused together in a way that allows the president to take credit for local accomplishments while simultaneously putting him in the position to visibly punish insubordination. The perception is that when local problems persist, it is because local officials are corrupt, acting against the will of the president; when local problems are solved, it is because local officials are loyal to the president and do as he intended. This is the classic “good tsar” phenomenon, the effects of which I discuss in the next chapter. Importantly, then, the president’s party reinforces the same local social dynamics fostered by institutions of local government.

I do not mean to suggest that ordinary people in Kazakhstan form personalistic social ties to *Nur Otan*. For as much as *Nur Otan* is a proxy for the president, it is still a distant and abstract one. I only mean to suggest that the work of the party, intentionally or not, undercuts the kinds of social ties people might otherwise develop with their own local officials, all other mitigating factors considered. The key result is that people form relationships to the state differently than they do in Kyrgyzstan. As I will describe in detail in the next chapter, ordinary people in each state inversely describe how they value the work of central versus local government and also describe different levels of trust for local officials versus officials in the central government, all of which is corroborated by national-level polling data.

IV. A Comparative Study of Social Ties and Local Government in Two Villages

The purpose of this section is to provide in-depth accounts of the varying relationships and processes of village governance that I described above. It is divided into two sections, each based around an ethnographic study of one village in each state. I discuss the socio-territorial origins of two local officials and the ways in which they interact with the local community

during the process of everyday governance. Aside from the names of the provinces (*oblasts*), all proper nouns used here have been altered to protect the identity of informants. The names of the villages themselves—Mountain village and North village—are entirely fictional.

The village-level data presented throughout this chapter are drawn from a series of other villages in different regions, as noted in the text. Thus, this section serves to reinforce the patterns presented above, though it does so in finer-grained detail. Unlike the data presented above, though, which come from villages of varying sizes, with both small and large populations, that are ethnically homogenous or ethnically mixed, and that are either relatively rich or poor, the village studies presented here are better controlled for comparison. Both villages are relatively small, with populations of between five to eight thousand people. And, both are relatively remote and relatively poor, two factors that tend to go together in both states. This is important because the rich social ties between local officials and communities that I describe in Kyrgyzstan, which might intuitively be attributed to the smallness of the village, do not exist in villages of the same size in Kazakhstan. Overall, this section can be read both as a paired comparison of two villages, and also as two case studies that exemplify the contrasting patterns described throughout this chapter, only in greater detail. In the final section, I provide some further caveats on the substance of this section and the chapter as a whole.

Nurlan baike, Naryn oblast, Kyrgyzstan

The *ayil okmotu* of Mountain village is Nurlan *baike*. Nurlan is a lifelong inhabitant of the village, which is located in a fairly remote and mountainous region of Naryn province. He was born here and raised by his aunt, who lived and worked here all of her life, when it was a collective farm. Now in her nineties, she continues to live with Nurlan and his wife, Meerim.

Nurlan's biological parents live next door with his youngest brother, Azamat, his wife, and their three young children. His two younger brothers, Kanbolot and Talant, also live in the village with their wives and children, as does his younger sister, Jyldyz. Nurlan's wife and Kanbolot's wife are from neighboring villages, all within the same small district that is linked together by a single, partially paved road. Nurlan's four children are young adults who now live in Bishkek and come back to the village at different times in the year to help with the family's small household farm.

Nurlan started his career as a teacher in the local school. He went on to become the school principal, and then the school director, a position he held until he was elected as *ayil okmotu* in 2005. His first term ended in 2009, at which time he was re-elected, this time indirectly, by the local council, in accordance with the new electoral laws that were established in 2008.¹⁹²

When I first visited Mountain village, in June and July of 2013, nearly every household was engaged in haymaking, creating fodder for the coming winter. But, among the nearly 7,000 inhabitants, only one person owned a fully functioning tractor. A lack of working farm machinery was one of the biggest challenges faced by ordinary people throughout the region, and the state programs for making machinery more accessible—which I discuss below—were hardly adequate. Most people had to rely on their direct acquaintances for assistance in working their fields. Many people went to Nurlan both because he was the public official most responsible for providing this help, and also because he could actually provide it. The most reliable tractor in the village was owned by Nurlan's close friend, Turar. Nurlan and Turar described each other as

¹⁹² Every time he had the opportunity to do so, Nurlan bragged that he won 78% of the vote when direct elections were conducted in 2005. He said that this system of direct elections was better because “votes could not be bought,” implying that the system of indirect elections by the village council was corrupt. Interview with author, July 19, 2013.

relatives (*rodstvenniki*), but they were not, in fact, direct kin. Nurlan was more than ten years older than Turar, but their fathers were close friends and the men had known each other their entire lives.

Nurlan utilized his ties to Turar and routinely brokered arrangements with other villagers who desperately needed help cutting and collecting grass. Turar not only provided his machinery at Nurlan's request, but often volunteered his labor as well. Nurlan called on Turar to do this not only for other villagers, but for the municipal land in the village itself, which produced fodder that Nurlan could dole out as he saw fit, to both his direct acquaintances and, more broadly and generously, to those who were very poor and in need of help.

Nurlan called on Turar for his assistance on a nearly daily basis, usually for reasons related to his tractor, but also sometimes because he owned a fairly reliable "mountain car."¹⁹³ In one instance, Turar was interrupted from his work early in the morning because Nurlan needed Turar to drive him to the summer pasture, which was nearly three hours away on unpaved mountain roads. Nurlan had promised to bring some staple food products—vegetables and flour—to a close friend, Manas (also described as a "relative"). Manas was grazing animals in the mountain pastures for the entire summer, without access to any products not derived directly from the animals themselves.

Manas was not only a lifelong friend of Nurlan's (and a close acquaintance of Turar's), he was also Nurlan's shepherd and looked after his modest holding of ten horses and nearly twenty sheep, which were among the hundreds put under his care by others in the community. Manas was relatively poor and Nurlan both paid him for his services and regularly brought him gifts, the giving of which was the ostensible purpose of this trip. But, Manas may have given

¹⁹³ That is, a car that could drive off road, including through the mountainous terrain that the village was situated in.

more than he received in this instance, slaughtering a sheep to provide a meal for his guests. He also provided bottomless servings of *kymys* (fermented mare's milk), which was produced through his wife's labor, but using milk from the horses that were in their care, including Nurlan's. We ate with Manas' family—his wife and five children—and with another shepherd and his wife, who were invited by Manas and also known personally by Nurlan and Turar.

The purpose of the trip, it turned out, was not only to visit Manas and provide him with goods, but also to visit other shepherds on the pasture, all of whom Nurlan described as “relatives.” He gifted each of them with a large bag of tomatoes, which he had purchased at the bazaar with his own money. It turned out that most of these shepherds also watched over a token number of Nurlan's animals. Nurlan had nearly 30 horses and 100 sheep in total, which he divided among these different shepherds, who were also his friends and co-villagers. The social ties between Nurlan and these shepherds, then, were simultaneously economic and social. But, as the *ayil okmotu* of the village in which all of these men lived with their families, their ties were political as well. Moreover, Nurlan was a member of the pasture committee, which governs the pasture union that every shepherd in the community belongs to. This created yet another link tying all of these individuals together. In this way the institutions of local government—the *ayil okmotu* and the pasture community—reinforced and duplicated Nurlan's personalistic social ties with his co-villagers.

We stayed in the mountains for the night, sleeping in one of Manas' two *yurts*. We drove back to the village early in the morning, at which point Turar immediately headed off to finish the work that Nurlan had interrupted him from the previous morning. He still had a lot of grass to cut.

Why was Turar so quick to help Nurlan? He endlessly volunteered his own time and labor, answering all of Nurlan's requests, and he did so willingly, without complaint, or at least appeared to. Admittedly, visible appearances can be deceptive, most of all to the foreign (and admittedly novice) researcher. In all likelihood, Turar must have sometimes experienced resentment and bitterness at Nurlan, even if he could not express this openly.

There were many factors animating this relationship that were not easy to disentangle. First, Nurlan was a close lifelong friend of Turar and his family, and he was also older than Turar, which placed him in a position of authority independent of his role as a public official. In their personal and inter-family relationships alone these men did not have equal status, which made it virtually impossible for Turar to willfully refuse a request made by Nurlan. To do so would have been highly disrespectful and almost confrontational. Nurlan's role as *ayil okmotu* both duplicated and bolstered the high levels of personal authority he already had in relationship with Turar, and with others in the village like him. Thus, there was a coercive element to these relations, even if only an implicit one stemming from unequal status.

But, it was not coercion alone. This was a deeply affective personal relationship that encompassed a lifetime of interaction, close family histories, innumerable mutual acquaintances, and patron-client exchanges. These ties produced reciprocal obligations that were diffuse and subject to moral sanctioning by the larger community. Nurlan could call on Turar for help, but he also had an obligation to provide things in return. That is to say, Turar did not endlessly give things to Nurlan, but also received things from him (work and cash, for example). Reciprocity was at the core of this relationship, which, in the classic literature on clientelism is precisely what distinguishes patron-client ties from other kinds of relationships between unequal partners, like explicit coercion, formal authority, or manipulation (Powell 1977: 142). Powell's abstract

description of clientelism aptly describes the relations between Nurlan and Turar, who was but one of Nurlan's "clients":

In a typical transaction, the low-status actor (client) will receive material goods and services intended to reduce or ameliorate his environmental threats; while the higher status actor (patron) receives less tangible rewards such as personal services, indications of esteem, deference or loyalty, or services of a discretely political nature such as voting (Ibid.).

Turar's most notable benefit was that Nurlan sometimes provided him with paying work, enabling him to generate a cash income in an economic setting with very few opportunities to do so. When Nurlan called on Turar to provide his tractor and labor, it was usually for free, but sometimes it paid. This is because Nurlan used his social ties to other members of the local state administration—at the district-level—to broker relationships between Nurlan and farmers in neighboring villages, who would then rent Turar's tractor, and sometimes his labor.

Among Nurlan's many acquaintances in the state administration was the then-serving head of the Ministry of Agriculture at the district level, Marat, who himself had previously been the *ayil okmotu* of a neighboring village. Nurlan and Marat had known each other since childhood, and, as *ayil okmotu* of a neighboring village, regarded one another as friends and colleagues. One of Marat's official responsibilities in the ministry was the administration of a state program designed to make farm machinery more accessible to rural inhabitants by providing leases and subsidized loans for their purchase. Though the machinery was badly needed by local residents, the Ministry of Agriculture required 30% of the lease payment in advance. By Marat's own estimation, based on his experience as a lifelong inhabitant of the region and the former *ayil okmotu* of his own village, this was entirely unaffordable. "This isn't possible. I don't know what they are thinking about. Maybe if people could pay 10% instead of 30%, it would be a useful program and people could use the machines to work."¹⁹⁴ The result is

¹⁹⁴ Interview with author, July 22, 2013, KYG1_Int_35.

that Marat rarely tried to direct people toward these leases, even though it was his job to do so. When farmers came to him with an interest in the tractor lease program, he frequently connected them with tractor owners in the area who were willing to lease their own machines for a much more reasonable fee. This included Turar, who was connected to Marat through Nurlan.¹⁹⁵

Notably, Marat's social ties to his own village ran deep and sometimes his personal priorities competed with his official state obligations. In addition to Turar, two other tractor owners in his own village were the beneficiaries of Marat's placement in the ministry, receiving work through their personal connections to him. Tellingly, the wall of Marat's office was decorated with only two things—an official seal of the Kyrgyz Republic and a calendar titled “Red Moon Father,” each month of which featured the image of an historical figure from Red Moon village, where Marat had lived his whole life.

Turar was hardly the only villager who benefited from his ties to Nurlan. As I described above, Nurlan also provided scarce goods to shepherds (who were also his friends and relatives) on distant summer pastures. In addition, on a nearly daily basis, he did favors—both big and small—for ordinary people in the village who had varying degrees of connections to him personally. While I have focused on only a few relationships for the purposes of in-depth discussion, it needs to be noted that Nurlan personally knew every person he came into contact with on a daily basis, calling them by name, exchanging handshakes and hugs, along with other pleasantries. Whether walking or in his car, Nurlan stopped to talk with every person he encountered and did so with great joy and enthusiasm.

¹⁹⁵ Though Marat complained about and disparaged the state leasing program quite openly, he never discussed his alternative solution with me directly. I learned about this, instead, from Turar, with whom I spent a lot of time. In the final section of this chapter I discuss some further details of this case, including the likelihood that both Marat and Nurlan also profited from this scheme.

On one occasion, Nurlan spent an entire day helping a neighbor repair part of his roof. Along with his brother-in-law, he helped an older woman deepen an irrigation ditch on her land because she complained to him that her field was too dry. When a respected village elder came to Nurlan to complain that that he had no electricity, Nurlan immediately offered to drive him to the district-center—about 40 minutes away on poorly paved roads—to see if they could arrange the necessary meetings at the district-level state offices.

Driving to the district center was something that Nurlan did on a semi-regular basis, but he never did it alone. Invariably, his car would be overfilled with people who needed to be dropped off in a different village along the way, or others who needed Nurlan's assistance in gaining access to other state officials. The district center also had innumerable small shops and an open-air bazaar. Sometimes Nurlan took along neighbors just so that they could go shopping for the basic goods that they could not get in the village. When I discuss the work of the village *akim* in Kazakhstan, I describe how this same mundane act—driving to the district center—takes on an entirely different meaning and function that result from the differing institutional and social contexts of local governance.

People came to Nurlan with problems—big and small—at all times of the day, whether he was at home or at the office. The irrelevance of the distinction between his public and private dwellings (his office versus his home) mirrored those between his obligations as a public official and those of personal acquaintance. Whatever the case, it must be stressed that Nurlan viewed his responsibilities to provide this help and assistance as obligatory. Turning down requests for help was not something he could do lightly. As evidence of this, he sometimes avoided people so that he could preclude them from asking for favors that he could not refuse. For instance, he frequently parked his car behind his sister's house so that nobody could see when he was home.

When his car was parked in front of his own house, it beckoned an interminable line of villagers who were in need of some kind of help.

Aside from a scarcity of machinery used for producing fodder, another major longstanding village problem was that wolves would frequently descend from the mountains to prey on household livestock. Livestock in rural Kyrgyzstan are both the foundation of household economies, and also one of the most reliable ways of storing wealth. Nearly everyone, rich and poor alike, keeps some number of chickens, turkeys, cows, and sometimes horses and sheep on their household plots year-round. When wolves prey on these animals, they threaten the lifeblood of household subsistence.

The official state-sanctioned method for addressing this problem was to hire licensed hunters. The hunters must be paid with village funds and also, for logistical reasons, be provided with food and lodging. Since there were no licensed hunters in the village itself, hiring licensed hunters would require that Nurlan spend scarce village resources to pay complete strangers. He complained that professional hunters were only motivated to get paid and had no genuine interest in helping people to protect their livestock.

Moreover, Nurlan himself was already part of a longstanding local hunting circle, even if not an officially licensed one. In October and November each year, he rode into the mountains with a group of acquaintances from the village to hunt Marco Polo sheep. Even though none of these hunters were licensed to use guns or hunt wolves, and none were (officially) paid to do so, Nurlan resolved to transform this hunting group into a quasi-public service.¹⁹⁶ Among the members of this informal outfit was Manas, Nurlan's close friend and shepherd, Nurlan's brothers, and his brother-in-law, who summarized the logic succinctly: "Why pay? We can do it

¹⁹⁶ Despite Nurlan's own testimony that this endeavor was partly driven by the need to save scarce resources, it's plausible that he distributed village funds to his friends (and himself) to "pay" for this service. I address this in the final section of the chapter.

ourselves!”¹⁹⁷ Several other men from the village were also involved. Importantly, the hunting outfit did not hunt wolves willy-nilly, but responded directly to local reports of attacks on livestock. When reported attacks became more frequent or widespread, local people would complain directly to the *ayil okmotu*, who then mobilized his own personal acquaintances to solve the problem.

In other instances, Nurlan called on a wider group of people for assistance with village problems. The abstract example of fixing a road that I have already referenced above was adopted mainly from what I learned here. All of the village roads were bumpy dirt paths that periodically developed large holes, rendering normal driving impossible. As in countless other villages in Kyrgyzstan, driving on these roads calls for the slowest possible speeds in meandering S-shaped loops. The most important of these roads connects the village to the main road of the district, which connects all of the villages in the district together. Even though this main district road is only about two kilometers from the village center, it can take a full ten minutes to reach it when the village roads are torn up, and even longer in heavy rain or snow.

On a semi-regular basis, when the condition of the main village road became particularly bad, Nurlan would organize a crew of volunteers to repair it. As Nurlan said, “even when there is no money, we have to fix the road and so we have to do it ourselves.” This, Nurlan acknowledged, required great finesse and interpersonal skills on his part. “The effectiveness of the *ayil okmotu* depends on how well they know people, and how they get along with people...you have to be very flexible and work with everyone.”¹⁹⁸ The village would never have the money or resources to pave the road, so the main activity consisted of moving rocks and dirt.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with author, November 9, 2013, KYG_Int3_22

¹⁹⁸ July 2013, field notes from participant observation.

Younger men would move large rocks into the biggest holes, filling the space, which would then be covered by shoveling mounds of dirt on top. Nurlan himself participated in the work.

Even when securing the services of private companies for the village, Nurlan's role was central, both in brokering outside assistance and using his local social connections to facilitate their work from inside the village itself. In 2007, for example, Nurlan *baike* appealed directly to two of the major telecommunications companies in the country, MegaCom and Beeline, to provide cellular service within range of the village. He convinced them to do so, but had to provide money, food, housing, and labor from the village. As he recounted:

These mobile companies did not realize that we had so many people who would start using their services, but I told them how many we had. In order to agree, we had to provide the company workers with housing and food—many lived in my house and in my brother's house. And we also had to provide a lot of local people who helped to carry dirt and brought and removed other materials from the construction site ... the company themselves brought the major equipment and other workers.¹⁹⁹

Today, two towers stand on a hill just outside the village and nearly every villager uses a cell phone. Even though this is not a public good, strictly speaking, everyone credits Nurlan (and not, for example, the telecom companies) for providing it. Nurlan's tenure marked a moment in time when one aspect of village life changed in a memorable and beneficial way. He appeared to do what others could not. But, in order to do so, he called on a wide array of people in the village for the necessary assistance, a fact that was also prominent in people's minds. An elder woman, echoing what countless others described in villages throughout Kyrgyzstan, and in Bishkek itself, "the *ayil okmotu* relies on everyone else."²⁰⁰

To be sure, these are all modest accomplishments. But, they were accomplished with few resources and against great odds, and without any help from the central government, a fact that Nurlan took pride in and never failed to remind people of. Most important of all, he helped to

¹⁹⁹ Interview with author, August 2013, KYG2_Int131g

²⁰⁰ Interview with author, August 2013, KYG2_Int47d.

solve concrete problems that people themselves brought to him. In order to do so, he relied heavily on his own network of already-existing social relationships and exchanges of goods and services with innumerable people that were diffuse, non-quantifiable, and crossed boundaries between the public and private realms.

Galym, Akmola oblast, Kazakhstan

Galym is the *akim* of North village, Akmola *oblast*. He is a young man for his position, appearing to be in his mid-thirties. He has a wife and three school-aged children. His children live in the village only during the summer so that they can attend school in Astana, about three to four hours away by car. Like Nurlan *baike* in Kyrgyzstan, Galym was born in the village that he now governs, but his ties to the village run less deep. For one thing, Galym's father was a district-level *akim* in two different districts within the province, neither of which is the one in which North village is located. Galym might have been born in North village, but he grew up in multiple other localities. Then, as a young adult, he attended university in Almaty—then the state capital, several hundred miles away. At university, Galym studied government administration. Upon graduating, he got a job at the district *akimat* in the district where his present village is located. He worked in the district administration for six years before he was appointed to become the *akim* of North village, where he has worked for the last two years (as of summer, 2014). In fact, until he was appointed as the village *akim*, Galym lived in the district center, not in the village itself. That means that at the time of my visit, in June and July of 2014, Galym had only been a full-time resident of this village for two years.

It should be immediately clear that Galym's career trajectory is dramatically different than Nurlan's and his position as *akim*—a position to which he was appointed, not elected—and

was likely achieved through the social ties he had to higher-level state elites, not to villagers themselves.²⁰¹ These could be ties formed through his father, friends in Almaty, or his relationships with members of the district administration, where he worked for six years. In all likelihood, this network of acquaintances was intertwined, such that they were all related to each other. It is not farfetched to assume that he only attended the university he did and secured a job with the district *akim* because of who his father was. Whatever the case, one thing was clear: Galym's whole social circle flowed through the state itself. As he put it, "my work has always been connected to the state."²⁰²

This does not mean that Galym lacked any ties to the village at all, only that these ties were less personalized and more distant and dormant. He did have at least two direct relatives there—both cousins—and possibly others. He also had a small budget at his disposal to hire local people as "helpers." No doubt, this small group of about six people—each supposed to represent a household in which no one was employed—was dependent on the *akim* for this modest income. But, to the extent that these were patron-client relations at all, they were one-dimensional and limited to a simple contractual agreement: work for pay.²⁰³ In fact, the *akim* rarely called on these workers for help of any kind. This is at least partly because the process of village governance did not require it. On most days, the group of helpers sat dormant in the halls of his office. Sometimes they swept and cleaned the grounds outside. The fact that Galym rarely asked more of them was not because of a lack of tasks that needed doing, but because

²⁰¹ It needs to be noted that he was first appointed and then elected to this position (in 2013, under new rules), but that the election was conducted by the district-level *maslikhat*, which as I described above is itself composed of state elites. Moreover, the *maslikhat* elects from a list of candidates determined by the district-level *akim*, whom Galym worked under at the time he was nominated for the post.

²⁰² Interview with author, KAZ_Int1_27.

²⁰³ To say that these employees lacked deep affection for the *akim* would be an understatement. Despite a desperate need for what little income the position provided, more than one of these employees was openly contemptuous of the *akim* and believed that he was withholding money that was allocated to pay them in order to provide more for himself.

there was not more that he considered himself to be responsible for. Indeed, everyday local governance did little to activate or strengthen the social ties that did exist.

Among the many things that village residents complained about, for example, was the condition of the main park. Soviet-era flower beds were full of untamed plants and trees; dilapidated benches were obscured by chest-high grasses and bushes; vestiges of dirt paths were no longer traversable and barely still visible; and trash was strewn everywhere. It was hardly a park at all. Rather, it was a patch of wooded land in the center of the village where a park used to be. In the memories of village inhabitants, this was a well-maintained public space. Now it cannot be used by anyone. In the third section of this chapter I described one villager who pointed to a tree that had fallen in this park, across its only remaining footpath, and complained that the *akim* had never bothered to address it.

Though maintaining the park was a task easily within Galym's means—a task that even his helpers could do—it still was never addressed and became a symbol of his disinterest in local problems. Though people had more pressing concerns, nearly everyone complained about the condition of the park. It summarized how nonresponsive Galym was to the problems of the locality in general and reflected a broader dynamic.

In fact, in many instances Galym excused himself from solving certain problems at villagers' behest by claiming that it was not his responsibility to do so. In one instance, a village resident's dog attacked and killed two sheep that were under the care of a part-time shepherd, Arman. Arman recognized the dog, went directly to its owner, explained what had happened, and demanded compensation. When the dog's owner refused, Arman went to the sheep's owner. Together they went to Galym so that the owner of the dog could be held accountable and the owner of the sheep could be compensated for his loss. For several days, Galym was nowhere to

be found, and when they finally secured the meeting, he blithely extricated himself from the problem. This is how Arman described what happened:

The *akim* just said “there’s nothing I can do,” so I asked him, “What do you mean there’s nothing you can do? You need to act according to the laws.” But he looked at me and said that there were no such laws. You can see he is not able to do anything. In general he does nothing. He’s weak.

In another instance, a woman complained that a neighbor allowed his pigs to run loose and that they were ruining peoples’ gardens. According to the law, she claimed, pigs have to be kept in pens. But, when she complained to the *akim*, he declined to intervene, leading her to believe that the pig owner must have bribed him.

At least part of this disconnect stemmed from the institutional configuration of the *akim*’s position, whereby he was dependent on and subordinate to the *akim* of the district-level who had appointed him. Galym never consulted with local people about what problems to address and rarely had to work directly with anyone in the village for any reason at all. He had only one real constituent and that person did not live in the village or know its problems. In fact, because Galym was rarely in a position to provide help from those who asked for it, he considered his few personal acquaintances to be especially burdensome. Sometimes people expected him to do things for them because he knew their parents or grandparents, but he always had to turn them away, having to explain that it was not his job. When recounting how acquaintances would approach him for help, he seemed genuinely conflicted by the fact that he could not always help them. Describing the ways in which he *could* offer help, he used only the first person plural, making it clear that he did not act alone, but was merely part of a larger apparatus: “We help them as we can. We are trying ... but there are only so many things we can do.”²⁰⁴

The “we” in this sentence refers most concretely to Galym’s close working relationship with the district-level *akim*. At the time of my visit, in June and July (2014), the main project

²⁰⁴ Interview with author, KAZ_Int2_38.

that occupied Galym's time was his work on the state program to provide clean drinking water throughout Kazakhstan, "*Su Arnasy*."²⁰⁵ Galym's main task in this endeavor, as he described it, was to "prepare all of the necessary documents" so that money could be provisioned from the district budget to pay for the construction of water pipes and other infrastructure (*vodoprovod*).²⁰⁶ To do so he works closely with the district-level *akim*, meeting with him on an almost daily basis. Though no funding had yet been approved, Galym was optimistic that the project could begin by the end of the year.

The scarcity of running water was among the most consistent complaints of village residents, and many relied on river water for watering crops and animals and for washing clothes. One elderly woman complained, "Of all the things, there is no water. Write that down. You're lucky if you live close to the river, but over there," she said, pointing across town, "there is no water at all."²⁰⁷ Another woman complained that the spigot in her home let out water in small drops. "How can people live the whole summer with no water?"²⁰⁸ Tellingly, though, nobody was aware (or believed) that the local government was doing anything to address this problem. All of the work that was being done—if it actually was being done at all—was done behind closed doors, out of sight from ordinary people. When expressing doubts about the prospects for running water in the future, one young man complained, "the officials just work to fill their own pockets."

Whether Galym was genuinely working toward solving this problem with the district-level *akim* cannot be determined here. What is clear is that whatever work he did remained

²⁰⁵ *Su Arnasy* is not so much a state program as a state-sponsored association—The Association of Water Supply and Sanitation Utilities of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "Kazakhstan *Su Arnasy*"—that helps to develop and implement the technical aspects of policy related to water provision and use. It also helps coordinate activity between the central government and local authorities.

²⁰⁶ KAZ_Int3_38

²⁰⁷ KAZ_Int3_48a.

²⁰⁸ KAZ_Int3_48c.

invisible to everyone. In fact, most of his work took place in the district center, not in the village itself. And this was something that people could see with their own eyes since the presence or absence of his car at the village *akimat* was easily observed. Indeed, people frequently complained that Galym was never in his office. Even though his trips to the center were ostensibly related to his work obligations, villagers tended to interpret it as a form of laziness, self-indulgence, and disconnection from them and their problems.

One part-time shepherd, for example, echoing a complaint that was widespread, described how Galym was rarely in the village because he “drives around all day and is always going to Centerville,” the district center. He went on to complain that “he gets paid no matter what he does” so it was not necessary for him to spend any time in the village itself. Unlike the village, the district center has stores, an outdoor bazaar with a variety of goods and foodstuffs, cafes, bars, restaurants, and many other things. The complaint that the *akim* was “always going” there is not only a gripe about absenteeism; it also insinuates that the *akim* has a privileged lifestyle and is enjoying benefits that ordinary villagers do not have access to.

To Galym, though, frequent trips to the district center—where he had lived and worked for the six years subsequent to this appointment—were an essential and unavoidable part of his job. From his perspective he was not “driving around,” but “working.” The district center is where he goes for regular meetings, and, ironically, the only place where he can truly make a difference in the village, by winning his superiors’ trust, approval, and money. That is to say, village governance in Kazakhstan does not actually happen in the village; it happens at higher levels of administration. Absenteeism, in this light, is not a moral shortcoming of a disinterested official (though it might be that, too)—it is an institutional requirement.

Above, I described how Nurlan *baike* in Kyrgyzstan also made trips by car to the district center. Here, too, the district center was a site of innumerable basic goods and services that were not available in the village itself. Importantly, the social and institutional context in which these two village officials performed this activity was different, and this changed the meaning of the activity itself. In Nurlan's social context, which blurred the distinctions between his public and private obligations, his trips to the district center sometimes fulfilled official duties, but they simultaneously implied moral obligations for him to assist friends and acquaintances. As I described above, he would routinely take an overloaded car of people with him, dropping some off in villages along the way, and bringing others to the center with him, helping them gain access to other officials in the district administration itself, pulling strings to arrange meetings and solve other problems for members of his community. Others would come along simply so they could visit the bazaar. These were all people on whom Nurlan would later call for assistance in addressing broader village problems.

For Galym, however, trips to the district center were neither a form of leisure activity (as it was often perceived by villagers), nor did they imply a duty or opportunity to perform favors. Instead, he describes his trips to Centerville as a burden that he would rather avoid; a one-way trip by car takes about thirty minutes on poorly paved roads, and the gasoline is an expense that he has to pay himself, so he says. During the time I spent in North village, I did not see Galym bring anyone along on this trip, or offer to do so.

When asked why it seemed to everyone that so many basic public problems were not being addressed—the roads included—Galym explained that there were already plans to pave all of the village roads and to fix the water pipes, and even to provide cable internet service. As he complained, somewhat ironically, in reference to his frequent trips to the district center, “I know

better than anyone how bad the roads are.”²⁰⁹ But, the plans still needed final approval at the district and provincial levels. This, he said, could take many more months and then even longer to be implemented, a fact that he himself bemoaned and seemed exasperated by. It is a concrete illustration of what Kazakhstani political analysts have described in the abstract, and what I described above:

All regional power is very closely connected with Astana. That’s why very often in our regions we have a lot of problems, local problems, because local powers are afraid to be initiators, they are afraid to be independent. And this is bad because *akims* who struggle with local problems must react quickly but they cannot because they have to explain the problem to the center and then receive recommendations and instructions, get financial approval. All of this takes a long time. And then, in the end, the problem might not be solved. What does the *oblast-akim* know about local problems? Nothing. But it is he and not the village officials who decide everything at the village level.²¹⁰

V. Caveats and Conclusions

To the readers who might wonder if all village officials in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are identical to Galym and Nurlan, respectively, the answer is no. One can find, in both states, examples of local officials who are crooks and liars, and others who are hard working and earnest. Local officials, after all, are just people. The stories I have told above should not be taken as anecdotes about people, but as ethnographies of local government processes. What I have attempted to document are not the personal characteristics of the officials themselves, but how they are socially situated in the village through the process of their official work. These processes and relationships, I argue, are generalizable because they stem from the formal institutions of local government, which systematically vary between the two states. Galym and Nurlan were not necessarily different kinds of people; rather, they are similar people who did their jobs in different social contexts and with different kinds of institutional requirements and limitations.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Dosym Satpaev, Director of the Risk Assessment Group, interview with author, April 4, 2014.

Even still, the various detailed descriptions of local governance processes in Kyrgyzstan presented above might be faulted as being too naive, idealizing local officials as selfless do-gooders. Here I would like to add some more complexity. Nurlan *baike*, though he did work closely with the local community to solve real problems, and did so out of a sense of personal obligation to individual people, was not merely a selfless public servant. Although I was never in a position to see directly any of the personal-enrichment style corruption schemes he may have been involved in, I can testify that his financial means far exceeded his official income. He was not a rich man, but he did own an apartment in the center of Bishkek, where his children lived, a feat far beyond the means of the average villager or the *ayil okmotu*'s modest salary.²¹¹ Indeed, by all objective measures, corruption is known to be endemic at all levels in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and this includes direct bribery, or paying for a public service that is being deliberately withheld from those who refuse to pay (McMann 2014; see also Transparency International).

I do want to emphasize, however, that not all acts of corruption are the same, and that the social context in which corruption occurs changes its meaning in significant ways. In Kazakhstan, I described a village *akim* in Sairam district who allegedly hired his own friend to repair gas lines, taking a kickback in exchange. In Kyrgyzstan, I described how Marat and Nurlan directed those in need of farm machinery to their own clients, very likely taking a small cut of the fee for themselves. To this we might also add that, in his prior role as school director, Nurlan may have secured jobs for friends and relatives, perhaps in exchange for kickbacks.²¹² Moreover, it is possible that he used village funds to pay himself and his friends for hunting wolves, even though he was not legally permitted to do so. In all of these cases, local officials

²¹¹ By Nurlan's account, his official salary was less than \$200 a month.

²¹² This is speculation. But, Nurlan's wife, sister, and sister-in-law are all teachers at the local school—a strange coincidence at least.

utilized their official positions to perform favors for friends while potentially enriching themselves. They are all examples of corruption.

But, still, these forms of corruption are not the same (nor are they exhaustive of the many forms of corruption that exist). Importantly, different social contexts change the meaning and nature of these acts and who benefits from them. The difference stems from how the officials themselves were socially situated in the village, who their friends (and clients) were and where they came from. The *akim* I described in Sairam did favors for friends, but these were friends who did not live in the community, which meant that he benefited his friend and himself at the expense of the local population. The favors that Nurlan and Marat delivered, though not accessible to everyone, were directed toward the members of their own communities. If they did enrich themselves, they did so while also benefitting their co-villagers. It was the state that was being shortchanged. The motivations to enrich oneself and also help others are not mutually exclusive. Nurlan, for example, was obligated to find ways of helping Turar, who was not only a loyal client, but also a close personal friend. He was at least partly driven by duty and obligation. In this light, as paradoxical as it might sound, securing work for Turar at the expense of a state program could be construed as a moral act.

I suggest that we problematize the singular idea of “corruption” and think instead about different moral economies of corruption, which derive from the different social contexts that tie individuals together, within and across state and non-state institutions. As Humphrey notes, the common understanding that “one cannot bribe a relative or a friend” means that “inducements paid to such closely related people do not count as bribes but as something else” (Humphrey 2000: 217-18). In this way the very meaning of corruption hinges on whether one’s local officials are simultaneously one’s friends and relatives. As I attempted to describe above, this is

the core difference in state-society relations at the local level in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The consequent variations in moral economies of corruption can be summarized accordingly: some ordinary people in Kyrgyzstan might still be excluded from officials' moral obligations to provide help and assistance, but in Kazakhstan nearly all are.

I also do not intend to suggest that the provision of public goods at the local level is better in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan, only that the experience through which its provision occurs, and the interactions that ordinary people have with their own state officials in providing it, are qualitatively different. Indeed, for financial reasons alone, village-level public goods provision is more possible in Kazakhstan, so much so that projects can withstand pilfering by public officials and still be seen to completion. The plans for new water pipes in Akmola *oblast* described above could not even be contemplated at the village-level in Kyrgyzstan, at least not without donor support.

The Moral Economy of Local Communities in Central Asia

Finally, by focusing on the social ties between local officials and local communities throughout this chapter, I do not intend to suggest that local communities themselves differ substantially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. To the contrary, the social fabric of local communities are quite similar in both countries, consisting of social ties between and among co-villagers that are deeply intertwined and overlapping. Community members participate in moral economies that entail reciprocal obligations and diffuse exchanges of mutual help and assistance. What produces the variation that I seek to describe in this chapter is the degree to which local state officials themselves are socially embedded in these communities and participants in their moral economies. My main claim is that *ayil okmotu* in Kyrgyzstan are more likely to be

socially embedded members of the community than their counterparts in Kazakhstan (the village *akims*).

The anthropologist David Gullette, for instance, describes localized “networks of assistance” throughout Kyrgyzstan whereby the members of a community rely heavily on friends, family, and other acquaintances for mutual support on a regular and ongoing basis. Gullette notes that “accessing forms of assistance or fulfilling obligations is a significant factor in establishing and maintaining relations” in local communities (Gullette 2010a: 101). He describes two main forms of support that local social relationships are used for, help and assistance. Help, according to Gullette, takes the form of diffuse obligations; it is “support that goes beyond reciprocal or calculable exchange” and is done because one “must” do it (*ibid.*: 102). It is, in other words, a social obligation, compelled by duty and the threat of moral shame, regardless of what one might get in return. Assistance, he says, has more of an emphasis on reciprocity, yet it is a reciprocity that is not usually quantifiable or explicit. “The kinds of material reciprocated are important, but an equally strong emphasis, if not greater, is on the maintenance of the relations between people” (*ibid.*:103).²¹³

By claiming that *ayil okmotu* in Kyrgyzstan are socially embedded members of their local communities, I am suggesting that they, too, are participants in these localized “networks of assistance.” I build on Gullette’s argument to show that that the *ayil okmotu*’s own networks are politically activated through the process of village government. The institutions of local government effectively incorporate local officials’ social and moral obligation into the state itself, first, by favoring the installation of ordinary local people, and then by requiring them to

²¹³ This echoes Ledeneva, who writes about informal exchange in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras: “The objects obtained in *blat* relationships were rarely exchanged in a straightforward manner. It should be emphasized that *blat* involved relationships and not merely goods. What was exchanged was neither objects for objects, nor the relative values people attached to these objects, but mutual regard and esteem. *Blat* was thus not a relationship for the sake of exchange but an exchange for the sake of a relationship” (Ledeneva 2000: 184).

access the help and assistance of their co-villagers, who themselves are making regular demands on local officials for help and assistance. From this perspective, local self-government in Kyrgyzstan does little more than formalize the social fabric of the village by giving it a title, an office, and some formal responsibility. The *ayil okmotu*, for that reason, is bound by the same moral economy as other villagers and the idea of strictly formal “official” responsibility is decidedly fuzzy.

As was noted briefly above, the case of Kazakhstan is not different because local social relations among villagers are different, but because local officials are insulated from those relationships rather than embedded within them. As Werner has shown, life in rural Kazakhstan is characterized by the same kinds of “networks of support” that Gullette describes in Kyrgyzstan (Werner 1998). She describes local social networks as “a web of social relationships based on one or more of the following criteria: kin relations, tribal affiliations, marriage alliances, geographical proximity, shared schooling, shared workplace, and friendship” (601). These networks, she argues, are maintained “by granting personal favours, presenting gifts, hosting dinner parties and feasts, and supplying voluntary labor” (601).

Both Werner and Gullette identify the Soviet-era “economy of shortages” as the origin of these mutually co-dependent and reciprocal social networks of support that were then transformed to cope with the new kinds challenges that resulted from the transition to a market economy. Thus, they draw on a larger literature on post-Soviet socio-economic systems (Ledeneva 1998, 2000, 2006; Humphrey 2000)

Again, what makes Kazakhstan different from Kyrgyzstan is that these networks of support do not link local communities with local state officials. This is because these links are minimized by the institutional configuration of local government. Just as the institutions of local

government in Kyrgyzstan incorporate local social networks into the state at the local level, those in Kazakhstan expunge them, keeping these relationships outside. Thus, while local officials in Kyrgyzstan are both burdened and empowered by the moral obligations that stem from the favors they receive from and owe to their co-villagers, their counterparts in Kazakhstan are confined only to what their superiors dictate and allow; they are embedded in an administrative hierarchy that includes few connections to local communities. Indeed, the social relations that matter most for local officials in Kazakhstan are those with higher level state elites who will determine not only what jobs they might be eligible for in the future, but also what kinds of resources they can attain to do the job they have now.

The institutions of local government in Kazakhstan shape the process of local governance and the social role of local officials differently than in Kyrgyzstan in two ways. First, by creating the greater possibility for the selection of local authorities from outside the locality, as I described above. As a result, these authorities are less likely to be already-embedded in local networks of support. Second, they are less likely to engage in reciprocal extra-official social exchanges while doing their job because of the institutional constraints placed on what kinds of things they are permitted to do as state officials and the obligations they have to their superiors.

At the heart of this qualitative difference in local governance are the contrasting ways that ordinary people experience what the state *is* (or, rather, *who* it is), whether and how it works, and why it works the way that it does. In Kyrgyzstan, the parts of the state that take on significance in everyday life are at the local level; in Kazakhstan, they are at the national level. In Kyrgyzstan, the advocate for local interests and needs is the local official; in Kazakhstan, it is the president and his political party.

The development of this localism in Kyrgyzstan, but not in Kazakhstan, as I have tried to show, was endogenous to the process of state formation itself, stemming from the creation of different kinds of government institutions at the local level. In the following chapter I elaborate on the broader effects of these different local social relations and describe, in more specific detail, the ways in which people understand their different connections to the local versus the central apparatuses of the state through varying levels of trust, evaluation, and accountability. These different patterns constitute different overall styles of state-society relations and set the stage for different kinds of center-periphery politics related to appointment and administration.

Chapter 5: Trust Relationships and State-Society Relations

In the previous chapter I described variations in local social ties between village-level officials and the communities that they govern in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. What are the broader effects that these ties have on state-society relations? I hinted at some of the effects in the last chapter by describing differences in officials' responsiveness to local demands, varying distinctions of public versus private boundaries in local governance as well as official versus moral obligations. Here I elaborate on two more specific effects that are related to and overlap with these. Citizens in each state show different levels of trust for local officials and evaluate the work of local versus national officials differently. That is, when we disaggregate the state into its local and national levels, we find significant variation in state-society relations, and in how ordinary people relate to state officials at different levels of state administration.

In the final section of this chapter, I describe the broader effects of these differences. The embedded local official in Kyrgyzstan not only changes the way local government operates—in comparison with Kazakhstan—it also affects how people come to understand the state itself, what (or who) the state is, what it does, and how and why it does it. In Kyrgyzstan, this changes state-society relations more broadly by shaping people's relationship to higher organs of state administration. It does so in two ways.

First, it establishes a general understanding that local cadre work for local interests, according to the moral economy of the local community. Non-local cadre, as outsiders to this moral economy, cannot be trusted in the same way. They are less likely to represent the community's interests and are not morally obligated to help or assist any of its individual members. Second, and more concretely, many former local officials go on to have careers in

higher levels of state office. Yet, people maintain expectations that “their” officials will continue to offer help and assistance to them and their friends, families, and co-villagers. Through appointment to higher levels of state administration—districts and provinces—and elections to the national parliament, the state itself becomes infiltrated with local elites who maintain ties to their home regions.

This sets the stage for political conflict with the central government over who will work in the state’s regional offices, how they will be selected, and whose interests they will represent. This conflict becomes acute when central authorities have explicit preferences for the appointment of cadre from outside the region, or seek to remove a local favorite from office. The policy of cadre rotation, for example, explicitly seeks to install outsiders to top-level provincial offices, pitting central authorities against the perceived interests of local communities and local elites. I discussed the politics of regional appointment in chapter two and elaborate on specific contentious episodes of regional appointment politics in chapter six.

Overall, these effects inversely shape the political salience of “local” versus “national” elements of state rule in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Ordinary people in Kyrgyzstan trust their own local officials precisely because they recognize the political and social mechanisms by which these officials can be held accountable for their work. Their counterparts in Kazakhstan never develop the same kinds of social ties with local officials. To the contrary, as I began to discuss in the last chapter, they often turn directly to the president’s own political party, *Nur Otan*, because it is the only mechanism through which they can hold corrupt and ineffective local officials accountable. The result is that people are more likely to side with the president against their own local and regional officials, thereby strengthening the center’s control over its own regional appointment policies and preferences, and, ultimately, over its own officials.

I. Trust, Accountability, and Evaluation in Central Asian Villages

Importantly, social sanctioning mechanisms shape the kinds of relationships people have with the state at its local versus national levels. People in villages throughout Kyrgyzstan, for example, describe the value of local cadre according to the logic of moral obligation and indicate that the threat of social shame is effective in making local officials accountable to local demands and work toward the common good of the locality. Moreover, officials' ties to localities are understood to be sticky. They cannot easily extricate themselves from the village where their own parents, children, brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles all reside. Even if they moved elsewhere, their families would be left behind, making them bound to return on a regular basis. Since everyone knows this, the local official must be careful not to shame his or her self, or his or her family.

Outside officials, in contrast, are seen as having little incentive to work for the good of the community; they are unlikely to be disciplined by the same moral mechanisms because they can leave as easily as they came. That is, to the degree that they are susceptible to moral shame at all, they can free themselves of it by moving elsewhere for a different job. When they do so, they leave little behind. They can (and will) leave with a clean break. This means that during their tenure there are fewer mechanisms through which local people can extract help, assistance, or other favors. Thus, local cadre are trusted and valued over and above outsiders, who are treated with suspicion. One villager in Naryn *oblast* explained:

The *ayil okmotu* is a local person so people know him and he knows them. He knows the place and the people and he knows how to talk to people. His family lives here, he is not going to go anywhere so you can trust him to do honest work [...] If he came from somewhere else he could just steal and be willing to take bribes ... everyone knows that he [a non-local] can just leave.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_49e.

Likewise, a villager from Jalalabad *oblast* expressed the same idea, both trustful of the socially embedded local officials and suspicious of the motivations of outsiders:

The reason [the *ayil okmotu*] works so hard and cares so much is because he's from here and he knows the people. I don't think someone from outside [this district] would work so hard and if they did people would have to ask "why is he working this way? What for?" And it would cause people to be more suspicious.²¹⁵

Similar sentiments have been captured in other research. In a study conducted by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), a village teacher expressed the importance of local officials' involvement in the education sphere in the same terms: "We know [local officials] will help because their own children go to the same school. They went to school here when they were little. Their daughters and wives work here. And that's how it's always going to be" (UNDP 2012: 58). The head of a village council who also participated in this focus group expressed the same logic: "...As a resident of this village and a patriot of my community I am vehemently opposed to the separation of primary and secondary education from the LSG's [local self-government's] sphere of influence. My children live and study here, and so will my grandchildren, and I'd like to have an opportunity to affect the quality of their education" (ibid.).²¹⁶ In both of these examples, officials' local origins and social embeddedness are explicitly referenced as characteristics that produce higher levels of trust and accountability. A policing advisor from the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Bishkek described how a provincial police chief spent an entire allotment of \$20,000 from the organization to build a new police station in his home village, where he grew up, and where his family still lives. The OSCE officer noted that local officials almost always use the money they

²¹⁵ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_49g.

²¹⁶ LSG stands for local self-government.

obtain from the organization to help their own villages “not only for their own personal comfort, but in order to gain recognition in the community that they did something to help everyone.”²¹⁷

A village elder (*aksakal*) in Bazar Korgon *raion* complained that higher levels of state administration—in the district and province—were unwanted and unnecessary precisely because their staff is further removed from the village.

Having a local person to do these jobs is better. Local people know more. They know the problems of the community and the people of the community so they are the only ones who can help. The *akim* [of the district] and the governor, these are just names. They don’t know anything or anybody. What do we even need them for? It’s just extra positions that take money from the budget.²¹⁸

Likewise, a former state official bemoaned the fact that “people think that if a person is local he is interested in helping local people, but if he is not local he is only interested in helping himself.”²¹⁹ Frequently, the same logic was abbreviated by ordinary people in simple statements: “Local officials care about the community because they live in it.”²²⁰ Officials in the central government, in contrast are “just businessmen,” who “have no respect for people.” They “don’t know people” and “don’t care” about them.²²¹ One village elder, describing officials in the central government, said, “they don’t even know their own job. They don’t care about people’s needs. They work for a day and leave.”²²² Another said, “It’s always better to have local people running the government. If the person is local, then they understand local problems, they get along better with people, and they are more honest. They will not steal from the people whom they know. But, the people in Bishkek steal.”²²³ And, “the *akim* [of the district] does not really work in the village or know about the village in depth. The *ayil okmotu*

²¹⁷ Interview with author, August 13, 2013, Bishkek.

²¹⁸ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_43, October 25, 2013.

²¹⁹ Interview with author, KYG1_Int2_2, January 25, 2014.

²²⁰ Village resident, interview with author, KYG2_Int1_49_9.

²²¹ Village resident, interview with author, KYG2_Int1_15, July 2, 2013.

²²² Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_5, October 4, 2013.

²²³ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_4, October 14, 2013

needs to have this power” (ibid.). This person is suggesting that *ayil okmotu* should take on the powers of higher-level state offices, in this case, the district *akimat*. Indeed, this is part of a broader dynamic that I discuss in more detail in the final section of this chapter: because socially embedded local officials are the only ones who can be trusted to help the village and its inhabitants, people want to see them promoted to higher levels of state office.

Local officials used similar logic, indicating their own sensitivity to the judgment of community members, and their motivation to manage moral shame. The *ayil okmotu* of Kenesh (Jalalabad *oblast*) said:

When [a local official] is from Kenesh it means that their parents live here, their friends live here, they are in touch with people, and they must live with these people. And this means he has obligations to the community and must work honestly. He must go to weddings and funerals and it is very hard to do these things if you’ve cheated people and not maintained your responsibilities to them. I think only local people can truly be trusted to do honest work for the community. Anyone else can just leave when they finish their job. They have no responsibility to the community. They will just take their money and go someplace else.²²⁴

Another *ayil okmotu* explained that, “it is easier to be from here. I get a lot of help from people and they trust me to do the right thing.” He then shared a Kyrgyz saying: “If someone comes from another place he can eat and leave, but if he’s a local person, he will eat and still be here.”²²⁵ The imagery of “eating and leaving” was widely invoked to describe the work and motivations of non-local state cadre. “Eating” is a euphemism for self-enrichment, corruption, and bribery. It evokes the concept of “feeding” in pre-modern Russia where “an administrative position ‘fed’ the person who occupied it” through “various forms of ‘private’ taxation,” which only became known as “bribery” or “corruption” with the introduction of a rational-bureaucratic

²²⁴ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_19.

²²⁵ *Bashka zherden kelgen zhep, zhep kalat. Ozubuzdun kylulndu kaicy mezigilde bolso dagy surap alabyz*. Interview with author, Oct. 4, 2013. None of the native Kyrgyz speakers I consulted was able to translate this idea with any ease, so I’ve included it here in the original Kyrgyz. I cannot date the origins of the saying and do not doubt that it might have a long history. What is notable here is that it was deemed appropriate to illustrate local social relations—as in any language, there are sayings for everything, and we invoke them when and where it helps to illustrate a larger point.

system of administration (Volkov 2000: 42-43). In Kyrgyz villages, the offense is not “eating,” but “eating and leaving,” or, taking without giving back, enriching oneself while contributing nothing to others. While anyone might eat, only outsiders could eat and leave. The deep social ties of locals, on the other hand, ensured that they would be bound by reciprocal obligations; they, too, would eat, but they would feed others as well.

In the previous chapter I described the work of Nurlan *baike*, an *ayil okmotu* from a village in Naryn *oblast* who was motivated by a sense of personal obligation to his co-villagers. Though he often asked much from others, he could only do so because he was able provide help in return. He was never in a position to deny requests for help from fellow villagers, even for problems that were private in nature. As I noted, his inability to refuse requests was so strong that his only respite was to preclude people from asking by hiding his car behind his sister’s house when he was home so that he could not be found.

Polling and survey data in Kyrgyzstan suggest that higher levels of trust for local versus central state authorities is not limited to a few villages. It is nation-wide and generalizable. A state poll, for example, measured citizens’ levels of “personal trust” (*lichnaya doveriya*) with respect to multiple state agencies and ministries. It was conducted in all seven *oblasts* plus Bishkek and Osh cities. It showed that the organs of local government enjoy the highest levels of trust when compared to every other state institution. The poll tracked levels of personal trust for every ministry of the central government, all state structures at the *oblast* and *raion* levels, including executive and legislative bodies, and the organs of local self-government in villages and cities. Of the 41 institutions listed, the organs of local self-government ranked the highest in levels of personal trust and is one of the few state organs to receive an overall positive rating

(National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic 2013). All of the central government agencies received negative ratings, except for the State Agency for Culture and Sports.

Likewise, the findings from a series of focus groups conducted by USAID showed that local government institutions enjoy the highest levels of public support. The report found that “unlike the general cynicism towards the role of the President and Parliament, there are higher expectations for sub-national government structures, and groups expressed that a number of entities are currently meeting or viewed as capable of meeting public expectations” (USAID 2013: 32). The report also notes that even in the specific localities where officials’ work was evaluated poorly, people still testified “that they could continue to demand more of their local officials” and “find a way to get things done.” The report concludes that, “while there was a wide range of satisfaction with *ayil okmotus*, they did come across as being viewed as legitimate, generally well-intending problem-solvers or conduits to higher levels of government” (ibid). Other field research has shown that local officials are relatively responsive to local demands and prioritize local needs (Babajanian 2015).

In contrast, ordinary people in Kazakhstan tend to have higher levels of trust for the central government than their local officials. They use precisely the same logic as their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan, and even sometimes the same imagery, but because their local officials are less frequently embedded in the community, they draw opposite conclusions. One villager in Akmola *oblast* complained that, “the local *akim* eats a lot [...] He takes everything for himself...he steals money, he takes bribes, he takes everything and gives nothing back.”²²⁶ A former local *akim* said that, “it is when people believe that the person does not really belong that problems arise. There is this discrepancy between the people and an *akim* who was simply

²²⁶ Interview with author, July 13, 2014, KAZ_Int2_48c

appointed and who is going to leave. In such situations there is room for corruption and mistrust from people.”²²⁷ The leader of an NGO in South Kazakhstan noted that the local *akim* is “simply doing his job, taking orders from his bosses and so I don’t think he can be trusted for a long-term relationship. He is not interested in my work, or in helping my organization.”²²⁸

Interestingly, in both Akmola and South Kazakhstan *oblasts* ordinary people described their own local officials as the most corrupt in the entire country. A sixty-three year old engineer living in Sairam *raion* complained that ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union it was necessary to pay a bribe in order to win tenders for work. “I can’t find any work because I won’t pay. But, it’s not like this in the north, only in the south.”²²⁹ A pensioner from another village in this same district described her own *akim* as “wildly corrupt,” but, said that “in the north it’s different. In the east it’s different. Here in the south the officials are the most corrupt.”²³⁰

In the northern province of Akmola, though, people say the same thing about their own officials. A shepherd in a village there said “our *akim* is corrupt, but the *akims* in other regions don’t work like this. Even the other *akims* in Akmola are better than this.”²³¹ An unemployed woman who survives by selling just a few liters of milk each day said, “our village is a mess [*bardak*]. It isn’t like this everywhere in our country. You should see the other villages and regions so you know.”²³²

Clearly, all of these people cannot be right. What it reflects is that everyone knows their own officials to be corrupt, and imagines that other officials are not. In fact, for those who like and trust the president (as I discuss below), this is a necessary belief. If one’s own local official

²²⁷ Interview with author, June 20, 2014, KAZ_Int2_39_9

²²⁸ Interview with author, May 2, 2014, KAZ_Int1_33a.

²²⁹ Interview with author, April 29, 2014, KAZ_Int1_37

²³⁰ Interview with author, May 12, 2014, KAZ_Int2_52b.

²³¹ Interview with author, July 8, 2014, KAZ_Int2_55.

²³² Field notes, Akmola *oblast* (June/July 2014).

is corrupt, it is because he is a bad person and is deceiving the president; but if every local official is corrupt, it suggests that there is something wrong with the entire system of power, and even implicates the president himself. To claim that one's own local officials are the most corrupt in the entire country is to perceive an anomaly; such an official would be fired, if only the president knew.

Indeed, officials from the central government—and the president in particular—are not treated with the same disdain and suspicion as local officials. To the contrary, they are viewed as the antidote to the dishonesty of their local officials and the only element of the state that works for the good of the country.

The [local] government is not effective, I would say. If you ask a local official here for help with something you will need to pay a bribe. But, in Astana the central government works as they need to, as professionals. When there is a problem they fix it. It's their job ... The people who work there are well-raised, educated, skilled, and they work quickly and professionally. Here a problem might get solved, but it will not be completely solved, and it will take a long time, and nobody will do anything unless they can make money from it somehow.²³³

Likewise, the director of a local NGO in South Kazakhstan *oblast* said, “local politicians are the most corrupt. In Astana they do good work.” Then, as if stating a maxim she added, “the farther you get from Astana, the more corruption you will find.”²³⁴ A taxi driver from a rural area in Akmola *oblast* describes his local *akim* as incompetent and disinterested. But, he has a different opinion of how officials in the capital city do their work, based on their close physical proximity to the president:

When I was in Astana I could see the results and the changes made by the government. It's because the president lives there and he can watch over the work of all the officials and so the *akimat* and the *akim* in Astana work well. They are the best in the country.²³⁵

If not viewed as overtly corrupt, local officials are at best seen as deeply flawed, and too self-absorbed, unskilled, or uninspired to help the president achieve his vision for the country.

²³³ Interview with author, KAZ_Int2_55i, village in Akmola *oblast*, June 30, 2014.

²³⁴ Interview with author, KAZ_Int1_30_11, May 13, 2014.

²³⁵ Interview with author, KAZ_Int2_43ii

An elderly woman in Sairam said, “nobody likes the local officials, but the officials in Astana are different.”²³⁶ Invoking a Russian saying—“a fish rots from the head”²³⁷—a woman selling textiles at the bazaar said, “If the president is bad, the whole country will suffer. That’s the main thing. I trust Nazarbayev. Right now we are lucky.”²³⁸ At the apex of power stands a visionary leader; at the bottom his incompetent lackeys.

While people have firsthand experience with the detachment of their local officials, as I described in the last chapter, the president’s integrity is never in question. A retired teacher in South Kazakhstan *oblast* complained that the local officials were “morons” who do not know how to talk to people and do not understand people’s problems. The president, however, is “elegant,” “smart,” “energetic,” and “cares about the country.”²³⁹ A taxi driver in this same region said, “I trust the president, he’s great, he’s wise, he’s old. But, he’s too far from us and the people in the *akimat* don’t follow his orders. We are proud of him, but he can’t solve problems in the village unless the *akim* follows orders and works honestly.”²⁴⁰ Note the different depiction of central and local authorities by a school director in Shymkent:

In Astana and Almaty the officials are very close to the president so they have good leadership and management. But when the president's orders go to the regions and other cities it is worse. I had a chance to meet our *akim*. He is a good man. By the way he talks and the things he says, it appears that he cares deeply about the city. But, when they give orders something happens there.

Maybe they just don't communicate, or maybe they have the wrong expectations. For example, when the government says that they want to help HIV families, they just write down an order on a piece of paper, they give it to some department, and then the order is passed down lower and lower, and at the local level it is just a piece of paper, it has no heart, no vision ... it has no inspiration and no sense of importance ... it has nothing to do with the nice speech that the president made at the beginning ... it's just an official order. It feels like the people in the *akimat* are just saying to themselves "just one more order...I hate it."²⁴¹

²³⁶ Interview with author, KAZ_Int1_30_10, May 7, 2014.

²³⁷ *Ryba gnet s golovy*.

²³⁸ Interview with author, KAZ_Int1_30_5, May 5, 2014.

²³⁹ Multiple interviews, May 2014.

²⁴⁰ Interview with author, KAZ_Int1_30_9, May 7, 2014

²⁴¹ Interview with author, KAZ_Int1_33i, May 14, 2014.

In the previous chapter I described the work of *Nur Otan* and its role in helping local people address corruption and ineffectiveness in the work of local cadre. This reinforces (and perhaps partly produces) the “good tsar” dynamic whereby people believe that the only reason their own officials work so poorly is that the president is unaware of what they are doing. If only the president knew, he would fire them. This sets the stage for how the politics of regional appointment play out, which I address in the next chapter. Unlike in Kyrgyzstan, the replacement or removal of local cadre by the central government is often a moment of great satisfaction. It is just deserts, revenge, and further evidence that the president wants to improve the work of public servants.

A shopkeeper from a village in Akmola *oblast* noted that “people say that the president has only a small staff. Of course, he cannot monitor and control the work of every local official and so they can work in a corrupt way and the president does not always know about it. When he does, he fires them. This happens a lot.”²⁴² Indeed, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, village officials often have short tenures. Though we do not know the precise reason for why this is, the upshot is that it simultaneously keeps local officials unembedded from social settings while making it seem as if the president is routing out corruption. In this context, the president’s tendency to rotate cadre across provinces conforms to local interests and expectations. In contrast to Kyrgyzstan—where local cadre are strongly preferred to outsiders, for the reasons I described above—local cadre in Kazakhstan are more likely to be disliked, such that the president’s decision to bring in new cadre is celebrated rather than bemoaned or resisted.

²⁴² Interview with author, KAZ_Int2_14ii, July 2014.

A brief anecdote will help illustrate this.²⁴³ While working in a village in Akmola *oblast*, I unexpectedly had to leave for Astana, about four hours away by car. I had an interview with Alikhan Baimenov, then the Chairman of the Agency for Civil Service Affairs. When I told two of my key village informants about this meeting, they became serious. One of the two men, a part-time shepherd named Almas turned to the other, Erlan, and said, “he [Baimenov] is in charge of everyone ... after the president.” As they thought about the fact that Baimenov had authority over their local *akim*, they began to hatch a plan. Together they reviewed all of the *akim*’s misdeeds and flaws, all the times he could never be found or reached, specific instances when he refused to offer help or solve a problem, and cases of alleged corruption.

They then began to formulate specific questions that they would like Baimenov to answer. And then they turned to me. Almas said, “You need to tell him that you talked to the people in [our] village and you saw for yourself how badly the *akim* works and that everyone complains about him. And you need to ask him ‘why does the *akim* work so badly?’” In short, they wanted me to file a report of complaint with the central government on their behalf. There was an unspoken but implied expectation about what would happen once this information was relayed to central authorities. If Baimenov knew of the *akim*’s poor work, he would reprimand him, or maybe fire him, and see that a more honest and hardworking person was put in his place.

Erlan and Almas then imagined variations on this theme. They urged me to meet with the *akim* himself, and to tell him what I would say to Baimenov. “You go to Astana next week, that means this week you need to meet with the *akim*. I want to see the look on his face when you tell him you’re meeting with Baimenov! His jaw is going to drop!” The two of them became intoxicated by the thought of this scenario. They were laughing and slapping their

²⁴³ Field Notes, June and July, 2014 and KAZ_Int2_45.

knees, repeating to me and to each other “I want to see the look on his face!” They wanted to see for themselves how the *akim* would respond when he learned his fate, when he became aware that he would pay for his wrong doing and be fired. Luckily, Erlan and Almas were not entirely serious, and never intended for me to file a report with Astana (though they were probably glad that the seed had been planted in my mind). What they were really doing was engaging in fantasies of justice (Scott 1990: 36-44).

The telling component of this anecdote is that the two shepherds expected justice to be done merely by informing the central government of the problem. It was taken as self-evident that if the highest officials in Astana knew what was happening, they would take action. And I, through a single meeting with one of the president’s close associates (who was in charge of cadre policy), represented the link that would convey this information directly to those in power. It never occurred to them that their own *akim* was simply working according to the rules of the system that he was a part of, or that Baimenov would simply be disinterested. In reality, corruption appeared to be a normal part of the system and punishment “suspended,” and meted out selectively, based largely on political criteria (Ledeneva 1998: 77-78; 2006: 13)

Though I intend for this story to display a core dynamic of state-society relations between center and periphery in Kazakhstan, the precise scenario itself is highly unusual. Rarely or never do most ordinary village inhabitants come into contact with a foreign researcher who also happens to be en route to Astana to meet with officials who are close to the president. This does not mean they have no means to convey their grievances to the president, however. As I discussed in the previous chapter, *Nur Otan* often plays this role in everyday life, as people’s conduit to the president, and the only place where they can turn when their local officials are lazy, corrupt, or simply bad at their jobs.

One shopkeeper in a village in Sairam district explained how she attempted to address local problems.

Of course I would try and go to the *akimat* first, but they don't listen to anyone. They won't do anything and they won't listen to my problems. They just follow their own rules and their own plans. But *Nur Otan* will listen. And they will look into problems and fix them. And they'll do it quickly. Even when the *akim* agrees to fix a problem, it takes a long time.²⁴⁴

Similarly, a man in Akmola *oblast* said that “If we cannot solve a problem, then we go to *Nur Otan*. They work hard to solve problems. They develop schools, they visit the area, and they evaluate the work of the village and city officials and report their research directly to the president.”²⁴⁵

Other research corroborates these general dynamics, and also paints an inverse picture of trust in national versus local state institutions in comparison to Kyrgyzstan. A public opinion survey conducted by International Republican Institute showed that the president consistently received the highest favorable ratings of any institution in the country, including in comparison to local and regional *akimats* and *maslikhats* (IRI 2011: 45). Between 2008 and 2011, the president's favorability ratings hovered around 90% (ibid.). In another survey of 1,807 people in all fourteen provinces, over 90 percent were familiar with *Nur Otan*, and 70 percent gave it a positive evaluation. The next most prominent party, *Ak Zhol*, was recognized by only 42 percent of respondents and only 6.9 percent gave it a positive evaluation (Umbetalieva 2010). One study notes that *Nur Otan* is the only party with the country with any meaningful presence outside of Almaty and Astana, such that every other party has “weaker recognition” and “lack the tools and ability to shape their relationship with society” (Isaacs 2011: 144-5). In sum, “the center of attention and concentration of positive political feelings remains focused on the president of the

²⁴⁴ KAZ, Int2_52a, April 30, 2014.

²⁴⁵ KAZ_Int1_52e, June 30, 2014.

country,” even “despite disagreements with the practices of making and implementing decisions” (Umbetalieva 2010).

Similarly, research institutes in Almaty have found that public trust for the president and his party heavily outweighed trust for local-level officials. A survey by the Central Fund for the Development of Democracy, which included 1,192 respondents from all fourteen *oblasts* plus Astana and Almaty, found the lowest levels of positive evaluation and trust for all sub-national levels of administration. In general, “the highest levels of trust were shown toward the higher organs of the vertical of power, most of all, the head of state” and “in practically every *oblast* the highest levels of trust were fixed on the President” (Umbetalieva 2009).

In contrast, “extremely low levels of trust were shown toward [...] the local organs of power—*oblast*, city, and *raion* akimats,” with the percentage of respondents expressing trust hovering between 32 and 43 percent (Umbetalieva 2009). The study concludes that:

... the ineffectiveness of local state structures among Kazakhstanis has practically acquired the character of an axiom, which is adhered to by every stratum and group of the population. Respondents of every age and level of material circumstances, living in various settlements and abiding by the most different preferences in the majority of things, all give a negative evaluation to the work of local structures [...] In other words, the ineffectiveness of the local structures of authority stand out as invariable for the population, and, in the perception of the population, the official of the *akimat* is considered to be a dishonorable and spoiled official (6).

State research institutes show the same dynamic. One report notes that “practically three-fourths of the population of Kazakhstan trusts the president” while people tend to trust “local organs” to a “lesser degree.” More precisely, 74.8 percent said that they trust the president while only 52 percent said that they trust the *akim* of their city or village. Additionally, though, people tend to trust their local officials with less intensity than they trust the president. The above percentages indicating levels of trust are disaggregated accordingly: 41.4% said that “fully trust” the president while 33.4% said that they merely “trust” him; but, only 15.5% said that they “fully

trust” their local *akim* while 36.5% said that they merely “trust” him or her (Mukhamedzhanov and Zhusupova 2011: 346-365).

In recent research on the work of *maslikhat* deputies in Almaty, only 4% of residents evaluated the work of their deputy positively.²⁴⁶ 2,292 out of 2,635 respondents, or 87%, said that they did not know enough about the activities of their deputy and could not answer the question. In fact, as noted in the previous chapter, nearly 85% did not even recognize the name of their deputy when it was read aloud. Yet, despite not knowing who their deputy was, or having a familiarity with their work, residents were “ruthless” in criticizing their deputy’s job performance in the written comments section of the survey.²⁴⁷

In fact, many respondents consciously attributed negative evaluations of deputies’ work to the fact that they did not know him or her personally. One respondent said, “We don’t know the local [officials] and they don’t do anything. They don’t help us with our requests.” Another asked, “How is it possible for him to work? Nobody knows him!” An elderly person complained, “They said that on the Day of the Elderly someone was going to give out resources, but where are they? I’m 92 and don’t have any help.” Still, another complained, “The deputy sees nothing and we know nothing about him.” Another said simply, “I give him a *dvoika*,” or a failing grade. The phrase “he does not do anything” (*nichego ne delaet*) appears countless times in the responses. Overall, the study concludes, “deputies weakly interact with voters, and a low level of familiarity with who the deputies are and a lack of information about their activities can be observed.” This “low level of information makes evident a low level of trust and a high level of criticality toward the *maslikhat* among citizens” (fn. 33).

²⁴⁶ “Results of Research on the Work of Deputies of the Maslikhat of Almaty City,” The Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan, Presentation of Findings at the *Kazhol* hotel, Almaty, April 22, 2014.

²⁴⁷ Personal correspondence with the director of this research, June 2014.

All of the polling data and reports presented in this chapter should be taken with a grain of salt. What is important here is not any singular measure of trust or likeability for any specific institution or person, but the broader patterns within and between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan with respect to central versus local authorities. President Nazarbayev's 90% approval ratings, for example, are likely inflated. But, what all of the data show is that he is evaluated more positively and given higher levels of trust when compared with his own local and regional officials.²⁴⁸ The data from Kyrgyzstan suggest the opposite. There, the institutions of local government are evaluated more positively than the central government, or the president. Overall, the emphasis here is on the relative measures, not the absolute ones: each country exhibits different patterns of trust and evaluation for central versus local authorities, and does so in ways that corroborates the ethnographic and interview data that were presented in this chapter, and the previous one. These suggest different overall patterns of state-society relations.

II. Broadening the Scope: Local Social Relations as State-Society Relations

Here I would like to expand the scope of localism in Kyrgyzstan. While I have emphasized that variations in social ties at the local level in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan stem from different institutions of local government, the effects of these relations are not limited to the local level alone. First, the relations that people form with their local officials change the relationship that they have with the state itself. The local official in Kyrgyzstan is often a personal acquaintance, but he or she is simultaneously a public official and the main (and sometimes only) interface through which ordinary people interact with the state. This shapes

²⁴⁸ In fact, most evidence does suggest that absolute support for the president is genuine and widespread. A Freedom House report notes, "few observers disagree" that Nazarbayev would "easily win a truly free and fair election by at least 65-70 percent of the vote" (Dave 2012: 266).

more general understandings about what the state is and how it operates, and has implications for how people interact with the state more broadly, at the district, province, and national levels.

Second, and more concretely, village-level officials in Kyrgyzstan often go on to have political careers in higher-level state offices. They may have started as a teacher, taxi driver, or farmer, but tenures as *ayil okmotu* or as deputies in local councils can reshape career trajectories, especially for those who are good at their jobs and have strong local support. As they enter higher state posts, they take on different official responsibilities, but also have new and expanding sets of resources with which to meet the expectations of friends, families, and other local acquaintances back home. It is this that sets the stage for the contentious politics of appointment in districts, provinces, and in the capital city itself, where local communities' and central authorities' expectations clash about what these offices are for and in whose interest the officials appointed there are supposed to work. A lawyer specializing on local self-government in Kyrgyzstan described the nature of this conflict:

Before you could see that there was always rotation, people from one region were appointed to other regions, but now the development of local self-government is pushing the other way [...] the previous *ayil okmotus* become *akims* because they know the structure, the people, and how to organize themselves. During Akaev's time and Bakiev's time this rotation was usual. Now this type of thing does not work, people do not accept it.²⁴⁹

In the previous chapter, I described the work of Marat, a former *ayil okmotu* who was later appointed to become the head of the Ministry of Agriculture outpost in his district. His co-villagers obtained benefits from his placement in this post that they would not otherwise have had in ways that reinforced a basic principle: state officials have obligations to help acquaintances in their own locality. Nurlan *baike*, meanwhile, had open aspirations to become

²⁴⁹ Interview with author, August 28, 2013, KYG1_Mt1_29.

the next *akim* of his district.²⁵⁰ He would frequently express his desire to obtain this post—“god willing” (*kudaiga shugur*)—and his disappointment that he had not been selected already.²⁵¹

According to an official at the State Agency on Work with Local Self-Governance, the subsequent appointment of former *ayil okmotu* heads to higher state positions is common in Kyrgyzstan—“there are many cases when an *ayil okmotu* becomes an *akim* [...] in general there are many people who used to be *ayil okmotu* who move up into higher positions.”²⁵² That is, multiple parts of the state are infiltrated with local elites, including former local officials. This reinforces the value of having local people appointed to higher-level positions as former village officials go on to secure more resources with which to help their home communities.

Dzhumagul Egamberdieva, for example, taught Russian language and literature for 23 years at the local school in her village, Terek-Sai, which is located in Chatkalskii district, Jalalabad *oblast*. In 2005, through direct elections at the village level, she became the head of Terek-Sai *ayil okmotu*. Three years later, she was appointed as *akim* of Chatkalskii district. In 2014, she was appointed as governor of Jalalabad *oblast*, a high-level state position that nominally (and officially) represents the central government in that province. As I started to describe in chapter two, governorships have been a continual object of contention between local elites and central authorities. Nowhere has this been truer than in Jalalabad *oblast*, which I elaborate on in detail in the next chapter to contextualize what Egamberdieva’s appointment to this post represents in broader center-periphery politics.

²⁵⁰ At the time this research was conducted, the post of *akim* in Kyrgyzstan referred only to the top executive office at the district level, not to be confused with the post of *akim* in Kazakhstan, which refers to the top executive office of any level, village, district, and province.

²⁵¹ Nurlan frequently told the story of being passed over for this position. He claimed that he was called to meet with the then-Prime Minister Atambayev in Bishkek to be offered the post but he could not go because he had very pressing (but unspecified) problems to address in the village. Whether true or not, it is interesting that Nurlan would represent village problems as having more weight than a meeting with the prime minister. In subsequent correspondence, Nurlan indicated that he expected to be selected as *akim* in the next round of appointments (November 2015).

²⁵² Interview with author, September 7, 2013. KYG1_Int1_45.

Similarly, the most recent governor of Talas *oblast* (as of April 2015), Koisun Kurmanalieva, is a life-long native of the province and served in her local village council for eight years. Kurmanalieva was installed as a “people’s governor” in 2010 when her supporters gathered in the province center and demanded the resignation of the state-chosen incumbent, who was appointed from a different province. This event occurred at the outset of a nation-wide revolution with governors deposed in every region of the country, which I also address in detail in the next chapter. Her “appointment” was confirmed by a new transitional government in Bishkek *ex post facto*. She held the post for five years and resigned on the fifth anniversary of the 2010 revolution, April 6, 2015 (Podolskaya 2015).

Likewise, Kyrgyzstan’s national parliament (*Jogorku Kenesh*) includes a number of prominent local politicians, many of whom were former village-level officials. Abdimutalip Kochkorbaev, a parliamentary deputy since 2011, was elected as the *ayil okmotu* of Mady, his home village, in 2001, 2005, and 2009. Prior to this he worked as a teacher of Kyrgyz language and then held several positions in the districts neighboring his hometown. Likewise, Esengul Isakov, who worked first as a driver at a local metallurgical complex and then as a shepherd of his local *sovkhos* (Kyzyl-Suu), served on the Almaluu village council (1995) and then as the head of the *ayil okmotu* (1996-99 and 2003-2005) before ultimately being elected to parliament in 2010.²⁵³ As prior research has shown, average villagers throughout Kyrgyzstan tend to support their “native son” in national elections. In parliamentary elections in 2007, campaigners in one village asked people simply “to vote for *oz kokurok kychygybyz* (our son, our brother, our dignity, and our foal); someone who was better than any outsider” (Ismailbekova 2014: 87).

²⁵³ Almaluu *ayil okmotu* encompasses the former *sovkhos* (Kyzyl-Suu) and the villages of Almaluu and Bordu and is located in Kemin district, Chui *oblast*. Esengul was born in Bordu.

Unlike village outsiders, the “native son” is “seen as representing the village as a whole, rather than a constituency of individuals” (ibid. 93).

A closer look at Kyrgyzstan’s national parliament offers an additional lens through which to view local expectations and the pull of local social ties on state officials because Kyrgyzstan switched to a proportional representation (PR) system in 2010. At this discrete moment in time, deputies were no longer the formal representatives of their own localities. By all accounts, however, this changed little about their actual behavior. The proponents of the PR system continue to be puzzled and frustrated by the fact that parliamentary deputies are concerned almost exclusively with the affairs of their own home village even though they are elected from party lists at the national level. An analyst in Bishkek who works with parliament through the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society explains that parliamentary deputies “still work based on their regional status...if he is from this village he thinks he has to work only for this village, this is our problem.” She went on to complain that, “it feels like they have this complex, where they cannot grow out of their region [...] it’s comfortable for them to have this village-level mentality, to say that ‘I have to work here, I am from here.’ No! You came to a national institution and you need to stop thinking only about your village!”²⁵⁴

A program manager at the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in Bishkek says that the point of the proportional representation system was to get deputies to think more about party platforms and less about their own regions. But, “people don’t act this way, nobody cares about the programs.” In order to attract votes, the parties “have to bring people from local communities.” The result is that “deputies raise only their own local questions, like ‘in my village there is no school, or no bridge, so we need to put this in the budget’ ...they just represent

²⁵⁴ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_12, August 27, 2013.

local interests.”²⁵⁵ A former assistant to a deputy from the *Ak Zhol* party noted that “members of parliament spend a lot of time in the regions, in their own villages...they build things, or they help people with money, even money from their own pocket. When they vote on bills they are concerned with what will be popular among villagers but they don’t think about the national interest.”²⁵⁶

A USAID report complains that the national reach of the five major political parties are not built upon strong party platforms, but on personalistic social networks in different regions and localities. Despite the veneer of national-level support for certain party lists, “party leaders continue to maintain clientelistic relationships with large families based in the regions and rely on particular party members’ ability to mobilize voters locally” (USAID 2013: 33). That is, people vote for a party only when specific individuals from their region or locality are put on the list, the very dynamic that a PR system is intended to undermine. In front of a parliamentary assembly in 2013, Vice Prime Minister Otorbaev noted that “regionalism” was too strong in the country, and complained that “the election system is proportional, but people vote for candidates according to regional affiliations” (Turgaev 2013).

Indeed, despite the party-list system for elections, the parties themselves appear to place a heavy emphasis on a candidate’s local prominence, among other things.²⁵⁷ A former high-level official from the *Ata-Meken* party who now works in the Central Election Committee described how one of the party’s main recruitment strategies was to work closely with members of local governments. “The party is always looking to add such members. It’s important for the party to have people who have their own political weight or power at the local level [...] who are

²⁵⁵ Interview with author, September 16, 2013, KYG1_Int1_8. This individual also held several high-level posts in the Ministry of Justice and in the presidential administration.

²⁵⁶ Interview with author, August 16, 2013, KYG1_Int1_34.

²⁵⁷ The parties are self-financed and so they also try and recruit candidates who are relatively wealthy and can contribute their own money.

respected in their region. In national elections people judge the party according to the work of these people, these local officials.” Even if such officials never make the national party list, or they are too low on the list to be elected to parliament, the party can help give them a “social lift”—i.e., a promotion—by getting them appointed to other state positions “so that people from the local level can grow higher.”²⁵⁸

Likewise, a former head of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) in Chui *oblast* noted that the party was always trying to win support outside of the party leaderships’ own home regions, which are predominantly in the north. “Of course, we invited different people from every *oblast*, especially prominent local people.”²⁵⁹ For SDPK, an emphasis was placed on prominent local elites from the south. Among the examples he cited was Egamberdieva, the former *ayil okmotu* from Terek-Sai in Jalalabad *oblast*, whom I discussed above. He also mentioned Soorobai Zheenbekov, the former school teacher and *kolkhoz* director who later became a parliamentary deputy from his region in Osh *oblast*. In the aftermath of the revolution in April 2010, he was elected by an unofficial public assembly (*kurultai*) to become a “people’s governor” of the province and was subsequently confirmed by the transitional government.²⁶⁰

Likewise, Karamat Orozova helped SDPK to garner votes in the remote southern province of Batken and was first elected to parliament in 2010. Orozova has lived in Batken her entire life and worked in the district-level organs of the communist party throughout the 1980s. In the post-Soviet period she became the director of the local kindergarten, *Teremok*, and worked as a prominent regional representative of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society from

²⁵⁸ Interview with author, August 28, 2013. Gulnara Dzhurabaeva, Vice Chairman, Central Commission for Elections and Referendums of the Kyrgyz Republic.

²⁵⁹ Interview with author, January 13, 2014. KYG1_Int2_44.

²⁶⁰ Zheenbekov was informally chosen as “people’s governor” on April 9. On May 13, the supporters of his predecessor, Mamasadyk Bakirov, reclaimed control. Bakirov’s deputy, Aitmamat Kadyrbaev, took over the post of governor. The central government, which was then dominated by members of the SDPK party, sided with Zheenbekov, who was able to reclaim his position, which he still holds (as of April 2015).

2001-2010. As the SDPK official described, “she was an activist in Batken for many years, just from society [...] during the instability of 2010 when there was an interim government, we helped to make her the governor [of Batken] [...] then she became deputy governor.”²⁶¹ In 2013, she went back to parliament on the SDPK party list.

It is not only the major parties that face these incentives to select prominent local leaders. A member of the new startup “Labor Party” (*Emgek*) described the same dynamic as the leaders of the larger parties described above “...to win elections the party is looking for people who have a good reputation in the regions. In order to have a good reputation the people have to live there or at least be regularly visiting and helping the population, for example, giving money to help the poor, or even fixing roads.”²⁶²

As these stories suggest, the electoral incentives that parties face in constructing their lists are quite similar to pressures that the central government faces in choosing its governors. In both cases the party (or the central government) are formally free to choose whomever they want, but there are strong local preferences for the selection of local leaders. This is because of ordinary people’s understanding of what the state is and what it can do for them, which comes from their experiences participating in their local government and the trust that stems from personalized social ties with local officials. In the case of the appointment of governors, local preferences for the appointment of local cadre happen to be directly at odds with the central government’s policy of cadre rotation in the provinces, as I discussed in chapter two. Indeed, undermining the local social bases of provincial state officials is precisely the purpose of cadre rotation.²⁶³

²⁶¹ She held the governor’s post for only one month.

²⁶² Personal correspondence, February 24, 2015.

²⁶³ It is worth noting that the contrast in party organization in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan parallels the broader patterns in state centralization and center-periphery relations described throughout this dissertation. Formal political parties in Kyrgyzstan, partly for the reasons described here, are fragmented, regionalized, and dependent on prominent local and regional politicians. Kazakhstan, by contrast, is dominated by a single party, which is deeply

We see the same dynamics with party lists. Even though the PR system should discourage party leaders from placing such a strong emphasis on recruiting regional representatives, the informal pull of local social ties creates a set of countervailing incentives. The existence, prevalence, and importance of such strong local ties were shaped and strengthened by the institutions of local government. It was through these institutions that ordinary people formed relationships to the state itself, in the personae of their local officials.

But, as I have also tried to argue, the effect of these state-society relations is not limited to the local level alone. Even officials who never formally served in local government structures are still partly bound by the logic and expectations of local social ties that the institutions of local government helped incubate and integrate into the state. Like the major political parties, individual politicians themselves have to meet expectations that they will provide help and support to the individuals whom they knew through childhood, and their friends and family. The nature of social ties between local officials and local communities in villages and cities shapes state-society relations in general, and places pressure on national-level officials to act according to its logic. This is true even for the most famous national-level politicians.

Throughout the Bazar Korgon district of Jalalabad *oblast*, for example, people still refer to the native-born parliamentarian and leader of the *Ata Meken* party, Omurbek Tekebaev, as “our deputy” even though he does not formally or officially represent the region.²⁶⁴ When people referred to him as “our deputy,” they were invoking an informal role based on moral obligations to assist *his* community, not as his formal role in parliament. If anything, his high profile in government only made him better equipped to do this, giving him access to resources that he could use to help people back home. His family still lives in the region and he visits on a

tied to the president of the country, as I described above. We might say that, in Kyrgyzstan, the parties are dependent on local officials; in Kazakhstan, local officials are dependent on the party.

²⁶⁴ Field notes, multiple interviews, September-October 2013.

regular basis, always coming with gifts. For example, he has provided computers to several local schools in the area, including the one he used to teach at.²⁶⁵ Many people described Tekebaev's obligations to the region according to the same moral logic that they used to describe their local officials, which I described above:

Of course if the person is from here they will try and bring projects when they are in power. They have an obligation to their families and to their village. Tekebaev tries to do this. He always tries to help Akman and Bazar Korgon [district]. But, if they don't have a lot of power then they can only do this in a limited way.²⁶⁶

Another villager from Akman noted that Tekebaev "always finds ways to help us here and we already know him so it is comfortable to ask for favors [...] If more people were like Tekebaev things would be better for Bazar Korgon [district]."²⁶⁷ In fact, other people *are* like Tekebaev, though not because they are helping Bazar Korgon; they are helping their own villages instead.

All of this is to suggest that promotions to higher level state posts do not sever officials' social obligations to their regions, or even their home villages. To the contrary, an official's access to increasing levels of resources also raises expectations about the kinds of help that co-villagers will be able to receive. One study of elite politicians in Kyrgyzstan emphasized the primacy of personalized localism in determining how elites are motivated to do their jobs and even why they seek to obtain high-level state positions in the first place (Huskey and Isakova 2010). Through surveys and multiple interviews with prominent state elites, the authors concluded that personal status was more important than anything else. By status these officials "did not have in mind status on a national level, but status among one's own relatives and local community" (246). The authors conclude that "all politics is very local in Kyrgyzstan, where the

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Interview with author, October 22, 2013, KYG1_Int1_3_ii.

²⁶⁷ KYG1_int1_49_#7.

most powerful geographical attachments are not to the nation, or to the north or the south, or even to one of the country's seven regions, but to one's district or village" (252).

Speaking generally about local officials who later get promotions, one unemployed man in Osh province commented that, "of course they will work for all of Kyrgyzstan, but at some level, even if it is minor, they will help their hometown or the community in which they were raised."²⁶⁸ One person even claimed that the president has a legal obligation to give 15% of his income to his home village.²⁶⁹ Though certainly apocryphal, the fact that someone thinks it to be true signifies an expectation that state officials have obligations to help their home communities as they obtain higher-level offices. It is to assume that moral norms have the status of state law. While the president certainly has no legal obligation to help his own village, he might still have a moral obligation to do so.

Indeed, in a rare but telling moment of sympathy for the plight of the two presidents who were chased from power, both of whom ran unapologetically nepotistic governments, one villager in Jalalabad province explained that they were only doing what was expected of them. They were obligated to help their friends and family:

Yes, state officials are sometimes corrupt, helping their own village, or maybe just even their own friends and relatives. But, they really don't have a choice. Once they have this job they are expected to do all these things. I know how they feel. Even when I go home [to Akman village] everyone I know expects me to do them favors and bring them things [because I now live in Bishkek]. It is an obligation.

It is the same for officials, but even more so. Take Akaev and Bakiev. Everyone said that they were corrupt and distributed jobs and money to their own friends and relatives. But I can understand it. If you put yourself in their shoes it is easy to understand. Every person whom they know from childhood to adulthood, everyone in their village and from nearby villages expects favors and hundreds or maybe thousands of people are waiting to get what they believe they are owed. And what choices did Akaev and Bakiev really have? They had just as much obligation to help their people as I have to help mine, only more so because they have so much power.

I think it is too simple to say that they are bad people, or corrupt. They have obligations to fulfill. I think most people understand this. I think so many people were angry at Akaev and then at Bakiev not because they gave jobs and money to friends and relatives; but because their *own* friends and relatives were not in a

²⁶⁸ Interview with author, October 25, 2013, KYG2_Int2_49_9.

²⁶⁹ Field notes, October 21, 2013.

position to give jobs and money to them. Nobody is fighting for an honest system—everyone is fighting to get their own people into power—the people whom they know and trust—so that they can benefit from it in every way, from regional development, to jobs, to money, to favors...all of it.²⁷⁰

Indeed, when Akaev's government crumbled during the Tulip Revolution in 2005, his only base of support in the entire country proved to be his home district of Kemin (*Chui oblast*). After Akaev's allies in the capital quickly defected, the main concern was "violence breaking out between the opposition and members of Akaev's clan from Kemin, perhaps one of the few places where the president's ouster was greeted with more fear than rejoicing" (ICG 2005: 9). The residents of Kemin "went into the streets" in anticipation of protestors arriving from Bishkek while "in the capital the new authorities feared that groups from Kemin would try to retake control" (*ibid.*).

Likewise, the "localist essence" of Bakiev's presidency was revealed when, as a result of the revolution in April 2010, Bakiev fled to his home village—Teyit (*Suzak raion*, *Jalalabad oblast*)—not to one of the major urban centers in the south where he might have been expected to find supporters (Ramas 2013: 140). In Teyit, with his uncles, brothers, and their many sons, Bakiev hunkered down before ultimately fleeing to Minsk. The deposed president's *Ak Zhol* party, which was dominant at the time, crumbled almost instantly in the face of protests. Like Bakiev himself, the party had "no social base to be mobilized beyond each member's local network," a resource that was used by each member to protect his or her self rather than Bakiev (Ramas 2013: 140). During his several days in Teyit, Bakiev made speeches and spoke to the press in an attempt to shore up his supporters, but the very act of doing so underlined that he was no longer president. Surrounded by ordinary villagers in Adidas sport suits or traditional Kyrgyz dress—staple wardrobe stylings of the average villager—Bakiev looked more like the *ayil*

²⁷⁰ Former school teacher from Akman, interview with author, October 2013 and subsequent correspondence (February 2014 and March 2015).

okmotu of Teyit than the president of the country. The logic of his career trajectory was the same for those I described above, only in this case he was making his exit from the state apparatus rather than his entrance.

III. Local Social Ties, Moral Economy, and Accountability

The general dynamics described above are not unique to Central Asia. The presence and effects of a moral economy in which local officials are embedded has been shown to have effects on trust and accountability in other settings. That is to say, they represent generalizable dynamics of local social ties and state-society relations. Tsai shows that even where the formal institutions of accountability are weak or non-existent, social mechanisms of accountability are still possible. Different kinds of local social ties in China, for example, shape different levels of responsiveness and accountability among local officials through the mechanism of moral standing (Tsai 2007a; 2007b).

In Tsai's argument, the factor that shapes local officials' ties to local communities is the presence or absence of "social solidary groups," which are groups defined by common norms and shared interests. Local officials become subject to moral sanctioning and are more responsive to local demands where social solidarity groups are both embedding and encompassing. An encompassing social solidary group is one that includes or is open to all of the people within the local government's jurisdiction; an embedding group is one that includes the local officials themselves as members.²⁷¹ When a local official is embedded in a solidary

²⁷¹ These two characteristics do not always line up. Lineage groups (like clans), she argues, can be embedding and include the local official, but they are not encompassing because not everyone in the locality is a member of the same lineage group or eligible to join. Catholic and protestant churches, in contrast, tend to be encompassing, but local officials are prohibited by the Communist Party from participating as members. Her point is that social solidary groups must be *both* encompassing and embedding in order for them to produce accountability through social and moral mechanisms.

group that encompasses the population of the village, they are subject to a common set of norms and have strong moral obligations to provide for the collective good of the community. The mechanism that compels them to provide for the public good is their moral standing within the community, particularly their ability to secure esteem and respect in social settings where their work is highly visible and subject to a common set of expectations.

The more that a solidary group *encompasses* all the citizens in a particular local governmental jurisdiction and the more that a solidary group *embeds* local officials in its activities, the more effective it is at enabling citizens to hold local officials accountable for public goods provision. When the boundaries of a solidary group overlap with local administrative boundaries, embedded officials have a strong *social* obligation to contribute to the good of the group (2007b, 96, emphasis in original).

In China, the institutions of local government do not formally vary across territory, allowing Tsai to study the effects of these informal modes of accountability. It is only where local government institutions and local solidary groups overlap territorially that accountability can be produced. Tsai argues that village temples in China are embedding and encompassing solidary groups. Using a sample of over 300 villages in China, she shows that the presence of village temples had a strong positive correlation on the level of public goods provision in a locality. Her main conclusion is that social mechanisms of accountability based on moral standing and trust can still exist in the absence of the formal institutions that create accountability in democracies. Inversely, the absence of village temples—and, therefore, the absence of embedding and encompassing social solidary groups—was associated with lower levels of accountability. Local officials in such settings were less susceptible to informal social pressures to provide for the needs of the village.

Tsai's social solidary groups resemble what Tilly calls "trust networks," which "consist of ramified interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties, within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of others" (Tilly 2005: 12). He stresses that trust is not an attitude, but a kind of social

relationship. Importantly, trust networks are not one of a kind, but “vary from setting to setting,” and can take multiple forms, such as “religious sects and solidarities, lineages, trade diasporas, patron-client chains, credit networks, mutual aid societies, age grades, and local communities” (Tilly 2005: 13). Moreover, he says, the ways in which trust networks are integrated into the apparatus of state rule, to the extent that they are at all, varies across time and space and have important implications for the kinds of state-society relations that emerge as a result (Tilly 2005: 30-51).

The cases of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, then, are not *sui generis*. But, they do provide new insights into the possible effects of local social ties on state-society relations. In these cases it is the formal local government institutions themselves that integrate or expel, and strengthen or weaken, the social ties that define local officials’ place in the village. That is, the mechanisms of moral sanctioning built upon interpersonal social relations are endogenous to the institutions of local government. Institutions of local government in Kyrgyzstan embed local officials in local communities and subject them to the moral sanctioning mechanisms of co-villagers.²⁷² In Kazakhstan, local government institutions, though they are encompassing, do not have the same embedding effect and even insulate local officials from the very moral economies that might produce trust and lead to greater levels of responsiveness and accountability. Thus, I emphasize that the formal institutions of government themselves can differently interact with, incubate, or preclude the informal social sanctioning mechanisms that come from social solidary groups or trust networks.

This approach, then, elucidates the effect that formal institutions can have on informal ones (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). It also suggests an answer to what Eisenstadt and Roniger

²⁷² They are encompassing by definition.

describe as the “central problem” in analyzing friendship, personal relationships, and clientelism: how to address “the construction and institutionalization of trust” in political and social orders (1984: 29).

IV. Conclusions

In the first parts of this chapter, I outlined different patterns of trust in local versus national level government institutions in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan using a combination of ethnographic and interview data in conjunction with national level polling, survey data, and secondary research. In Kyrgyzstan, ordinary people show the highest levels of trust and evaluation for the institutions of local government in comparison with the president and other national-level state institutions. In Kazakhstan, however, the highest levels of trust and support were shown for the president and his political party. Local officials, in contrast, were not well liked, and even despised. The central government—both the president and his party—have obtained their popularity and support, at least in part, because of their ostensible responsiveness to local complaints and occasional interventions into local government. In sum, the way that people evaluate “the state” and its officials is disaggregated into its local and national components.

I have also emphasized that these differences in local level social contexts and politics shape broad patterns of overall state-society relations. The high levels of trust stemming from the nature of local social relations in Kyrgyzstan shapes people’s expectations about what the state can do for them and how it can do it. This politicizes the distinction between local and non-local cadre and creates strong preferences for the appointment of embedded local leaders throughout the state apparatus. After all, they are the only ones who can be expected to provide for the village and its inhabitants, and the only kinds of officials who can be trusted to represent

its interests. In Kazakhstan, the distinction between local versus non-local cadre does not have as much political significance.

This sets the stage for different kinds of contests related to cadre rotation, as I described in chapter two. While ordinary people in Kazakhstan are indifferent to cadre rotation and might even welcome it as a sign that the president is keeping corruption in check, residents in Kyrgyzstan have strong preferences for who is appointed to govern which region. Moreover, they are sometimes willing to fight to protect their own trusted cadre against relocation, or against the appointment of an outsider. Indeed, Radnitz argues that high levels of protest mobilization in Kyrgyzstan stem from the ability of socially embedded local elites to mobilize their communities when they have conflicts with central state authorities (Radnitz 2005, 2006, 2010; see also Khamidov 2006).²⁷³

Frequently, these conflicts center on the right (or desire) of prominent local elites and officials to hold or maintain their offices. Huskey and Isakova recount the testimony of one state official in Kyrgyzstan who is quoted as saying, “if you part with your post [*dolzhnost*’], your life has ended [*propala tvoya zhizn*’].... If you aren’t a big official, it means that it’s over, it’s the end of the world [*u tebya vse, konets sveta*]” (2010: 246). The authors note that this is related to “the desire of former politicians to get back in the game” if they lose or are otherwise removed from office (ibid., fn. 30). Likewise, Ramas argues that cadre rotation during the Akaev era caused resentment and bitterness among regional officials, leading them to become increasingly active in the opposition movement that culminated in the Tulip Revolution (Ramas 2013: 136).

In the following chapter, I return to the politics of regional cadre appointment that I described in chapter two. In chapter two, I described the historical and social logic of cadre

²⁷³ I address Radnitz’s argument in detail in the following chapter.

rotation, argued that it was a relevant indicator of state formation (or bureaucratic centralization) in post-Soviet states, and showed differences in the outcome of its implementation in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. While cadre rotation is the desired policy of central authorities in both states, only Kazakhstan has been able to implement and achieve it. Central authorities in Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, face continued resistance and opposition from local communities and local elites. While there is some contention surrounding regional appointment politics in both states, the key difference is that in Kyrgyzstan these are battles that the central government often loses, due mainly to grassroots social mobilization in local communities. In the next chapter I review contentious episodes of regional cadre appointment in detail, mapping how cases in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan differ according to the socio-territorial origins of the officials themselves, in the contexts of the offices they are being appointed to or removed from, along with differences in the behavior of local communities. Taken in aggregate, I argue that these different patterns of contentious politics in regional appointments represent contrasting trajectories of state development during the post-Soviet period.

Chapter 6: Contentious Episodes of Regional Appointment and Representation

In chapter two, I described broad contrasting patterns of regional appointment politics in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan related to the policy of cadre rotation. Though each state has the same policy—namely, the rotation of cadre across regions—only Kazakhstan has successfully implemented it. Central authorities in Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, have frequently faced resistance when attempting to remove locals from office, install non-locals in their place, or both. Moreover, local officials, along with their supporters, have sometimes seized control of offices they are not officially appointed to. In this chapter I present specific contentious episodes of cadre appointment politics in more detail. Not all of these cases are directly related to an appointed regional office; they include other state offices and seats in parliament. But, all are cases of center-periphery conflict over who holds what office, and pit central authorities against local and regional officials, and sometimes local populations.

Two clear patterns emerge: local and regional officials in Kazakhstan who exhibit too much independence, or who directly challenge the president's appointment powers, end up in jail or in exile; their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan end up in power, either in their own region, or in the central government itself. In every instance, they do so through the ability to mobilize local communities, who, as I discussed in the previous chapter, have an interest in seeing known members of the community hold offices locally, or obtain appointments to higher-level positions.

Indeed, the list of Kazakhstan's provincial governors who became too powerful and broke with Nazarbayev also became high-profile criminals, convicted of "corruption" or "abuse of power": Akezhan Kazhegeldin (exiled); Zamanbek Nurkadilov (mysteriously killed); Galymzhan Zhakiyanov (jailed and exiled); Viktor Khrapunov (exiled); Bergei Ryskaliev

(missing); Erlan Aryn (arrested). Their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, remain among the most prominent officials in their home region, and sometimes go on to obtain significant positions within the central government itself: Azimbek Beknazarov, Iskenderbek Aidaraliev, Zhusubek Zheenbekov, Koisun Kurmanalieva, and Melis Myrzakmatov, among others. The key difference is that these regional officials, unlike their counterparts in Kazakhstan, had substantial public support in their home villages and regions. This enabled some to resist efforts to remove or relocate them and others to seize control over local and regional offices that they were not officially appointed to.

I. Center-Periphery Appointment Politics in Kyrgyzstan

While this dissertation is not about revolutions, and does not seek or claim to explain how or why they occur, there is no way to address state power or contentious politics in Kyrgyzstan without touching on the Tulip Revolution (2005) or the April Revolution (2010). These were complex events with multiple causes and were not about regional appointment politics alone. But, governor's offices in every province were contested in both revolutions, usually leading to the installment of a locally selected "people's governor." In fact, contention surrounding control over regional representation—in both parliament and in governor's offices—were the proximate events leading to national-level conflict in both cases (Kulov 2008). In short, regional appointment politics played at least some role in these revolutions. For the purposes of analysis, I focus on specific contentious events rather than on the revolutions themselves (Sewell 1996). In addressing these events through the prism of regional appointment and representation, I highlight aspects of the revolutions that have remained on the periphery of analysis. In addition,

I discuss contentious episodes of regional appointment before, between, and after the revolutions, in 2002, 2006, and 2010-2014.

Much of the existing literature on Kyrgyzstan's two revolutions has focused on inter-elite politics at the national level. The overwhelming emphasis has been on national elites' competition for relatively scarce patronage resources (Engvall 2011; McGlinchey 2011). Others argue that Kyrgyzstan's divided-executive system—which gives both the president and prime minister substantial formal powers—reinforces “competing-pyramid” patronage networks pitting national elites against one another and creating continual instability among them (Hale 2006, 2011, 2015: 61-94). Overall, these theories treat the revolutions as capital-city events. They have less to say about center-periphery politics or whether and how the revolutions touched on the interests of ordinary people, particularly those living in rural districts and villages.

Yet, these revolutions were not palace coups. They entailed the mass mobilization of ordinary people and were initially led by regional elites with deep ties to particular local communities. In both March 2005 and April 2010, protest mobilization started in the regions and only later came to Bishkek as protestors literally travelled to the capital from the provinces. This leaves questions about how and why ordinary people were willing to fight on behalf of their regional leaders in large numbers, and at such great personal risk. What kinds of interests and ties bound protesters to regional elites' such that mass mobilization became possible?

Radnitz (2005, 2006, 2010) addresses this question in detail and argues that frequent and large-scale social mobilization in Kyrgyzstan was facilitated by the social embeddedness of regional and local elites, who can call on large networks of supporters in conflicts with central authorities. Sometimes this protest activity remained regionalized, as in the “Aksy events” of 2002—which I address below—but, in other instances, regional elites coordinated through

horizontal networks formed in parliament, which is how regionalized protests grew into national-level revolutions in 2005 and 2010 (Radnitz 2010). In all cases, though, the key players are regional elites and the local communities in which they are socially embedded.

In discussing the contentious politics of regional appointment and representation in Kyrgyzstan I rely heavily on Radnitz's work, which emphasizes the social embeddedness of local and regional elites and the mobilization of local communities to fight on their behalf in conflicts with the central government. But, I offer a different perspective from Radnitz on two key points: first, on the nature and origin of these local social ties; and, second, on what the object of contention is in these and similar conflicts between center and periphery. In addressing these differences, I use empirical cases to illustrate the main points, and also to highlight some of the dynamics described in previous chapters.²⁷⁴ In doing so I seek to build on Radnitz's theory in a way that can tell us something about how these many contentious episodes have shaped the centralization of the Kyrgyz state and administrative relations between center and periphery. At the end of this chapter I will elaborate on these differences in more detail, drawing on the empirical data presented here on both the Kazakh and Kyrgyz cases.

The events described below involve numerous individual actors in a variety of local social contexts. For the sake of factual accuracy and precision, I include all the specific places and actors. But, the dynamics of events themselves are far more important than any particular place or person. In recounting the details of the contentious politics of regional appointment and representation in Kyrgyzstan, I seek to highlight, above all else, one basic pattern: ordinary people back local political figures, assisted their own officials in resisting central directives for removal and transfer, and sometimes even deposed central government appointees in the

²⁷⁴ The differences are mainly theoretical and analytical, not empirical. I rely on Radnitz's accounts of the Aksy events and Tulip Revolution, supplemented by others, to recount a basic outline of what happened and when.

provinces to install their local favorite as a “people’s governor.” While electrifying in their own right, the distinctiveness of these events in the Kyrgyz context becomes more apparent through comparison with Kazakhstan, which I address afterward.

The Aksy Events (2002)

The Aksy events refer to a series of protests in a rural district of southern Kyrgyzstan that culminated in the use of violent state force against protestors and was then followed by state concessions to protestors’ demands. The cause of these events was the arrest of the parliamentarian, Azimbek Beknazarov, who represented his land-scarce home district of Aksy (Jalalabad *oblast*), and was openly critical of a deal in which President Akaev ceded land to China. Upon his arrest in January 2002, which was widely seen as politically motivated, thousands of people from his village and district mobilized to fight for his release and for his reinstatement in parliament. By June 2002, the central government conceded to these demands.

The grassroots campaign to free and reinstate Beknazarov was led by two childhood friends from his home village (Kara-su), who were soon joined by other former schoolmates. The “inner core” of his supporters were his family and close acquaintances from his village (Radnitz 2005: 415). Within one month of Beknazarov’s arrest, his local supporters organized protests. Part of this organization was a direct outgrowth of the local self-government system and its officials who “were already well-connected, respected, and had experience in mobilizing people” for the tasks associated with village governance (412).

During the first two months of protests, the number of participants in Aksy district swelled into the thousands as Beknazarov’s family and friends activated their own social networks, which included people in neighboring villages throughout the district. After several

open conflicts with the district-level administration—including the kidnapping of several officials by protesters—state security forces were dispatched to arrest the leaders. While scuffling with marching protestors on March 17, state security forces opened fire, killing several people.

As a result of the violence, local social mobilization nearly doubled. Across Aksy district, nearly 8,000 people mobilized to fight for the reinstatement of their deputy (415). In June, Beknazarov was given a one-year suspended sentence and released from custody, but was denied his seat in parliament (414). In the days that followed, the protestors were relentless, marching on every major administrative structure in the region in the hundreds or thousands. Fearing wider conflict, President Akaev overturned the court ruling, allowing Beknazarov to hold his office (414).²⁷⁵ Though this conflict was over an elected position and not an appointed one, the core of the conflict—including its process and resolution—followed the logic of other events, which I describe below: central authorities, when attempting to remove a local leader from office, were met with powerful local resistance, and ultimately conceded to local interests.²⁷⁶ Moreover, the ways in which local government institutions already connected local leaders with local communities for purposes of village governance were important organizational features in the mobilization that was now being directed against central authorities.

²⁷⁵ Like others who survived these battles with central authorities, Beknazarov went on to obtain even higher-level state positions. In 2005, he was appointed General Prosecutor of the Kyrgyz Republic. In August 2010, he was appointed Vice Prime Minister.

²⁷⁶ The key difference with appointed office is that the central government has the formal legal authority to appoint and remove its appointed officials. In this case they had no firm legal footing to remove Beknazarov in the first place. Below I address cases of conflict over appointed offices, which follow a similar pattern.

The Tulip Revolution (2005) and the Talas-Jalalabad Cadre Shuffle (2006)

As noted above, the revolutions in Kyrgyzstan have not been about provincial governorships alone, but these offices have been deeply contested in both revolutions. In the course of the Tulip Revolution, all but one of Akaev's incumbent governors were either forced from office by mass protest—in miniature versions of what happened to Akaev himself—or immediately removed and replaced by the new government, led by Kurmanbek Bakiev.²⁷⁷ Among these was the governor of Jalalabad *oblast*, Zhusubek Sharipov, governor from 2002 until the revolution in March 2005.

Sharipov was an example of a non-local appointment, chosen by President Akaev from outside the region and without local bases of support. He was born in the Kara-Kulja district of Osh *oblast* and worked in several administrative positions in Osh and Bishkek before being appointed as the governor of Issyk-kul *oblast* from 2000-2002. His subsequent transfer to Jalalabad, in 2002, is one of the few examples of observable cadre rotation in Kyrgyzstan, which is precisely what we should expect to find under Akaev's explicit attempts to shuffle governors across regions. So Sharipov's fate as a deposed non-local governor of Jalalabad, mirroring Akaev's as the president of the country, tells us a lot about the fate of cadre rotation in Kyrgyzstan.

The Tulip Revolution was sparked when supporters of a local candidate for parliament in Jalalabad, Zhusubek Zheenbekov, lost his race to a pro-Akaev candidate and claimed intimidation and fraud. Joined by the supporters of other disgruntled losing candidates in the region—who were denied access to state office as a result—Zheenbekov and his local followers marched on the governor's office in Jalalabad city and demanded a meeting with Sharipov, the

²⁷⁷ The Tulip Revolution took place in March 2005. It consisted of large-scale protests in the capital city that led to the ouster of President Askar Akaev. Here I focus only on specific contentious contests for regional state offices that took place as the revolution unfolded.

sitting governor, who was described above. Like Zheenbekov, the other losing candidates “started the active mobilization of their supporters, the majority of whom were relatives, friends, and fellow-villagers” (Temirkulov 2010: 593).²⁷⁸

When Governor Sharipov refused to meet with the protestors, they stormed and occupied the governor’s office. After weeks of fighting with state security agents, the protestors ultimately prevailed, taking full control of the provincial administrative building. They then formed an unofficial people’s assembly (*kurultai*) that chose Zhusubek Zheenbekov as the new governor of Jalalabad *oblast*. Within days more than 1,000 protestors had gathered in Osh; there, too, the provincial governor fled as protestors seized and occupied the governor’s offices (Khamidov 2006: 88). In a cascade effect, the governors of other provinces were soon being deposed and replaced by large crowds who favored a local “people’s governor” against Akaev’s appointed (and often non-local) appointees.

Only after this did attention turn toward Bishkek and President Akaev. Under the organization of regional elites, in conjunction with an increasingly organized opposition movement in Bishkek, led by Kurmanbek Bakiev, protestors travelled to the capital, arriving in the tens of thousands from throughout the country, demanding Akaev’s resignation (Radnitz 2010: 131-166; Temirkulov 2010: 593). The contest for Zheenbekov’s seat in parliament and his subsequent seizure of the governor’s office—both contests between center and periphery for control of state offices—were by no means the causes of the Tulip Revolution. But, they were the proximate events that sparked what followed. The deposed governor, Zhusubek Sharipov,

²⁷⁸ Khamidov also notes that “the demonstrators were mainly villagers, relatives, friends, and close associates of the candidates” and that there was no united opposition movement to depose the president at the outset of what later became the Tulip Revolution; rather, “each opposition candidate waged a separate struggle in his or her own locality” (2006: 87).

whom Akaev appointed to Jalalabad from outside the region, had no social bases to protect him when the president could not.

On March 25, 2005, the new president, Kurmanbek Bakiev, “confirmed” Zheenbekov as acting governor of Jalalabad, an *ex post facto* concession that he probably could not challenge if he wanted to. But, less than a year later he did, evidence that this initial confirmation was merely a temporary concession to Zheenbekov’s local supporters. On January 1, 2006, Bakiev sought to reclaim the state’s formal authority to select its own governors, attempting to remove Zheenbekov from his post in Jalalabad and rotate him instead to Talas *oblast* where he would be an outsider without local support. In response, however, Zheenbekov’s supporters, as they did in March 2005, rallied in the streets of Jalalabad city, openly challenging Bakiev’s authority.²⁷⁹

The decision to move Zheenbekov to a new region was consistent with the general logic of cadre rotation, but the choice of Talas *oblast* as a destination held a special significance. The sitting governor of Talas *oblast* at the time, Iskenderbek Aidaraliev, was the only Akaev-era governor who survived the revolution. Unlike his counterparts in other provinces, he did not face public demands to resign or leave his post. Subsequent events showed that he had a significant amount of local support. Thus, by switching Zheenbekov and Aidaraliev, Bakiev was simultaneously breaking the local bases of support for two of his governors, attempting to make them more dependent on the central government. He was, in accordance with the logic of cadre rotation, seeking to dis-embed them from the communities that they were tied to, much as Akaev had tried to do before him.

But, it was precisely because these two governors had such strong bases of local support that Bakiev’s orders were fiercely resisted. When Aidaraliev arrived in Jalalabad in early

²⁷⁹ Bakiev himself is a native of Jalalabad *oblast*, and its former governor (1995-1997). Since Zheenbekov was a member of an opposing political party (SDPK), we can assume that the two men were not political allies, which might also have animated Bakiev’s decision to move him to Talas.

January, in accordance with the president's orders, he was met by an angry crowd of Zheenbekov's supporters, who demanded that Zheenbekov be reinstated. Aidaraiev fled back to Talas, where his own supporters had amassed in the streets demanding the resignation of Zheenbekov. In short, the population in each province was actively resisting cadre rotation. On January 23, Aidaraliev's supporters declared him the "people's governor" of Talas. On this same day, Bakiev met with Zheenbekov and some his supporters in Jalalabad. According to news reports, a presidential spokesperson explained that Bakiev was "replacing [Zheenbekov] as part of a policy of [cadre] rotation" (RFE/RL 2006).²⁸⁰

Momentarily, Bakiev appeared to concede, and promised to allow both governors to remain in their posts—Zheenbekov in Jalalabad and Aidaraliev in Talas. But, the concession was a ruse. When the crowds disbursed in both cities, Bakiev went ahead with the transfer. On January 27, 2006, the governors traded places and Bakiev had successfully shuffled his regional personnel.

The (Informal) Reshaping of Administrative Relations between Bishkek and Jalalabad (2010-14)

Though President Bakiev succeeded in getting his way in the case described above, he had to overcome significant local resistance to do so. This event, early in his presidency, demonstrated (again) that the government was not truly free to appoint whomever it wanted, that there could be public pushback at the local level, and the consideration of the local populations

²⁸⁰ Admittedly, Aidaraliev's biography suggests that his connections to Talas *oblast* are tenuous, especially in comparison with others, who are clearly local (like Zheenbekov) or not local (Sharipov, for example). Aidaraliev was born in Jalalabad *oblast* but worked for most of his career in Issyk-kul *oblast*. It was not until 1999 that he came to Talas, first as the *akim* of Talas *raion* and then as governor of Talas *oblast* (1999-2006). That makes his case an outlier as he is the only official documented here whose status as a local was unclear yet was still able to mobilize substantial public support in the locality.

would need to be taken into account.²⁸¹ Indeed, subsequent appointments by central authorities appear to have been disciplined by the fear of local protests. In the aftermath of the 2010 April Revolution, which I discuss in more detail below, Zheenbekov was again selected in an informal people's assembly (*kurultai*) to be reinstated as governor of Jalalabad. In the four-way contest that ensued, he voluntarily ceded the post to one of his biggest supporters and allies, Bektur Asanov (also a Jalalabad native), who was later confirmed by authorities in Bishkek. This, once again, was not an appointment made by the central government, but an *ex post facto* concession to local interests. Even still, Asanov continued to hold the post for nearly two years.

Eventually, in March 2014, Zheenbekov was formally appointed as the governor of Jalalabad *oblast*. This was the third time he was selected for this post, but only the first time he was formally appointed by Bishkek. This suggests that the central government may have modified its selections based on local popular demand. This, too, is a constraint on its ability to select whomever it wants, particularly if it prefers candidates from outside the region.

Zheenbekov's successor, Dzhumagul Egamberdieva, has deep local roots as well. As I described in the previous chapter, she worked for 23 years at the local school in her village, Terek-Sai. In 2005, through direct elections, she became the head of Terek-Sai *ayil okmotu*. Three years later, she was appointed as *akim* of Chatkalskii district. What her appointment as governor represents in broader center-periphery politics is a major concession to local interests, even as leaders in Bishkek tout the importance of cadre rotation as official policy. Jalalabad *oblast*, it should be noted, has been one of the most contested governorships in the country. Eighteen different contenders can be counted as having come to occupy the post, either legally or illegally, and not all of them tied to the revolutions, more than in any other province.

²⁸¹ This was not Bakiev's first chance to learn this lesson. He was the prime minister during the "Aksy events" of 2002. As noted above, Beknazarov ultimately won his battle with the central government. Bakiev, in contrast, was forced to resign.

Indeed, Zheenbekov's state-appointed predecessor, Zhusubali Toromamatov (2012-2014), was chased from power in May 2013 when 200 protestors stormed the building and installed a new "people's governor," Meder Usenov (Abdyraeva 2013). As a school director in the region put it, "the old governor was too subordinate, he dances to the tune of the prime minister, so they [the people] fired him."²⁸² Usenov occupied the post for only a few days before being arrested. But, upon his arrest, his supporters came out in even larger numbers setting the stage for a broader conflict.

The former "people's governor" and Zheenbekov ally, Bektur Asanov (2010-11), appeared to endorse Usenov and his supporters, urging the central government to concede. He said in an interview, "It seems to me that you must take into consideration the demands of the people. I will tell you honestly, if they do not let [Usenov] go, there will be no stop to the unrest in Jalalabad" (Kasmalieva 2013). Authorities managed to prevent Usenov from becoming governor, but they did let him go free even though he illegally seized control of the provincial administrative office. Six months later, Toromamatov went to Bishkek with a request: "I asked [Prime Minister] Satybaldiev to transfer me to a different job – closer to Bishkek" (Dzhumasheva 2014).²⁸³ Toromamatov was replaced by the local favorite Zheenbekov (as described above).

Meanwhile, Iskenderbek Aidaraliev, the former governor of Talas, went on to take numerous high-level posts in the central government. Perhaps in exchange for his transfer to Jalalabad in 2006, Aidaraliev was later appointed as Bakiev's prime minister in 2007, and then Minister of Land and Water Management and Manufacturing in 2009, and Minister of

²⁸² Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_46, October 16, 2013.

²⁸³ Both Toromamatov and Usenov are Jalalabad natives. Toromamatov is from the village Ak-Took, in Suzak *raion*; Usenov is from Toboi village, also located in Suzak *raion*.

Agriculture in 2010. He, like others, challenged Bishkek's appointment authority only to end up with even more power.

After the contentious events surrounding Aideraliev's transfer in 2006, every governor appointed in Talas was from the region save for one, Beishenbek Bolotbekov, the previous governor of Naryn (1993-1996). Conflict between Bolotbekov and the local population led to his deposition by a crowd of protesters and the selection of a new "people's governor" in Talas in 2010. This episode, to which I now turn, was among the proximate events that sparked a second national-level revolution, leading to the deposition of governors in every province, and, ultimately, President Bakiev himself.

The April Revolution and Talas oblast (2010).

Like the events that sparked the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Jalalabad, the sequence of events that unfolded in 2010 are noteworthy because they show that the contestation of governors' offices is not necessarily the result of a general disorder that results from large-scale political tumult. In this case, as in the last one, the seizure of a provincial governor's office was prior to the revolution that followed.

Beishenbek Bolotbekov was a native of Naryn *oblast* and had previously served as the governor of Naryn (1993-1996), making him—like Sharipov, Zheenbekov, and Aideraliev—one of the governors whom central authorities had appointed to multiple regions, in accordance with cadre rotation. As in these other cases, subsequent events showed how contentious the policy of cadre rotation can be. Bolotbekov was ultimately deposed by protestors who backed a former village-level official from the region, Koisun Kurmanalieva.

The revolution of 2010 began in Talas with the arrest of Bolot Sherinyazov, a lifelong native of Talas *oblast*. In 1994, Sherinyazov served in the local council of Manas district, where he was born (Pushkin village). In 2000, he was elected to the national parliament, a position he often used to bolster his standing in his home region against central authorities. In 2008, Sherinyazov led a march to protest President Bakiev’s agreement to cede disputed territory to Kazakhstan. “Kazakhstan has a lot of land,” Sherinyazov said in an interview, “but together with our land they are taking away our history, our pride and memory.” Vowing to fight until the end, and implicitly referencing the Aksy events—which, as noted above, stemmed from the arrest of Beknazarov when he criticized Akaev’s land deal with China—Sherinyazov taunted the president: “It would be better if they shot me. I’m ready to die for these lands” (Kanazarov 2008).²⁸⁴

Sherinyazov was the vice-president of the opposition party *Ata Meken*, and his arrest in 2010 appeared to be purely political as it was linked to his planned participation in an informal referendum on President Bakiev in Talas, set for April 6. However, the arrest jeopardized his seat in parliament and, thus, “served as a stimulus for mass mobilization” in the area as “people protested to protect the leader” (Temirkulov 2010: 597).²⁸⁵ Local protestors assembled in front of the provincial administrative building demanding Sherinyazov’s release. When the governor of the province, Beishenbek Bolotbekov, attempted to calm the situation, the crowd “stormed the administration building and took the governor hostage” (Gullette 2010b: 91). They then took over the local Ministry of Internal Affairs offices, and the Minister of Internal Affairs,

²⁸⁴ Admittedly, Sherinyazov’s tone was more nationalistic than regional, given that the land in question was not even part of Talas *oblast*, but neighboring Issyk-kul.

²⁸⁵ Like many of the other figures outlined above, Sherinyazov ultimately bested central authorities. After Bakiev fled the country, the new transitional government named Sherinyazov its new Minister of Internal Affairs. Thus, just two weeks after his initial arrest, he and Bakiev had virtually traded places. Sherinyazov held the post until July 2010 when he announced his intention to seek a seat in parliament.

Modomusa Kongantiev, was “also taken captive and savagely beaten” (ibid.). Bolotbekov and Kongantiev, who was dispatched directly from Bishkek, had no supporters in the region.

By the end of the day, the crowd had illegally elected a new “people’s governor” of Talas, Koisun Kurmanalieva.²⁸⁶ Kurmanalieva was born in Orto-Aryk village, in Talas district, Talas *oblast*, and lived and worked in the region for her entire career, primarily within the local village government of Dolon.²⁸⁷ From 1987 to 1994, she served on the executive committee of the Dolon village soviet, the Soviet-era predecessor to the village councils that were established in 1994. She then served on her village council while simultaneously working as the head of the Dolon village board (1997-2002). For all of the late Soviet period and the first 11 years after independence, Kurmanalieva was a village-level official in the same village in which she was born. Like many other village-level officials with strong local social bases, she was later appointed or elected to higher-level state posts. From 2005 to 2008, she served as the deputy head of state administration in Talas *oblast* and in 2008, she was elected as a deputy in the district-level council of Talas *raion*.

It was her strong local social bases that enabled Kurmanalieva to take control over the governor’s office in 2010. Though the governor is an official representative of the central government in Talas, and central authorities have the formal authority to select whomever they want, Kurmanalieva was chosen by her local supporters, without Bishkek’s input. The transitional government—which came to power as a result of the revolution that followed these

²⁸⁶ A different group of demonstrators chose a different people’s governor, Sheraly Abdyldaev, from the Manas district of Talas *oblast*. Abdyldaev spent most of his career working as a mechanic, but throughout the 2000s held various posts in the Manas district administration and also became the Chairman of the Talas *oblast* council (2003-2005) and Deputy Head of Talas *oblast* (2005-2006). How and why Kurmanalieva ultimately emerged as the victor of this contest is not known. Though Bishkek did not select either candidate, it is possible that they resolved potential conflict between the two of them. Within weeks the government confirmed Kurmalalieva as governor and appointed Abdyldaev as Minister of State Property.

²⁸⁷ Dolon *ayil okmotu* consists of three villages, Kurmanalieva’s home village (Orto-Aryk) and two others.

events—confirmed her appointment only after the fact. Nevertheless, she held the post for five years before resigning.

Kurmanalieva was not the only local person who took control of regional state offices at this time. She was simply the first. In the course of the April Revolution—as in the Tulip Revolution before it—similar events unfolded in other provinces and districts throughout the country. One report notes that opposition groups everywhere were “occupying the buildings of local organs of power in the regions” (Fergana 2010a). Local people occupied administrative buildings in Tokmok city (Chui *oblast*), and in the district-level *akimats* in Chui (Chui *oblast*), Bazar-Korgon and Aksy (both in Jalalabad *oblast*) (Fergana 2010a). A village elder from Bazar-Korgon described what happened: “People went right away to the *akimchilik*. Everyone there was appointed by Bakiev and people just went ahead and chose their own people instead ... people elected themselves, just regular people from Bazar Korgon. When they kicked out the *akim*, we chose a new one, Kuban.”²⁸⁸

Similarly, in Sokulu district (Chui *oblast*), an “alternative ‘people’s *akim*’” (*narodnyi akim*) was “appointed” by the population (Fergana 2010a). Protesters there also demanded the release of “their fellow local” (*ikh zemlyak*) from Sukulu, Temir Sariev, an opposition leader whom the government had detained (Fergana 2010b).²⁸⁹ In Naryn *oblast*, protestors stormed the provincial governor’s office “demanding a change of the mayor of Naryn and the *akim* of [Naryn] *raion* to their side” (*TsentrAziya* 2010). They then selected an “alternative ‘people’s’ governor,” Adyl Esenbekov (Fergana 2010b). This was in April, 2010; Esenbekov held the post until July.

²⁸⁸ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_4, October 14, 2013.

²⁸⁹ As typical of a pattern in Kyrgyzstan (and in marked contrast to Kazakhstan), Sariev went on to obtain even higher positions in the state. From 2010 to 2012 he served as Minister of Finance. In 2015, he was appointed Prime Minister.

Indeed, incumbent governors in all seven provinces were deposed and sometimes several local contenders—“people’s governors”—vied for control. As in the Tulip Revolution, it was only after this that protesters focused their attention on President Bakiev. The specific details of who did what and where, though documented above, are less important than the broader pattern: once again, the revolution started in the regions, was sparked by contests over local offices, and entailed the mass mobilization of local communities in support of their preferred local officials.

The People’s Mayor, Melis Myrzakmatov (2009-2014)

One of the few Bakiev-era appointees to survive the revolution in 2010 was Melis Myrzakmatov, the mayor of Osh city—the “capital of the south”—from January 2009 to December 2013. As I describe below, the only reason he was able to hold his position for so long was because of the enormous base of support he had within the city. During his tenure he gained a reputation for his fierce independence and outright refusal to obey policies set in Bishkek. When the central government sought to fire him for insubordination in August 2010, thousands of his supporters protested until they relented. He continued to hold his post for nearly three years after this, serving under a government that had the legal authority to fire him, but that lacked the actual power to do so.

Myrzakmatov’s case somewhat complicates the framework I presented in previous chapters. First, the status of Osh city as a unit of administration does not clearly fall under the local, district, or provincial levels. Formally it has “*oblast* status,” meaning that it is equal to other *oblasts* and is not formally governed as a unit within the *oblast* that it is territorially situated in (Osh *oblast*).²⁹⁰ Yet, as a city, Osh is governed like other cities and villages,

²⁹⁰ It is simultaneously the administrative center of Osh *oblast*.

according to the framework of local self-government, with one main exception. When Myrzakmatov was first chosen as mayor in 2009, the rules for selection in Osh and Bishkek cities were the same as those for governors, not *ayil okmotu* or mayors.²⁹¹ At least initially, then, Myrzakmatov was appointed by the president, not elected by the population. Thus, the delineation of local (village) and provincial levels that I used in prior chapters does not neatly apply to Osh city, which is its own hybrid of city and province.

Related to the status of Osh as a city, Myrzakmatov's local social ties are undoubtedly more complex and less complete than his counterparts in villages and smaller cities. As noted above, Myrzakmatov was directly appointed by the president. In addition, Osh city has a population of approximately 250,000. That makes it significantly larger than any village and precludes the possibility that Myrzakmatov personally knows all or even most of the city's residents. Moreover, as I discuss in more detail below, Myrzakmatov is a Kyrgyz nationalist in a city that is ethnically divided, further complicating his ties to the population.

At the same time, Myrzakmatov is a local person who has lived and worked in Osh his entire career. He was born in Kara-suu *raion*, the district that territorially encompasses Osh city, in a village called Papan, which is located approximately fifteen miles from the city center. He attended Osh Technological University, and took his first job in the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Osh *oblast* and then as a state tax inspector in Osh city. He then worked as the deputy director for a company, *Koopsnab*, for two years and as the director of a charitable fund, *Eldik Demilge*, before being elected to parliament as a representative of his district.

²⁹¹ Unlike other units of local self-government, the laws governing the selection of mayors in Bishkek and Osh are determined by parliament and have been subject to change over time. The mayors of these two cities have variously been directly elected by the population, directly appointed by the president, or indirectly elected by the city council. In itself this is evidence for the fact that the selection of regional officials is deeply contested, as central authorities have never secured uncontested appointment powers in Kyrgyzstan's two largest cities.

Bakiev appointed Myrzakmatov as mayor of Osh city in 2009. But, unlike the many other Bakiev appointees who were deposed during the revolution in 2010, Myrzakmatov cleverly organized his supporters to help takeover the office he already held. Rather than defend his office as its incumbent, he effectively did what Kurmanalieva did in Talas, and what Zheenbekov had twice done in Jalalabad. The difference in Myrzakmatov's case was that there was no outsider to depose. He was already a popular local leader, and he succeeded in holding his office because he was able to mobilize a large crowd of friends, family, and acquaintances to rally in support of his tenure. According to Timur Kamchibekov, Myrzakmatov's deputy, the mayor "gathered a group of his people, his supporters, his relatives and they demanded that Myrzakmatov [be kept on], that the people are for Melis Myrzakmatov and the people demand that he [continue] to work as mayor and not leave his post" (Pannier 2010). Thus, even though he came to office as a Bakiev appointee, he only continued to hold it as a "people's mayor." This makes him very much like other "people's governors" of the post-Bakiev period.

When a new transitional government took power after Bakiev fled in April 2010, Myrzakmatov regularly relied on his powerful local support base to thwart subsequent efforts to fire him. When rumors swirled in July 2010 that authorities in Bishkek planned to remove him, Myrzakmatov warned that, "only the people can decide the question of my leaving office" (Pannier 2010). In August 2010, when central authorities did decide it was time to replace the mayor with their own candidate—in accordance with their formal legal authority—nearly 3,000 people rallied in the streets of Osh until the government backed down. Myrzakmatov, speaking to the crowd that had assembled in front of City Hall, proclaimed defiantly "I am going nowhere.

I am with the people. I am with you” to which the crowd responded by chanting “victory, victory” (Brooke 2010).²⁹² He later wrote that the government

...needed a person who would unconditionally execute all of their orders and who would crumble like glass beads in front of them. In my opinion, the population of the city would never have accepted another person, whom the transitional government appointed as mayor. Every day inhabitants come to support me (Myrzakmatov 2011: 74).

Myrzakmatov did not merely hold his appointed office against the wishes of central authorities. He argued that the government in Bishkek had no legal authority to replace him or tell him what to do. When asked in an interview with a Russian newspaper, “why didn’t the authorities [*vlast*] pressure you and try to force you to leave?” Myrzakmatov replied, “behind me stand the people. If they say: Melis, you are wrong, I will leave. But directives from the transitional government do not have any legal force in the south” (*Kommersant* 2010). A colonel of the *militia* in Osh City, who repeatedly described Myrzakmatov as “just a simple person,” explained that, “because the people support him, he can stand up to them [central authorities]. When the central government says the wrong thing, he stands up to them and says it to their faces. He doesn’t listen to them.”²⁹³ Another city resident noted that the central government “has to be very careful with the mayor”; they “cannot just use force to take him out” because “they know that if they did this they would have their own problems. If people support the

²⁹² According to his written account, the government first asked him to resign voluntarily. When he demanded that the president sign a formal order removing him from his post, they sweetened the deal by offering him other positions to detach him from his local supporters in Osh: “They offered me a few embassies, Minister of Natural Resources, the Agency of Forest Management, [and] the Director of State Material Resources. They told me to pick one of these positions [...] I said to myself, even if I am left without a position, I will be together with my people. I answered [to the president]: ‘Roza Isakovna I am not one of those who will throw himself at a position like a dog at a bone, not one who is satisfied with slop. If you want, fire me right now, I won’t be offended’” (Myrzakmatov 2011: 75).

²⁹³ Interview with author, September 30, 2013, KYG1_Int1_11. The colonel also described how Bishkek’s appointment of *militia* heads had been shaped by the mayor. Even though the Minister of Internal Affairs has the full authority to make these appointments, they consult with Myrzakmatov and defer to his demands: “There were situations when there was tension between the head of the *militia* and the mayor, and the mayor protested and continually called the Ministry to complain and finally the Ministry fired him. The mayor is like the owner of a house—he is the owner of the city. He is extremely powerful here.” This, too, is another example of a constraint on the central government’s formal appointment authority.

mayor that is it.”²⁹⁴ He went on to describe the broader implications for Bishkek’s appointment authority in the regions:

There should be a lesson learned for the government. They need to understand that they cannot mess with local people. Local people should know better and do know better and this is good precedent for the shaping of policy on this issue [regarding appointments]. They have to care, they must listen to people at least about whom they appoint. They should be afraid of what will happen if they don’t.²⁹⁵

After the government’s failed bid to replace Myrzakmatov in August 2010, he continued to hold his office for another three years. During his tenure he “continuously ignored the central government by exerting full power in his ‘territory’ and often oppos[ed] decisions coming from the capital city” going so far as to propose the creation of his own independent police force in 2011 (Osomonov 2011).

By all accounts, Myrzakmatov accomplished a great deal and was intensely popular, partly because he succeeded in visibly improving the city’s infrastructure without any help from Bishkek, earning him an “almost mythic status” among city residents (Ryskulova 2013). The Deputy Chairman of the Osh City Council, Amanylo Rozybaevich, complained that authorities in Bishkek treat Osh “as a stepmother treats a stepson [...] they discriminate against the whole city because they don’t like the mayor.”²⁹⁶ He cited as an example the fact that, in 2013, from a Turkish loan of \$106 million, \$35 million was given to Bishkek city, but nothing was given to Osh. Despite the fact that “we don’t get any money” from Bishkek, “the mayor works hard to find ways to complete these projects without the government’s help” (ibid.). It appears that this only bolstered his popularity.

The mayor’s troubleshooting included a reputation for being deeply connected to the city and its population. City myths hold that Myrzakmatov walks the streets at night helping people

²⁹⁴ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_8ii, October 30, 2013.

²⁹⁵ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_8ii, October 30, 2013.

²⁹⁶ Interview with author, September 27, 2013, KYG1_Int1_7.

with their problems, and that he personally checked on the progress of public projects to ensure their completion (Ryskulova 2013). A member of the city council described how, “every Tuesday, [the mayor] sits in the first floor [of city hall], not in his office, and meets only with city residents who come to speak with him.”²⁹⁷ In 2012, two local newspapers named Myrzakmatov “mayor of the year” and “personality of 2012” (Mukhametrakhimova 2013). According to some reports he was successful in improving the city’s drinking water and the quality of heating in apartment buildings (Mukhametrakhimova 2013).²⁹⁸ In a state index tracking citizen’s levels of personal trust, the Osh city organs of local self-government—which includes the mayor’s office—received the highest ratings of any state institution in the entire country, national or local (National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic 2013).²⁹⁹

Myrzakmatov’s local popularity and his conflict with central authorities is admittedly broader and more complex than his control over the mayor’s office alone. Part of the reason the central authorities wanted to get rid of Myrzakmatov is because of the role he is believed to have played in ethnic conflicts that broke out in parts of Jalalabad and Osh in June 2010, in the months following the April Revolution.³⁰⁰ When fighting broke out between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 2010, Myrzakmatov was accused of fomenting the violence and even assisting Kyrgyz

²⁹⁷ Interview with author, October 1, 2013, KYG1_Int1_38. Numerous other city residents also made reference to this weekly ritual.

²⁹⁸ The frequent lack of heat in the south during winters inspires bitter regional rivalries. Kyrgyzstan has a central heating system and the vast majority of all the country’s heat and electricity is consumed in Bishkek, leading to shortages in other parts of the country, like Osh.

²⁹⁹ On a scale from -100 to +100, the level of personal trust given to the organs of local self-government in Osh city was +55.6. The next highest ranked local self-governments were significantly lower: Osh *oblast* (+25.1) and Batken *oblast* (+22.1) – these are aggregate measures of all local governments within each province. As noted in the previous chapter, the organs of local self-government had the highest overall ratings of trust for any state institutions while nearly every organ of the central government was given a negative rating.

³⁰⁰ Like virtually all of the population centers in southern Kyrgyzstan, Osh has a large population of ethnic Uzbeks. Demographically the city is approximately 45% Uzbek and 45% Kyrgyz, with the remaining population being made up of other ethnic groups, mainly Russians.

fighters. He also defied authorities in Bishkek as they made decisions about how to help bring the conflict to an end.

His most notable act of insubordination came when the government in Bishkek, under its formal authority to conduct foreign policy, agreed to allow an OSCE police advisory group to monitor events in the south in the midst of the conflict. Myrzakmatov objected, noting that the city council had “unambiguously said no” to a foreign presence in the region. Claiming that the OSCE would only make the conflict worse, the mayor defiantly announced that, “we will not allow a repeat of the Kosovo experience in the Fergana valley” (*Kommersant* 2010). Moreover, he questioned the central government’s authority to make such an agreement with the OSCE in the first place. The head of the mayoral apparatus, Aidar Kolievich, implicitly suggested that authorities in Bishkek did not have any more right to make this decision than the mayor of Osh city, “it was just a transitional government [...] it does not mean we wanted to disobey them, it means that we wanted to obey our own government, here in the south.”³⁰¹

Myrzakmatov issued an implicit threat to the OSCE, saying that he could not ensure the security of foreign observers in the south. Explicit threats were also delivered, albeit unofficially, from people believed to be Myrzakmatov’s closest supporters. One of the 52 officers assigned to the advisory group said, “the OSCE started receiving threats that any OSCE police in the south would be directly targeted, killed, burned alive, dragged through the streets, and things like this.”³⁰² In the end, the central government backed down and renegotiated the OSCE mission into “a shell of what it was supposed to do,” consisting of “unarmed police consultants” who would not be involved in any kind of police monitoring (*ibid.*). Even by

³⁰¹ Interview with author, September 26, 2013, KYG1_Int1_47.

³⁰² Interview with author, November 4, 2013, KYG1_Mt1_27.

December 2011, after President Atambayev took office, top members of his administration said that “they have no way of influencing the situation” in the south (ICR 2012: *i*).

For these reasons, the center-periphery politics of cadre appointment and control in the context of these ethnic conflicts is considerably more complicated than other cases. First, Myrzakmatov’s support was both local and ethnic, and his stand against the central government was not only construed through the prism of local versus national prerogative, but also as Kyrgyz versus Uzbek.³⁰³ Indeed, as popular as the mayor was among ethnic Kyrgyz in the south, he was not well liked (if not despised) by many Uzbeks. Second, Myrzakmatov’s defiance of the central government was often explicitly framed according to the specific context of the revolution. He did not so much question the abstract authority of Bishkek as he questioned the transitional government specifically. They had illegally deposed his former patron. Naturally, he questioned their legal right to issue orders.

In December 2013, central authorities were finally successful in replacing Myrzakmatov, but only because he agreed to go without a fight, for reasons that remain somewhat mysterious. Tensions between Bishkek and the mayor bubbled up again on November 20 when a popular southern deputy (and former speaker), Akmatbek Keldibekov, was charged with corruption and put under house arrest. Hundreds of Keldibekov’s family, friends, and supporters gathered in his home region, Alai district (*Osh oblast*), and began to organize his “defense,” which consisted of protests in Osh and Bishkek. By November 21, Keldibekov’s supporters were picketing in front

³⁰³ At the same time an element of this conflict does reinforce center-periphery political dynamics. Though the conflict in the south was between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks, ethnic Kyrgyz themselves are sharply divided between north and south. Myrzakmatov’s position as a Kyrgyz nationalist in the south actually pits him against ethnic Kyrgyz in the north, who do have some significant political alliances with the Uzbek community in the south. Interestingly, the derogatory term “*sart*,” which ethnic Kyrgyz in the south apply to Uzbeks, is used by ethnic Kyrgyz in the north as a generic (though still derogatory) term for all southerners in the country, whether they be Uzbek or Kyrgyz.

of the White House to demand his release.³⁰⁴ Protests escalated in the south, too. On December 2, thousands of Keldibekov's supporters gathered in Osh, protesting in front of the governor's office. There, Myrzakmatov publicly backed Keldibekov and his supporters, calling the arrest "nonsense" (Zozulya 2013). Protestors made a failed attempt to take over the provincial administrative building of Osh *oblast*.³⁰⁵

Within days, Prime Minister Satybaldiev issued a decree to remove Myrzakmatov from his post. The ostensible reason was for his participation in the protests. Discussing the firing, Deputy Omurbek Tekebaev pointedly said, "maybe Myrzakmatov fails to understand the interests of the state and the need for security. It looks like that's why the prime minister decided to sack him" (Erkin and Nurmatov 2013). Myrzakmatov's supporters immediately assembled in front of City Hall to protest his removal, but the mayor urged everyone to go home, stating simply (and unexpectedly) that he agreed with the prime minister's decision (*ibid.*).

While this appeared to be a major concession, it is more likely that Myrzakmatov and central authorities had struck a deal. Only days after Myrzakmatov was fired, President Atambayev signed a law that allowed for the mayors of Osh and Bishkek to be elected by a secret ballot in the city council rather than appointed by Bishkek. Because Myrzakmatov's own political party (*Uluttar Birimdigi*) held a majority in the city council, the law was believed to assure his continued dominance of the city. Thus, it appears that it was Bishkek, not Myrzakmatov, that had made the biggest concession. They fired Myrzakmatov now, but gave up their formal authority to appoint and fire other mayors later.

The election was held just weeks later, on January 15, 2014, meaning that Myrzakmatov was only out of office for a little more than one month. Yet, despite the fact that his own party

³⁰⁴ Personal observation, Bishkek. The White House is the colloquial name given to the building that houses the president's administrative offices.

³⁰⁵ Keldibekov's supporters continued their protests well into the summer of 2014.

held 22 seats in the council, Myrzakmatov received only 19 votes in the secret ballot, raising suspicions that central authorities had interfered with the process. Pointing his finger at “those in power – those in the central power structures,” Myrzakmatov complained that “these elections were held completely unfairly, completely unlawfully, in a way that anyone would despise” (RFE/RL 2014). Several of his allies in the city council resigned in protest. A reported 10,000 people assembled in the central square of the city to demonstrate in support of the mayor, including Osh’s former chief of police who burned a portrait of the president in protest (ibid.). Strangely, though, Myrzakmatov called the protests off and urged everyone to go home, announcing that the “real political struggle will take place in 15 days after the cold weather is over” (ibid.). Two weeks passed. The spring came and went. Yet, nothing happened. How the elections turned out as they did and why Myrzakmatov chose to go quietly when he could have caused problems remain unknown.

Even considering these complicating factors and caveats, Myrzakmatov’s overall tenure helps to underline the lack of control central authorities have over their own cadre and their ability to appoint whom they want, where and when they want to. In repeated contests with central authorities over who would control Osh city, how they would be selected, and what orders they were going to carry out, Myrzakmatov seemed almost invincible. Even though they got rid of him in the end, authorities in Bishkek ended up sacrificing their formal appointment authority to do so.

The complicating factors of two revolutions and their aftermath hardly soften the significance of the many cases outlined above. First, contention for provincial office was as much a partial cause of the revolutions as an outcome. That is, these were not just opportunistic seizures of power stemming from temporary lawlessness in the capital. The reverse is more

accurate: temporary lawlessness in the capital partly resulted from seizures of power in the regions. Second, when central authorities are challenged by regional officials as frequently as they are in Kyrgyzstan, it cannot be considered exceptional or unusual, but representative of normal center-periphery politics. Myrzakmatov's relationship with Bishkek might be considered extreme, but that is still relative to what passes for normal.

Popular mobilization against appointed incumbents is common enough that a Kyrgyz neologism now exists to describe it: *Ketsinizm* is the phenomenon of demanding that an official leave his or her appointed office.³⁰⁶ As a villager in Bazar Korgon put it, "if we don't like the [district] *akim* or the governor, we can tell him to go to hell!"³⁰⁷ A lawyer in Bishkek explained:

When there is a person who is appointed by the central government that the population does not accept they will just bring their own person and say "get out of here, our person will work here." If the prime minister is smart enough he will appoint from the local level. But, if he is not smart, he will of course choose his own person, and it will again bring such a situation when people will just remove him.³⁰⁸

As this testimony suggests, the distinction between local versus non-local appointments lies at the heart of these politics. Moreover, socially embedded village-level officials are often seen as the representatives of local interests, and those most deserving of district and provincial level posts. One *ayil okmotu* argued that, "only the *ayil okmotu* knows the problems in the village and so it would make him the most effective *akim* [of the district]. Even when there is someone who is more qualified and educated, people want someone who is local. In every region, in every village, people will only support someone who is from their community."³⁰⁹

Sometimes the preference for local cadre over outsiders is expressed as antipathy for any level of government higher than the village. The deputy of a local council in Bazar Korgon

³⁰⁶ *Ketsin!* is the imperative "leave!" which is a ubiquitous demand heard at public rallies against incumbent authorities throughout the country. The suffix *-izm* has the same meaning as its English counterpart, *-ism*.

³⁰⁷ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_46ii, October 17, 2013.

³⁰⁸ Interview with author, KYG1_Mt1_29, August 28, 2013.

³⁰⁹ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_23, October 4, 2013.

district said, “instead of increasing the status of the *akims* and governors [as the prime minister had proposed], it is better to increase the power of village authorities because only local level officials know the needs of the population. Only we work directly with the people.”³¹⁰ A village elder in a different village noted, “the *akim* does not really work in the village or know about village issues. The *ayil okmotu* should have this power!”³¹¹ Likewise, a school director asked, “What is the governor for? We don’t need him. We have an *ayil okmotu* and that is enough. The prime minister can speak directly to the *ayil okmotu*, the others [*akims* and governors] are just unnecessary.”³¹² Rather than fight for control over governor’s offices and district-level *akimats*, they should be eliminated or diminished in power.

But, given that governors and *akims* do still exist, cadre rotation often leads to open conflict. As in the cases above, the central government sometimes concedes to local demands for fear of public backlash, which is also a constraint on its ability to select and control its own cadre. A program manager of a local NGO in Bishkek noted that, “there is this regionalism in Kyrgyzstan. If you are not from this region the people will not accept you, especially since 2010, it is almost impossible. The central government is very weak.”³¹³ A former official in Bishkek bemoaned local resistance to outside appointments. “People for sure will prefer someone from their own locality, but this is not right, we need to have this rotation [...] there is a stereotype that a person who comes from a different region is not interested in helping to develop the region that they work in. But this is a stereotype, and we should break it by explaining to people what is best.”³¹⁴

³¹⁰ Interview with author, KYG2_Int1_11, February 5, 2014.

³¹¹ Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_4, October 14, 2013.

³¹² Interview with author, KYG1_Int1_46, October 16, 2013.

³¹³ Interview with author, KYG1_Mt1_23, August 6, 2013.

³¹⁴ Interview with author, KYG1_Int2_2, January 25, 2014.

As I attempted to show in chapters four and five, this “stereotype” is not a primordial characteristic of the “Kyrgyz mentality” (as it is sometimes described); rather, it is a feature of state-society relations that is endogenous to state formation in the post-independence period. The institutions of local self-government forged state-society relations in such a way that local social ties were incorporated into local state institutions. Moral economies of trust in villages became state-society relations between local officials and local populations with the creation of Kyrgyzstan’s system of local self-governance.

II. Center-Periphery Appointment Politics in Kazakhstan

Regional appointment politics in Kazakhstan differs from Kyrgyzstan in two notable ways. First, there is less observable contention. In Kazakhstan, President Nazarbayev appoints whom he wants, where he wants them, and he regularly relocates, fires, or imprisons the governors and mayors of cities who become too independent, or who express broader political ambitions. That is, there is rarely or never any significant pushback against the president’s regional appointments, least of all from local populations, who are more likely to celebrate the removal of a local or regional official for corruption than protest against it.

Second, in cases where contention is observable and regional governors or mayors try to mobilize public support against the president, they invariably fail. They receive virtually no public support at the local level, and are quickly subjected to investigations for corruption or abuse of power. In the end, powerful regional officials who have challenged the president are typically arrested, imprisoned, exiled, or end up dead or disappeared. Rarely do they remain in power. As Junisbai suggests, the reason that provincial governors in Kazakhstan lack public support in their fights with the president is because they are continually rotated through different

offices in center and periphery (Junisbai 2010: 254-259). Through rotation, the president “has kept *akims* from either becoming too popular with constituents or entrenching themselves,” in local economic and social structures (ibid. 256). Junisbai’s point is to argue that center-periphery politics in Kazakhstan are negligible. Yet, it would be a mistake to suggest that no struggle for power exists simply because the president has routinely bested his regional cadre when conflict arises. After all, if center-periphery politics were not relevant in Kazakhstan, the president would have no need for cadre rotation policies in the first place.

Perhaps the most prominent case in Kazakhstan’s post-independence period is the arrest and exile of Galymzhan Zhakiyanov, the former governor of Semipalatinsk *oblast* (1994-1997) and Pavlodar *oblast* (1997-2001). I focus most extensively on the Zhakiyanov case for two reasons. First, unlike other powerful regional officials, Zhakiyanov’s struggle with the president was embedded in a larger opposition movement, the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DVK).³¹⁵ The DVK was the most significant opposition movement since Kazakhstan became an independent country, and its ultimate demise—which consisted largely of Zhakiyanov’s arrest—sheds light on how the president fares in battles with his regional and national opponents. Second, while many powerful regional elites are arrested under political circumstances that are hidden from public view, the case of the DVK and Zhakiyanov was public, and it was clearly and explicitly related to the politics of regional appointment. Nazarbayev’s victory over Zhakiyanov effectively ended public debate over the president’s regional appointment powers as they were established under the constitution.

On November 18, 2001, the newly founded Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan issued a declaration of political demands signed by a number of prominent elites. Zhakiyanov was the

³¹⁵ The acronym is derived from the movement’s Russian name, *Demokraticeskii Vybor Kazakhstana*.

leader of the group, alongside Mukhtar Ablyazov. Both men were wealthy businessmen who also held high-level state posts. Zhakiyanov, prior to his governorships, was the director of his own firm, *Toman*, and general director of a financial-industrial group *Semei*. Ablyazov was a wealthy businessman and former Minister of Energy (1998-1999). It is widely believed that Ablyazov had a business dispute with President Nazarbayev's then-powerful son-in-law, Rakhat Aliev, leading him to help organize the DVK (Isaacs 2011: 69-70).³¹⁶

Consisting mainly of wealthy state and economic elites whose status in Nazarbayev's inner circle was insecure, DVK's main political goals were for protections of their independence under the rubric of democratic style reforms (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005). Among these reforms was eliminating the president's power to appoint provincial governors (*akims*). Instead, the group pushed for direct elections (Makhmutova 2004: 6). At a televised press conference on the day of the organization's founding, Zhakiyanov—then the governor of Pavlodar—said, “we consider that power today is concentrated and overly centralized and we believe it to be a good cause for this power to be dispersed and balanced, both by level—from top to bottom—and also by branch. That is, there must be a balance.”³¹⁷ Later, in front of DVK supporters in Almaty, he declared that, “*akims* must be elected, responsible for and accountable to, and under the control of their own people.”³¹⁸ It was not the first time Zhakiyanov had made these demands. In September 2001, just months before starting the DVK, Zhakiyanov had published an article titled “Time to Make a Choice” (*Vremya Delat Vybor*). In it, he argued that provincial governors

³¹⁶ Later, Rakhat Aliev also fell from power, under circumstances that remain unclear. Long presumed to be Nazarbayev's successor, the government brought charges of kidnapping and treason against Aliev in 2008. At the time, he was serving as ambassador to Austria and lived in hiding for the next several years shuffling between Austria and Malta. Later Austrian officials opened their own investigation and, in 2014, arrested Aliev on charges of kidnapping and murder. In February 2015, he was found dead in his jail cell while awaiting trial. It was ruled a suicide.

³¹⁷ Galym Zhakiyanov speaking at a press conference in Almaty, November 18, 2001. The full press conference can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRBZp0XA_po last viewed June 2, 2015.

³¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0vAEfxR-P0> at time marking 04:44, last viewed June 4, 2015.

should be directly elected (HRW 2004: 28). For governors like Zhakiyanov, direct elections would mean political autonomy from the central government; for the president it would mean losing the power to appoint and fire his top regional personnel.³¹⁹

The government's response to the DVK's November 18 declaration was immediate and uncompromising. On November 20, Prime Minister Tokayev announced on television that members of the DVK who still held government posts would be fired immediately, according to the president's orders. Zhaikyanov was mentioned by name, as were several others. In subsequent days, four of Zhakiyanov's deputies were also fired. Twenty other officials at the provincial and local level in Pavlodar who were "perceived as DVK supporters" resigned voluntarily, though likely under political pressure (Human Rights Watch 2004: 13).

Initially undeterred, the members of the DVK organized a public meeting for January 19, 2002, in the circus building in Almaty.³²⁰ The venue was chosen to accommodate a large audience, which the organizers planned to televise. Zauresh Battalova, then a Senate Deputy and original member of the DVK said, "it was broadcast live on television so everyone in the country could see how many people came, and so they could hear what we were saying. Everyone gave speeches, including Zhakiyanov, Duvanov, and myself and we discussed all of the themes in our platform."³²¹ But, the meeting was interrupted. As Battalova recounted, "the broadcast was

³¹⁹ Other demands made by the DVK included creation of a parliamentary system, establishment of independent courts, electoral reform, and the strengthening of an independent media. As Junisbai and Junisbai note, these were not necessarily driven by idealistic notions of democracy, but instead represented wealthy elites' attempts to obtain legal protections for their political and business interests from Nazarbayev's friends and family (2005).

³²⁰ Since a meeting of the "Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan" would not be permitted, the group met as "A Meeting of the Democratic Society of Kazakhstan" (*Sobranie Demokraticheskoi Obshchestvennosti Kazakhstana*).

³²¹ Interview with author, KAZ_Int2_50, June 26, 2014.

stopped because somebody shot at the broadcasting equipment with an automatic weapon and destroyed it.”³²²

In early February, formal criminal charges were filed against Zhakiyanov and Ablyazov. By the end of March they were both arrested. Zhakiyanov was charged with abuse of power while serving as *akim* of Pavlodar. Prosecutors alleged that he illegally sold state property below market value (HRW 2004: 29-30). He was convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison.³²³ Amnesty International complained that the trials were politically motivated (2003) while Human Rights Watch described Zhakiyanov as a “political prisoner” (2004: 27-34).

These arrests and convictions may have outraged international observers and pro-democracy urban intellectuals in Almaty, but they led to little reaction by ordinary Kazakhstanis. This is because the DVK and its members lacked grassroots social bases outside of Almaty. Nearly all of its members were Moscow-educated wealthy business elites and powerful state officials. One study notes that the members of the DVK were never able “translate [their] organizational advantages into the creation of a wide base of popular support” (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005: 389). The DVK’s January 2002 meeting in Almaty, which I described above, underlines the point: it was both physically and socially removed from ordinary people, and did not involve the participation of anyone outside of Almaty, save through the artificial and virtual medium of television. These elites, in short, were socially unembedded.

³²² According to one account this happened only after the fact, as retribution to the television station that covered it, and was accompanied by the firebombing of a newspaper office associated with one of DVK’s founders (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005: 380); Human Rights Watch makes no mention of the shooting, but says simply that the television stations covering the event were “abruptly taken off the air” (2004: 14).

³²³ Ablyazov was sentenced to six years but was pardoned by the president in December 2003 under a presumed agreement that he would no longer be involved in politics. He was given political asylum by the UK in 2011; however, in late 2013 the High Court in London charged him with defrauding investors and embezzling \$5 billion in Russia and \$400 million in Ukraine while he was head of BTA bank. He fled to France in January and was apprehended by French authorities in July 2013. French courts ruled in October 2014 and March 2015 that he should be extradited to Russia.

Zhakiyanov, for example, was originally from Semipalatinsk and was only later moved to Pavlodar, in accordance with the policy of cadre rotation. His bases of support and network of social connections in Pavlodar—the province he was appointed to govern at the time he led the DVK—could not have been deep or overlapping. Unlike his Kyrgyz counterparts whom I described above—Myrzakmatov in Osh, Zheenbekov in Jalalabad, and Kurmanalieva in Talas—Zhakiyanov had no local supporters to turn to when the central government decided to get rid of him. Indeed, when his arrest was pending, Zhakiyanov did not flee to Semipalatinsk or Pavlodar. Instead, he sought refuge with the international allies who supported his proposed reforms and temporarily hunkered down in the French, British, and German embassies.³²⁴ Kazakhstan’s Foreign Ministry was forced to negotiate his release, promising to give him a fair trial, and allowing him to meet regularly with representatives from the European Union (HRW 2004: 28).³²⁵ Later, after he was freed from prison, he fled to the United States. To ordinary people in Pavlodar, Zhakiyanov was just a powerful businessman and high-level state official who had little connection to them or their problems.

Some have argued that opposition leaders in Kazakhstan should be in a strong position to challenge the central government because they are organized and united, they have vast amounts of independent wealth to fund their activities, and they have a clearly defined legislative agenda for reform (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005). Yet, “popular political mobilization” has “proven challenging” for them (2005: 388). That is, they lack the connections to society that would provide for wider bases of public support. In contrast, these scholars describe the opposition in Kyrgyzstan as “the mirror opposite” (387). There, the opposition consists of “disorganized” groups linked to different localities “which have not articulated a program for wider political

³²⁴ The French, British, and German embassies in Almaty were all located in the same building.

³²⁵ According to Human Rights Watch, the Kazakhstani government violated the agreement once Zhakiyanov was in custody.

change beyond pressing for the interests of particular regions.” Yet, these regional leaders “represent definite bases of popular support” (388). These different connections to society and different patterns of state-society relations are why Zhakiyanov ended up in a jail while Myrzakmatov, Zheenbekov, and Kurmanaliev seized and held power.

Zhakiyanov was released from prison after four years on the condition that he abandon politics. Upon his release he made a public statement in Almaty, acknowledging that he never had a real chance against the president:

If I'm to be sincere, I cannot say that I experience any kind of warm feelings toward him [President Nazarbayev]. What happened, happened. At the same time I cannot say that what happened with me was his fault alone. I have to hand it to him, he did warn me that this is how it would all end (Sidorov 2006).³²⁶

With that, Zhakiyanov left the country and has remained in self-imposed exile ever since, living variously in the United States and China, pursuing his business interests. In many ways, Zhakiyanov's fate mirrors that of his predecessor, Akehan Kazhegeldin. In fact, the two men were previously business partners. In 1990, they founded the firm *Semei* in their home city of Semipalatinsk, which Zhakiyanov would later run. Kazhegeldin was then appointed as the *akim* of Semipalatinsk *oblast* (1991-1993), the same position that Zhakiyanov would hold from 1994 to 1997. Both men were then rotated out of their home region, detaching them from whatever local social bases they might have had: Zhakiyanov was sent to Pavlodar *oblast* while Kazhegeldin became prime minister. After serving as prime minister from 1994 to 1997, Kazhegeldin denounced Nazarbayev and announced plans to form his own party and run for president in 1999. In short order he was charged with corruption and tax evasion. Before authorities were able to arrest him, Kazhegeldin fled the country. In 2001, a court sentenced him to 10 years in prison, and he has lived in self-imposed exile ever since. Isaacs suggests that

³²⁶ Zhakiyanov's defeat seemed total. In this address, he shocked attendees by suggesting that the country had made good strides toward democratic reforms under Nazarbayev and that outside opposition was no longer needed for further progress.

Kazhegeldin's defection is what led Nazarbayev to begin building *Nur Otan* into the party-state organ that it would become, giving the president extra leverage over his regional cadre, as I described in prior chapters (Isaacs 2011: 82).

Another prominent regional official, Zamanbek Nurkadilov, was believed to be coordinating an opposition movement with Kazhegeldin in 2004 and 2005 (Kusainov 2005). Throughout his career Nurkadilov was shuffled through a variety of high-level posts in the regions and in the central government. He served variously as the *akim* of Almaty city (1990-1994), and the *akim* of Almaty *oblast* (1997-2001).³²⁷ He was later appointed as the Minister of Emergency Situations in Astana. Nurkadilov publicly broke with Nazarbayev in 2004 when he denounced the president as corrupt and called for his resignation. In November 2005, he was found dead. Though he was shot three times, twice in the torso and once in the head, official investigators ruled his death a suicide (RFE/RL 2005).

Viktor Khrapunov fared better, not because he bested the president, only because he lived. After serving in multiple high level positions in the central government between 1995 and 1997, he was appointed as the *akim* of Almaty city (1997-2004) and then as the *akim* of East-Kazakhstan *oblast* (2004-2007). Then he was reappointed to Astana as the Minister of Emergency Situations (2007).³²⁸ He left his post when charges of corruption were brought against him for illegal land deals during his tenure as *akim* of Almaty. Khrapunov managed to escape to Switzerland, taking a massive fortune with him. He now lives there in exile. Authorities in Kazakhstan have tried unsuccessfully to have him extradited.

It is widely believed that Khrapunov became subject to investigation because of his personal connections to Mukhtar Ablyazov, the co-founder of the Democratic Choice of

³²⁷ The administrative center of Almaty *oblast* is Taldykorgan, not Almaty city.

³²⁸ Khrapunov is originally from East Kazakhstan *oblast*.

Kazakhstan. Khrapunov's son married one of Ablyazov's daughters, leading many to believe that Nazarbayev no longer found him to be trustworthy, and possibly even suspected him of having sympathies for Ablyazov's political causes, which were described above.³²⁹ What we know for sure is that when Nazarbayev chose to do so, he had no problem getting rid of him. Khrapunov, like Kazhegeldin, Nurkadilov, and Zhakiyanov, had no local supporters. Because they spent their careers scattered across various regions and localities, these officials hardly had a place that they could call home. The charges brought against them had few implications for anyone aside from themselves and their immediate families; the impact on local communities was negligible, for there were no local communities to which these regional figures were firmly attached.

Of all the disputes Nazarbayev had with his sitting and former governors, only one was well entrenched in the region in which he was born and lived. That was Bergei Ryskaliev. Ryskaliev was the governor of oil-rich Atyrau *oblast* for six years (2006-2012), which followed a series of other high-level posts in the province under his political mentor and close Nazarbayev ally, Aslan Musin.³³⁰ In August 2012, Nazarbayev flew to Atyrau to personally announce that Ryskaliev would be transferred to a new position (Keene 2012). In fact, Ryskaliev had been fired. The following month he was formally charged with corruption, prompting him to flee the country (Gromova 2012). His whereabouts are unknown, though there are rumors that he has been spotted in London.

³²⁹ In fact, Ablyazov did not abide by the terms of his release from prison. Once safely outside the country he began to fund a number of anti-Nazarbayev media enterprises.

³³⁰ Musin, however, had been appointed from outside the region. He was born in Aktobe and was appointed there as governor from 1995-2002. He was rotated to Aktau and served as governor there from 2002 to 2006 before going on to take multiple high-level posts in the central government. Among Ryskaliev's multiple posts in the region was as Musin's deputy (2005-2006).

Ryskaliev is accused of conspiring with his brother, Amanzhan Ryskali, and at least 11 other people, for stealing up to \$100 million from state coffers (Dave 2013: 13-14). The chairman of Kazakhstan's financial police assigned with fighting corruption described the actions by Khrapunov and Ryskaliev as the "most damaging to the state" of any corruption charges filed in recent years (*Kapital* 2013).

Ryskaliev's removal and disappearance occurred within a broader context of center-periphery conflict related to events in oil-rich Mangistau *oblast*. In December 2011, oil workers went on strike in the city of Zhanaozen. Rather than mobilizing alongside local protestors against the central government, as often happens in Kyrgyzstan, the local authorities in Zhanaozen were themselves the targets of the demonstrations. In fact, protestors set fire to the local *akim*'s office (Bissenova 2012). In response to the protests, local authorities dispatched local police, who used violent force that killed 16 people and wounded dozens of others. Nazarbayev blamed the conflict on the corruption of local and regional officials, fired several of them, and pledged to tackle corruption in the oil regions more aggressively. Ryskaliev's removal was widely seen as taking place in this context (Keene 2012). By firing him, Nazarbayev reinforced public perceptions that local and regional officials are corrupt, and that he had the will, power, and authority to sack them.³³¹ The key point in comparison with Kyrgyzstan is that there was no form of local resistance when he chose to do so. In every instance, Nazarbayev proved to have firm control over whom he appointed where, and when.

Save for Ablyazov and Zhakiyanov, whose break with the president was deliberately public, the precise reasons for conflict between other high-level provincial officials and the president are speculative. Still, we can be confident that these are political conflicts between the

³³¹ Others believe that Ryskaliev's firing centered on a conflict between the president and Ryskaliev's powerful patron, Aslan Musin, who was demoted at around the same time (Dave 2013: 14)

president and his regional appointees, not the dispassionate application of anti-corruption law. It is only when Nazarbayev needs to eliminate a potential enemy that the law is applied; corruption is prosecuted selectively, for political reasons. Put differently, the state officials charged with corruption in Kazakhstan “typically have entered into personal or political rivalries with Nazarbayev” (Lillis 2014: 309).³³² Formal legal charges are merely forms of “selective punishment” (Ledeneva 1998: 77-78; 2006: 13).

Most of the cases above describe regional officials who accumulated too much power, or who may have been suspected of having too many independent political ambitions. The key point is that when the president wanted to get rid of powerful regional officials, he had no problem doing so. As one official put it, they all “broke their wings trying to increase their self-reliance and they were heavily punished.”³³³ None of these officials had deep social bases in their own regions, nor did they have constituents in the broader population who had deep interests in seeing them in office. No doubt, the regular charges of “corruption” and “abuse of power” brought against regional officials even resonated with ordinary people, putting them on the side of the president. This gives “selective punishment” a dual strength: it frames the president’s political attacks against his regional subordinates in formal administrative-legal terms rather than political ones, yet it undoubtedly has a political resonance with ordinary people, who tend not to benefit from the corruption in which local and regional officials are engaged. Moreover, it likely tempers the political ambitions of other potential upstarts. As noted at the beginning of this section, it is not only the quality of contentious events in Kazakhstan that

³³² Indeed, the same European countries that have given political asylum to self-exiled Kazakhstani officials and refused extradition on human rights grounds have filed their own charges against the suspects. As described above, both Ablyazov and Aliev faced legal problems in their new host countries; so, too, did Khrapunov, who has been under the investigation of Swiss authorities since 2011. Zhakiyanov, by most accounts, was genuinely innocent of the charges filed against him.

³³³ Interview with author, July 23, 2014, KAZ_Int2_46.

differs with Kyrgyzstan, but their quantity too. The majority of regional authorities in Kazakhstan do not challenge the president's authority at all; they are better integrated into the state's administrative hierarchy as subordinate officials.

III. Reassessing Localism and Social Embeddedness: Competing Explanations

As noted in the introductory section of this chapter, a focus on the social embeddedness of local officials in facilitating or foreclosing social mobilization against central authorities draws heavily on Radnitz. Here I elaborate on Radnitz's theory. Using both the arguments of social embeddedness presented in chapters 3 through 5 of this dissertation, and with the backdrop of the empirical analysis presented above, I highlight the major points of departure on localism and social embeddedness in Kyrgyzstan. I do so through comparison with Kazakhstan.

While there is strong agreement here about the fact that local social ties create serious challenges for national authorities, there are two significant differences: first, the origin of local social ties in Kyrgyzstan and their apparent absence in other Central Asian states; second, the causal role that social ties play in shaping actors' behavior at the local level. As I discuss below, Radnitz takes a rationalistic view of social ties while I seek to reassess their social logic and effects. These differences, in turn, change how we understand the nature of the contentious episodes described above, including, in particular, what the object of contention is. For Radnitz, these are contentious episodes revolving around the control of private wealth. As I have argued, though, they can best be understood as contests for control over state offices themselves. In the concluding section of this chapter, I reiterate the implications that this has for state formation specifically, as center-periphery contests for state office have drastically different implications for administrative centralization than contests for wealth alone.

Where did local social ties in Kyrgyzstan come from, and why don't they exist the same way in Kazakhstan, or in Uzbekistan for that matter? In previous chapters I focused on the ways in which the institutions of local government embedded officials in local communities and reshaped the nature of state-society relations in Kyrgyzstan. Local officials in Kyrgyzstan are simultaneously fused to the state through their office and embedded in local communities because of how those offices are structured under the system of local self-government. These relationships at the local level shape state-society relations more broadly by changing expectations about what the state is, what it can do, and why it does things the way it does. As I also noted in these same chapters, authorities in Kazakhstan developed different institutions of local government, which tended to displace local officials from local social contexts and reduced their overall levels of interaction with, and dependence on, ordinary villagers.

Radnitz, in contrast, argues that regional and local elites in Kyrgyzstan are defined by their independence and distance from the state, which is what creates incentives for them to develop social ties with local communities. What makes Kyrgyzstan unique among other Central Asian states, Radnitz says, is that it underwent rapid economic liberalization in the early 1990s. This enabled elites to secure money, property, and enterprises for themselves, so that they no longer depended on the state to secure wealth. As a result, these elites "occupy a tenuous niche in the social and political hierarchy" because they are always potential rivals to state power (Radnitz 2010: 17). Conversely, the state is always a threat to elites' independent wealth because it can seize wealth and property. As a mechanism of self-defense against a predatory state, these elites embedded themselves in local communities. By providing badly needed resources to desperately poor communities, local elites can call on the assistance of those community members when central authorities threaten their wealth. Radnitz dubs this

“subversive clientelism,” since it is designed to undermine state power (Radnitz 2010). At the core of this story is a strong and clear dichotomy between state elites and economic elites who are potential or actual rivals with each other.

Empirically, however, the boundary between state elites and economic elites in Kyrgyzstan is blurry. This has important implications for what local elites and central authorities are actually fighting to control—private wealth or the offices of the state itself. I argue it is the latter. State offices provide both personal income and public resources that can be delivered to one’s home community, meeting local expectations, and fulfilling community obligations, as I described in prior chapters. They also provide officials with prestige and respect in their home communities (Huskey and Iskakova 2010). Finally, provincial governors and district *akims* obtain significant appointment powers of their own, enabling them to dole out jobs to members of their home communities within their own provinces, districts, villages, and cities. All of these things provide members of local communities with incentives to see local cadre obtain control over these offices.

Indeed, despite economic liberalization, the accumulation of wealth in Kyrgyzstan is still deeply tied to the ability to hold and maintain public office. At the pinnacle of economic power stands the president, not a private businessperson. Until the Tulip Revolution, the “Akaev Family Business” referred to the sizeable economic assets controlled by the president and his family (Spector 2008: 152). One study notes that, “during the formative period of economic and political restructuring under Akaev, enrichment and political connections became synonymous” (Engvall 2007: 36). When Bakiev succeeded Akaev as president, his family and friends took control over Akaev’s businesses and then expanded control over other assets as well (Marat 2008).

A list of Kyrgyzstan's richest individuals published in a Bishkek newspaper³³⁴ in 2013 doubles as the country's political elite, suggesting that it is dependence on state office that generated great wealth, not autonomy from it. The list includes: Omurbek Babanov (former prime minister); Askar Salymbekov (former governor of Naryn, member of parliament, and former mayor of Bishkek); Almazbek Atambaev (former prime minister and current president); Nariman Tiuleev (former mayor of Bishkek); Igor Chudinov (former prime minister); Melis Myrzakmatov (former mayor of Osh city); Omurbek Tekebaev (former speaker of parliament and leader of the *Ata-Meken* party); Kamchybek Tashiev (member of parliament and leader of the *Ata-Zhurt* party) (Tokoeva 2013).

The only person on this list who has not held office is Temirbek Asanbekov, though he was a candidate for president in 2011. Another on this list, Askar Salymbekov, was one of the founders of Bishkek's massive Dordoi bazaar, giving him a strong footing in the legitimate business world. But, Salymbekov's case only further highlights the interdependence of economic and state power in Kyrgyzstan. While Salymbekov secured key government appointments during the Akaev and Bakiev years—in both center and periphery—the original co-owner of the bazaar, Kubat Baibolov, did not. Though he held high-level posts under Akaev, he failed to secure an office under Bakiev and was subsequently “forced out of the business” (Hale 2015: 315-16). As I discussed above, local populations frequently mobilized to protect local officials whose tenure is challenged. But, nobody came to Baibolov's defense when his business interests were threatened.³³⁵ Indeed, it is notable that every contentious episode described in the first sections of this chapter involved individuals who held or aspired to hold

³³⁴ The original list was compiled by the publication “*Planeta*.”

³³⁵ After losing his business, he lived for a few years in the United States (2008-2010). After Bakiev was toppled in 2010, Baibolov was embraced by the new transitional government. President Otunbaeva appointed him interior minister in July 2010.

state office. If the autonomy of economic elites refers to their distance from the state, none of the actors involved in these events appears to qualify.

In fact, as noted above, it is precisely the control over state offices that enables one to accumulate wealth. One study concludes that, in addition to informal social ties to high-level state elites, “formal affiliations with political institutions [...] can help business owners secure assets” (Spector 2008: 150). Another notes that wealthy elites in Kyrgyzstan “seek political capital (such as political appointments, offices, titles, connections) in order to reproduce power and wealth” (Satybaldieva 2015: 374). In all of these cases, it appears that obtaining and protecting one’s wealth requires a position within the state, not distance from it. It is for control of state offices themselves, I argue, that center-periphery conflict occurs. People from communities in the provinces have an interest in seeing cadre from their own locality and region hold those offices because of the moral obligations that such individuals have to deliver a portion of those resources to their home village or region.

I recall here the case of Koisun Kurmanalieva, the long-serving village official who went on to become the “people’s governor” of Talas *oblast* in 2010, which I described above. Kurmanalieva held the position of governor for five years only because of the wide base of public support she enjoyed in the region. A relatively unknown figure outside of her home region before seizing power, Kurmanalieva became the single wealthiest regional governor in the country during her tenure, again highlighting the interconnectedness of state office and private wealth (Podolskaya 2014). If Kurmanalieva operates according to the logic of moral obligation of other local officials in Kyrgyzstan, which I outlined in chapters three through five, then we can assume that her friends, family, and co-villagers benefited from the wealth she generated as

the governor of Talas *oblast*, which better explains why she had so much local support when seizing office in the first place.

Radnitz's focus on the impact of privatization on elite formation in Kyrgyzstan comes through comparison with Uzbekistan, one of the few "completely nonreformed" post-Soviet countries where the state still formally controls much of the economy (Aslund 2007: 2-3). Also in contrast to Kyrgyzstan, levels of social mobilization led by local and regional elites in Uzbekistan are extremely limited. Hence, the links among privatization, independent economic wealth, and regional social mobilization become salient.

But, comparison with Kazakhstan raises further questions about the role of privatization in fostering an independently wealthy elite class. Levels of privatization in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were roughly equivalent. In 1996, the private sector share of GDP was 50% in Kyrgyzstan and 40% in Kazakhstan; by 2010, it was 75% in Kyrgyzstan and 80% in Kazakhstan (Junisbai 2012: 894-5). Hellman categorized both countries as "low intermediate reformers," in contrast to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which were "slow reformers" (Hellman 1998). Overall, the effects of privatization on elite formation both inside and outside the state have been comparable in each state (Junisbai 2012; Hale 2015: 102-03; 137-9). As in Kyrgyzstan, the elites in Kazakhstan who have benefited most from privatization are those with access to state office and deep connections to the ruling elite (Junisbai 2010, 2012). Indeed, it seems that here, as elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, the state "remains the major vehicle for intergenerational transfer of wealth and status" (Beissinger 1997: 177). The loss of state posts jeopardizes access to those resources.

Yet, in Kazakhstan, we do not see the emergence of elites with private assets becoming socially embedded in local communities or mobilizing those populations to protect their wealth

against the central government. The fate of Galymzhan Zhakiyanov—a self-made businessman who became one of Kazakhstan’s most prominent regional governors, whom I described above—is a case in point. When he was removed from office and thrown in jail after challenging the president’s appointment powers, nobody protested. The same can be said for Mukhtar Ablyazov and Akezhan Kazhegeldin—both private businessmen turned politicians, who, nevertheless, were unable to develop sufficient social bases of support to challenge the president in the same way as their Kyrgyz counterparts.

What distinguishes Kazakhstan from Kyrgyzstan is the degree to which the wealth and resources generated from state office benefit ordinary people in local communities. As I described in chapters three, four, and five, local officials in Kazakhstan are less likely to be socially embedded and have fewer moral obligations or responsibilities to provide resources to anyone at the local level. Thus, when local and regional officials in Kazakhstan are fired, rotated, arrested, put in jail, or exiled, it has few implications for local interests. Put simply, social ties connecting state officials to local communities are weak or nonexistent. In Kyrgyzstan, however, local cadre are socially embedded in local communities, and they have moral obligations to provide help and assistance to co-villagers. When their tenure in office is threatened—either because they are fired, or assigned to a different region and replaced by an “outsider” who lacks these same obligations—so are local interests.

As I emphasized in previous chapters, the reason state officials in Kyrgyzstan are more socially embedded than their counterparts in Kazakhstan is not because of privatization, but because of differences in how the state itself is organized and embedded in society at the local level. Through the development of local self-government in Kyrgyzstan, it was not only local elites who became socially embedded, but part of the state itself. This gives local and regional

elites there strong social bases of support in their region, while their counterparts in Kazakhstan are socially isolated and dependent solely on the president for their status and position. The difference is crucial because it defines what regional elites and communities are fighting for when they mobilize against central authorities. Are these regional and local elites protecting their wealth from a predatory state? Or, are they fighting to control the regional and local organs of the state itself? I argue it is the latter.

Indeed, the key players in contentious center-periphery politics in Kyrgyzstan are state officials fighting to gain or maintain access to public offices, along with local supporters who have a direct interest in seeing them do so. In the second section of this chapter I described the contentious events surrounding the arrest and eventual release of the parliamentarian Azimbek Beknazarov—the Aksy events of 2002. Radnitz himself wrote the most in-depth and widely cited study of the 2002 “Askyl events” (2005), which he also addresses under the theoretical framework described above (2010: 103-130).

Importantly, Azimbek Beknazarov was not an independent elite with access to private wealth, but a life-long public official who spent his entire career in state office. Most of these positions were at the local and district levels, keeping both him and his family enmeshed in the same social networks of the locality that they came from. During the Soviet period, Beknazarov and his family worked as shepherds on the *sovkhos*, Kyzyl-Tuu. In 1991, he received his law degree from Kyrgyz State National University and went on to work in various state offices, first at the district and provincial levels, and then in the central government. He was elected to the parliament representing his home district in 2000. At no point before or after this did he have a source of income outside of the state. And, though he undoubtedly secured resources through his state positions that benefited both him and his co-villagers, the central conflict in the protests

over his arrest was over his right to maintain his office. In short, Beknazarov was fighting central authorities for his seat in parliament; he had such robust support from the members of his village and district because they benefited from having a member of their community—someone with social ties to the region and moral obligations to provide help and assistance—in a position of power.

Whether these and other contentious events are fought over access to regional state offices or individual private wealth leads to a related question: how and why are local elites socially embedded in local communities in the first place? Here, too, I seek to build on Radnitz's work and attempt to shift perspectives by highlighting elements of social ties that his theory does not fully incorporate.

According to Radnitz, local and regional elites are socially embedded as the result of a deliberate rational calculation: we should “conceive of clientelist provision [to local communities] as an investment portfolio” (2010: 82) and the production of social ties with local communities as “medium-term investments in self-protection” (38). Subversive clientelism is not a form of social organization based on personalized face-to-face affective relations; it is an instrumental “strategy” whereby elites “make communities their arsenal of defense” against a rapacious and predatory state (52). Local elites are not described as being passively embedded in communities; rather, they are given enormous agency to “embed themselves” by making scarce resources available in exchange for protection in the form of protest mobilization (5, 21, 82). We might even say that these elites are rationally rather than socially embedded.

This rationalist approach, while theoretically parsimonious, renders social obligation and moral economy invisible or superfluous, and thus changes how we understand what social ties are and what they do. Do local elites contribute money and resources to become socially

embedded in communities out of rational self-interest, or do they contribute those resources because they are socially embedded and have moral obligations to do so? Conversely, is protest by villagers the result of an elite-orchestrated contractual exchange, or is it motivated by genuine outrage when central authorities threaten local interests, in the personage of their own community members, leaders, and local officials? Rational and social accounts are not mutually exclusive, but they do change our perspective and understanding of causation.

As Lewis argues, both the Tulip Revolution and the Aksy protests “involved genuine political protest, informed primarily, but not only, by local concerns. It represented not merely some manufactured discontent (or protestors being paid to demonstrate, as was sometimes alleged), but deep levels of social and political anger” (Lewis 2008: 267). In fact, once mobilized, local people in Kyrgyzstan engaged in protest repertoires that appear to go beyond instrumental reciprocity and imply deep moral outrage. For example, after the 2002 arrest of Beknazarov, described above, a number of his local supporters went on hunger strike, one of whom died as a result (Olcott 2005). Others were shot and killed by government agents. The willingness to take such extreme actions on Beknazarov’s behalf suggests a level of personal commitment and moral outrage that cannot be easily reduced to the instrumentality of a cost-benefit analysis (Jasper 1997). Similarly, during the earliest stages of the Tulip Revolution, most protesters in the south trekked to Osh by foot, a two-day journey for some (Fuhrmann 2006: 22). This harkens back to James Scott’s observation that personalized social ties between patron and client are not merely instrumental, but can create “as firm a bond of affection and loyalty as that between close relatives” (Scott 1972: 94). Indeed, clientelism is unique as a set of social relations precisely because it can be built upon “mutual devotion,” not merely “mutual advantage” (ibid.).

While Radnitz's theory privileges the rational aspects of these relations, much of his rich empirical data, like what I described in chapters 4 and 5, suggests that elite behavior in Kyrgyzstan is often governed by moral imperatives rather than sheer rational calculation and that individuals in local communities, in fact, have a lot of agency in deciding to whom they will lend support and why.

Indeed, for local elites, contributions to society are viewed as obligatory, rather than as favors in need of repayment. "In many cases," Radnitz says, "aspiring patrons were acting in a milieu in which co-villagers believed that the wealthy and powerful had a moral obligation to help" and that they "expected" local elites, including their local officials and parliamentary deputies, to contribute "by spending their own money to help the district" (2010: 88-89).³³⁶ In short, it seems that the only communities in which elites stand any chance of embedding themselves rationally are the ones in which they are already embedded socially. If so, that leaves central questions unanswered: Where did these expectations and social pressures come from? Why do members of local communities expect so much of their local state officials in the first place? I attempted to provide answers to these questions in prior chapters.

Likewise, the members of local communities were shown to be skeptical of the motivations and roles of "outsiders," as I described in chapter five. Radnitz notes that ordinary people tended to view elite patronage as a "cynical ploy" when elites' ties to the community were limited to instrumental material contributions (2010: 89). That is, ordinary people would

³³⁶ Likewise, Radnitz's ethnography of one local elite, "Eldar," depicts a person so deeply embedded in his community that his compliance with local norms is shaped by his fear of social shame and ostracism, rather than his rational self-interest. Eldar's rational self recognizes that he would benefit by leaving the village and moving to the capital city, but his deep ties and obligations to the community make it difficult for him to extricate (or dis-embed) himself. In order to "maintain status in the community" one often had to "demonstrate adherence to local norms, even if they were burdensome to uphold or at odds with one's convictions" (2010: 47). For example, Eldar felt compelled to build a garden and keep cows so that he was able to provide food for fellow villagers. He did so not because he wanted to secure a client base, but because "he was ashamed" not to do what was expected of him (48).

not support patrons whom they did not know personally. People would “remain immune to the appeals of nonlocal(s),” thus leading to a “double standard” based upon a particular elite’s own local origins (ibid.). Again, it appears that elites are not free to choose how and whether to become socially embedded, which leads us back to the question: how and why are they socially embedded in the first place? I argued it is the way that local government institutions themselves fortified and expanded local officials’ social ties into the state itself, and reshaped state-society relations more broadly, a factor that comes to the fore through comparison with Kazakhstan.

These distinctions lead to different perspectives about how and why contentious episodes unfold the way they do in Kyrgyzstan, differences that are partly tied to what these arguments intend to explain. Radnitz’s focus on social mobilization implies a great deal for state authority and administrative relations between center and periphery, but says little about them explicitly. In his comparison between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the state is depicted as fundamentally the same kind of force in both countries: exogenous to and above society, powerful, predatory, static, and fully formed at independence. It is only in conflict with an exogenous and powerful state—in conjunction with privatization and rural poverty—that subversive clientelism develops.³³⁷ This leaves important questions about the state unanswered: Is the state in Kyrgyzstan weak because it is regularly confronted by social mobilization in the periphery, or is social mobilization in the regions of Kyrgyzstan easier to accomplish because the central government has less control over cadre?

³³⁷ This is the reverse causal logic of how state power affects clientelism in the classic literature. According to Scott, for example, clientelism at the local level thrives in the absence of a strong state. When powerful states were developed during the colonial period in South East Asia, local patrons typically moved to the capital city, seeking higher status and money, leaving local social structures in shambles (Scott 1972; 1976), similar to what Tocqueville (1955) writes about the exodus of the French rural nobility to Paris during the nineteenth century. Here states did not lead to the creation of clientelism at the local level, but its erosion. What all of these stories have in common, though, is that the state remains detached from and exogenous to society.

By shifting focus to the center-periphery politics of state formation and centralization, we see endogenous aspects of state-society relations and the ways in which state power and social forces shape one another through an interactive process (Migdal 2001). The kind of state that emerges over time depends largely on whether and how its administrative personnel are embedded in society or integrated into the state apparatus. This approach seeks to show that the “state” is not a unified and fully formed actor at independence, nor is it inherently threatening to regional elites. Rather, its formation and its relation to regional elites depends upon how those elites are incorporated into the state itself, and whether and how they maintain social ties to local communities once they are. It is here that we see dramatic differences in the state formation outcomes of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, as I tried to lay out in chapters two through five. The empirical cases of contentious regional appointments outlined in this chapter further highlight these main points.

IV. Conclusions

This chapter builds on and supplements the broader patterns of center-periphery politics outlined in chapter two. Both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are unitary states where central authorities have the formal authority to appoint and remove provincial governors, who serve as representatives of the government in the regions, not as representatives of the people living there. Central authorities in both states have sought to utilize the policy of cadre rotation to socially disembed regional cadre from local social settings and integrate them into the state’s administrative hierarchy, as subordinate agents of central directives.

Yet, as has been discussed here, central authorities in Kyrgyzstan have not been nearly as successful as their counterparts in Kazakhstan, and the centralization of state administration has been undermined as a result. Throughout Kyrgyzstan’s provinces and districts, regional cadre

have relied on their local supporters to resist attempts to remove them from office, or rotate them across regions. In other instances, local elites have successfully taken over and occupied administrative offices with local support, gaining Bishkek's approval only after the fact. In still other instances, authorities in Bishkek have seemed to modify their cadre selections in anticipation of public backlash. What all of these cases have in common is that local and regional cadre have been able to mobilize significant public support in their home regions in conflicts with the central government over who will hold which office. This sometimes allows them to best central authorities, thus loosening Bishkek's hold over its own personnel and over state administration itself.

As was shown here, this support often derives from the very lowest levels of government, from the officials' own home village or government. As I describe in chapters three through five, it was the implementation of a local self-government system in Kyrgyzstan that cemented local elites' social ties in local communities, reinforced their social embeddedness, reshaped broader state-society relations, and, ultimately, undermined cadre rotation in the provinces. In many cases, the unsanctioned contenders for provincial office—people's governors—were themselves long-serving members of local self-governments with deep ties to the region.

In Kazakhstan, President Nazarbayev has successfully rotated cadre across regions, and between center and periphery. In doing so, it seems he has successfully cut them off from the local and regional bases of social support that they might have enjoyed otherwise. In those rare but notable instances when regional cadre have sought independence from the center—primarily from the president—they have been met with swift and uncompromising penalties, and without generating any significant public support for their cause. In Kazakhstan, unlike Kyrgyzstan, the policy of cadre rotation was applied to an administrative system that was hierarchical from top to

bottom, and, therefore, more coherent and effective. Unlike Kyrgyzstan's system of local self-government, village-level authorities in Kazakhstan are appointed, interact with the local population minimally, and rely on them for nothing, as described in chapters 3 through 5. This has undercut officials' local social ties and re-forged state-society relations in such a way that cadre rotation itself was more feasible and successful. This has allowed central authorities to better integrate their regional cadre into state administration, helping them to better centralize the state's administrative hierarchy.

I. The Puzzle and Question

This dissertation examines the process of administrative centralization in newly independent states using data from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan during the period 1991 to 2013. Much of the existing work on Central Asia couches the specific events recounted here in terms of regime dynamics. By focusing more directly on administration centralization, this dissertation not only contributes to a broader theoretical literature on state formation, it also offers a unique vantage point for analyzing events in Central Asia specifically. It stresses, for instance, that the representation of communities at the local level may be an aspect of democratization, but it also stands at odds with state centralization and administration.

Indeed, common accounts of regime politics in the region leave us with puzzles that are best solved by shifting perspectives to state formation. Observers of Central Asian politics agree, for example, that Kazakhstan is an entrenched authoritarian regime. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan is described as being both too democratic and not democratic enough. While nobody would suggest that Kyrgyzstan is a consolidated democracy, the country is often characterized as having extraordinarily high levels of participation in politics—whether through direct participation in local governance, elections, or protest mobilization. Sometimes this participation is unruly, consisting of intense center-periphery conflict that undermines central authorities, which is why there is “too much” of it. The paradox is captured by a news report about a proposal for Bishkek to formally recognize the decisions of informal popular assemblies, or *kurultais* (Rickleton 2011). As discussed in chapter six, *kurultais* have been one of the forums through which local populations and local elites have undermined the central government’s appointment powers, illegally electing their own “people’s governors” in place of Bishkek’s

official choice. It is for this reason, the article notes, that the *kurultai* has “become a byword for instability.” Hence, the ominous question it poses for the capital city: “Is Another Layer of Democracy Too Much for Bishkek?” (ibid.).

Framed as a problem of administrative centralization rather than democratization, Kyrgyzstan’s democracy paradox comes into clearer focus, particularly in comparison with Kazakhstan. In fact, through the prism of state formation, Kyrgyzstani politics is hardly a paradox at all. What looks simultaneously like too much and too little democracy is merely the consequence of decentralization in the absence of an established centralized state; it is, in short, the result of decentralizing authority that has never been adequately centralized.

Indeed, as I have stressed throughout, underlying the political regimes in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are very different kinds of states and state-society relations, defined by different levels of bureaucratic centralization, social embeddedness of officials, and control over regional cadre and appointments. At least one reason why center-periphery politics in Kyrgyzstan are contentious is that central authorities have so little control over their regional cadre. Instead, regional and local officials are deeply embedded in local communities, and alliances between local officials and local communities—as sometimes expressed through the insurgent politics of the *kurultai*—undermine Bishkek’s authority in the regions, and over the state itself. While scholars disagree on the precise causes of Kyrgyzstan’s two revolutions, the empirical facts are not disputed: they were initiated by regional elites and officials, in collaboration with their local supporters, usually family, friends, and other acquaintances.

In contrast, a key aspect of what observers see when they describe President Nazarbayev’s authoritarianism is his firm grip over the state’s administrative bureaucracy, which entails the swift and merciless punishment of insubordinate cadre. Nazarbayev succeeded in

centralizing state power by uprooting local officials from local social contexts, incorporating them into the state bureaucracy, and isolating them from social bases of support in the regions. In the few instances when regional elites have challenged Astana’s authority, or undermined the president’s formal appointment powers, they were sent to jail, or exiled. The lack of public support that these regional officials garnered in conflicts with the president cannot be lost on other potential upstarts, which might be one reason why there seem to be so few of them.

According to Nazarbayev, the presidential administration has “the ultimate responsibility” for maintaining “an effective system of state governance” and is “the main controlling organ for the implementation of decisions and assignments, [for] coordinating the work of regional and central executive organs” (*Tengrinews* 2014). Building a strong centralized state in Kazakhstan is one of the accomplishments that President Nazarbayev boasts about most often. His public development strategy—*Kazakhstan 2050*—lists “the establishment of a strong state” as the first among his many self-proclaimed achievements.³³⁸ This entails, among other things, that the “regions are united in their activities” (Nazarbayev: 2012: 6-7). Likewise, “stability” (*stabilnost*) has been one of the major themes of Nazarbayev’s presidency, invoked in nearly every major policy proposal and in most public speeches. Whenever possible, Nazarbayev reminds state officials and the public alike that the stable political order Kazakhstan has today was not an inevitable outcome.

We passed through the terrible breakdown of the Soviet Union, a major crisis. From 1992 to 1996 we tumbled around while answering the question: will there be a Kazakhstan or not? It seemed that it was not possible to emerge from that darkness, that chaos, but we survived together (Tashkinbaev 2014).

In this same speech, Nazarbayev implicitly asks his audience to imagine a counterfactual outcome, referencing political instability in Egypt, Syria, Ukraine, and Libya, where, he noted,

³³⁸ Quite literally, the opening section of the document is titled “Our Achievements: Establishing the Modern State of Kazakhstan.”

“the state practically does not exist” (Tashkinbaev). In other instances, state elites in Kazakhstan use the post-Soviet examples of Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan as explicit counter-examples to their own experience. Alikhan Baimenov, then the Chairman of Kazakhstan’s Agency for Civil Service Affairs, noted that one of Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine’s biggest problems was to allow local elections because it enhances “the influence of informal relations” allowing them to “play a big role in choosing local officials.” Citing the post-Soviet experiences of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine, he argued that elections in all cases led to the fragmentation of state power. “We need to understand,” he said, “that in the transition [period] we were attempting to build a new statehood and a new unified country.”³³⁹

We would be remiss to dismiss or condemn these sentiments because they do not accord with democratic principles. Behind them lies some truth, one that resonates broadly with the public, even if it also happens to bolster a government that many westerners find morally repugnant. After all, the projects of state building and authoritarian consolidation are hardly mutually exclusive, and can sometimes be overlapping (Slater 2010). This is all the more true if bureaucratic centralization requires that regional officials are insulated from society and rendered non-responsive to local demands. Indeed, insofar as democratization requires the opposite process—one by which regional and local officials are made to represent local interests—the process of bureaucratic centralization does not look democratic at all. Thus, formal policies to disembed local officials—like controlling appointments in villages (local government institutions) and provinces (cadre rotation) may, indeed, bolster Nazarbayev’s authoritarian regime. But, that is not their only effect, and may not even be their primary purpose. Observers

³³⁹ Interview with author, July 10, 2014 KAZ_Int2_37

might differ on how to categorize regime types in Central Asia, but nobody disputes that Kazakhstan is a more centralized and robust state than its small southern neighbor.

How precisely did these states arrive at such dramatically different outcomes given their remarkably similar starting points in 1991? How did Nazarbayev succeed where successive presidents of Kyrgyzstan failed, and what does this tell us about state formation—understood here as bureaucratic centralization—in the contemporary historical period? Even more broadly, how do some rulers succeed in integrating regional officials into the state’s administrative hierarchy as subordinate agents to the capital city, and why do they sometimes fail?

II. The Argument

The core argument made in this dissertation is that the nature of local social ties and state-society relations shape whether and how bureaucratic centralization proceeds. As noted above, this process might be at odds with democratization. This is hardly a new idea, given the classic literature on bureaucracy, which I outlined in chapter one. Weber’s “iron cage” not only symbolizes officials’ strict obedience to rules and procedures; it also suggests that they are held apart from society. The cage insulates them from the multiple social forces from below, or socially “disembeds” them. As a process, Weber’s image of state bureaucracy is rigid and rule bound—as a set of social relations it is clinical, unfeeling, and inhuman. Importantly, Weber emphasizes the importance of appointments for state bureaucrats, which ensures their strict obedience to the decisions of higher authorities; elections, by contrast, subject them to the interests of society from below, thus undermining the formation of the state’s administrative hierarchy. State bureaucrats—in both rational-legal and patrimonial bureaucracies—exist to

represent and carry out the policies of higher authorities, not to represent the interests of local or regional communities.

During the process of bureaucratic centralization, a key challenge for central authorities is to recruit and control their regional subordinates in the periphery, integrating them into a singular administrative structure—the state. It is for this reason that virtually all of the classic literature on state formation explains differences in bureaucratic centralization by looking at the forms of preexisting social and political organization in the periphery. This is the social context that shapes whether and how central authorities recruit local elites into the nascent state bureaucracy, continue to bargain with them as outsiders, or seek to displace them altogether with their own agents. Moreover, preexisting social and political organization shaped the likelihood that powerful or popular local notables could resist centralization and mobilize social forces against the capital city. As social and political organization varied in different peripheral territories, so too did the kinds of regional elites that central authorities encountered, as determined by the ties that bound them to society. Thus, in different territories, states emerged along different trajectories of development, leaving notable variations in the levels of bureaucratic centralization and in the character of subsequent center-periphery relations.

What makes contemporary cases of state formation different in world-historical context is the international political pressure that is brought to bear on new national authorities. As part of the neoliberal world order and the emergence of western liberal hegemony after the Cold War, bureaucratic centralization was reframed as undemocratic. Particularly in the former Soviet Union, state centralization was viewed mainly as a legacy that needed to be overcome. Instead of centralization, international organizations and western states—particularly the United States—promoted democratization and decentralization. Importantly, the “transition paradigm” that

undergirded these policies made important assumptions about states; namely, that they were all equally centralized, coherent, and developed to begin with (Carothers 2002). International proponents of decentralization and democratization invariably focused more on “the redistribution of state power” than its accumulation (ibid. 17). Put differently, they put the decentralization of state power ahead of its centralization.

Anthropologists studying postsocialist states seemed to suggest, by contrast, that central authority in newly independent states had virtually ceased to exist. Only later did it become clear to others that many of the countries nominally in “transition” to democracy “have faced fundamental state-building challenges” and, ultimately, the paradigm could not stand on the underlying weakness of its assumptions (Carothers 2002: 16). Yet, recognizing the faults of the transition paradigm does little to answer the fundamental question about state formation that it uncovered. To say that not all states end up as democracies is only half of the problem. The question remains: what kinds of effects did these policies have on the states that formed during this period? Put more broadly, how does the post-Cold War context of neoliberal western hegemony shape the trajectories and outcomes of state formation in newly independent states?

Through a comparative analysis of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, this dissertation outlines one possible answer. I argue that the main factor that set these two states along different trajectories of state formation was the institutions that national authorities built at the lowest levels of state administration, in villages and small cities. Throughout the early- to late- 1990s, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan created dramatically different institutions of local government, due largely to the contrasting levels of influence that international donor organizations had in each country. This had significant impacts on the level of social embeddedness of local officials, and fundamentally reshaped state-society relations in ways that led to different patterns of center-

periphery politics, and, ultimately, different levels of cadre control and bureaucratic centralization.

This account contrasts with other accounts of localism and social embeddedness in Kyrgyzstan, and its absence in other Central Asian states. As discussed in chapter six, Radnitz depicts social embeddedness in Kyrgyzstan as the result of rational and strategic investments made by newly independent elites who obtained private wealth as a result of early market reform. These elites socially embedded themselves as a form of self-defense against a predatory state (2010). For McGlinchey, in contrast, localism in Kyrgyzstan is the result of increasing levels of “Islamic revival.” The dense local networks formed as a result of increasing interaction with religious institutions “can and are mobilized against the central state when local populations feel aggrieved” (McGlinchey 2011: 38).

Both of these approaches, however, have little to say about the state itself. Rather, they make a common assumption that the state was strong, cohesive, and predatory from the moment of independence.³⁴⁰ In doing so, they gloss over state-society relations: Is the state in Kyrgyzstan weak because social embeddedness in the periphery leads to high levels of social mobilization, or is there so much social mobilization in the periphery because central authorities lack firm control over regional cadre? By looking at the development of the state itself through the prism of state-society relations, and in comparison with Kazakhstan, the argument presented in this dissertation highlights the latter. In doing so, it explains social embeddedness in Kyrgyzstan as stemming from the institutions of the state itself, making it endogenous to the process of state formation. It was not economic liberalization, Islamic revivalism, or the Kyrgyz “mentality,” that fostered dense social networks between local elites and local communities.

³⁴⁰ McGlinchey’s account does problematize this to some extent, but mainly through looking at differences in styles of authoritarian patronage. Kyrgyzstan’s state differs from its neighbors to the extent that state elite themselves are more internally divided.

Rather, it was the institutions of local government that were created in the decade after independence, which embedded local officials in local communities and made them dependent on their own social networks during the process of village governance.

This argument also highlights aspects of state formation that are absent in the existing literature in comparative politics. As noted above, the classic literature on state formation portrays the aspiring rulers of nascent states and the social forces they encounter in the periphery as discrete and mutually exogenous. Rulers encounter preexisting forms of social and political organization in the periphery that they must contend with, seemingly at a moment in time. Even in the interaction that ensues—which shapes the trajectory of state formation—these two sides, center and periphery (or state elites and regional elites) remain distinct and separate. What these cases from Central Asia show us, though, is that peripheral forms of social and political organization were not merely preexisting; they were being created and reformed during the same period that bureaucracies were being centralized. This means that peripheral social forces that central authorities had to contend with were partly endogenous. Put more concretely, new social and political institutions in the periphery were themselves produced during the process of state formation, as were the manifold effects that these new institutions had on local social ties and state-society relations over time.

If the social forces that these new institutions incubated were partly endogenous to the process of state formation, the impetus behind their creation was not. As I outline in chapter three, the direct political influence of international actors is what caused differences in institutional design at the local level in each state. From the moment of independence, Kyrgyzstan was heavily dependent on international donor organizations and foreign aid. National authorities in Bishkek were under pressure to adopt the kinds of institutional reforms

that these donors favored. This included a highly decentralized system of local self-government based on western models. The particular features of Kyrgyzstan's local self-government system, which were created in fits and starts during the first decade of independence, included an elected local executive (*ayil okmotu*), elected local councils, an independent local budget, and the direct participation of local populations in local governance, both in decision-making processes and implementation. Local self-government in Kyrgyzstan gave local officials, in collaboration with local communities, the responsibility for solving "problems of local significance" however they saw fit, with whatever means they could muster.

Kazakhstan, in contrast, had significant oil resources that insulated central authorities from international and western pressures to decentralize. There, authorities proceeded with institutional reforms that bolstered the power of the central government (and the president), over and above their local and regional subordinates. That is, they *created* subordinate officials at the village level to start. In marked contrast to Kyrgyzstan, the main features in Kazakhstan's system of local state administration in villages and small cities included an appointed local executive (*akim*), the absence of representative village councils, and a centralized budgetary system that renders villages entirely dependent on higher levels of administration for both policy making and resources. Unlike in Kyrgyzstan, the institutions of local government ensure that local populations play little formal role in local governance; in fact, ordinary people are entirely excluded from both decision-making processes and implementation within their locality.

However, the core argument in this dissertation is not merely that decentralization can undermine centralization—which is tautological—but to outline precisely how and why it does so. In fact, it was not the formal differences in local government institutions that mattered most. Rather, it is how these institutions fostered different levels of social embeddedness for local

officials, which shaped subsequent state-society relations and broader center-periphery politics over time. As I described in chapters four and five, the institutions of local government in Kyrgyzstan socially embedded officials in local communities; in Kazakhstan, these institutions were different and had the opposite effect, leading to the social alienation of local officials, producing space between state and society that rendered these officials increasingly dependent on the capital city, unable to form independent social bases of support in the periphery.

Chapter four documents the ways in which the institutions of local government in Kyrgyzstan produced socially embedded local officials. It did so in the following ways: first, local elections made it more likely that local officials were selected from among the village population, rather than from outside. This meant that they governed the same places where they had lived their entire lives, and where they had multiple and overlapping networks of family, friends, and other life-long acquaintances from all spheres of everyday life.

Even more significant, however, was the creation of an independent local budget, which established a unique *process* of local governance. The independent local budget allowed local officials to secure resources directly from international donor organizations. Yet, these funds had strings attached. In order to secure donor money, local officials had to gather a “local contribution”—either in cash, labor, or in-kind contribution—that was put toward implementation of the project in question. The very purpose of the local contribution, according to the donors themselves, is to make local officials more dependent on their local communities, and less dependent on Bishkek. Indeed, to mobilize the local contribution, local officials rely on their own local social networks, calling on family, friends, and local acquaintances for direct assistance, or to help mobilize others in the community. This had multiple effects: it continually activated and reinforced the importance of the local officials’ own social ties in the village and

district. It also integrated these social ties into the process of local governance, and, in effect, institutionalized them. In short, the local officials' social relations were built into the state itself at the local level.

Importantly, this had significant implications for broader state-society relations, as I discuss in chapters four and five. Social embeddedness is a two-way street of reciprocal and moral obligation. The socially embedded local official in Kyrgyzstan can call on a broad network of support during the process of local governance, but he or she also has obligations to offer help and assistance in return. The *ayil okmotu* could call on his neighbor to help fix a village road. But, later this neighbor might ask the *ayil okmotu* for a ride to the village center. These are but a few of the empirical examples from the ethnographic research I presented in chapter four.

When such interactions occur between state officials and local populations, the lines between state and society are continually being blurred. In fact, it is not always clear if the request for help and favors is occurring in the public or private sphere. When the local official calls on his brother to help to dig an irrigation canal, is he asking in his role as an official, or in his personal capacity as kin? When his brother later asks for help fixing the roof of his home, is he asking his brother, or is he asking a public official? The answer is both and neither. The point is that the distinction becomes unimportant. These social relations are multiple and overlapping, encompassing and intertwining political, social, and economic aspects of everyday life. Importantly, these local social relations are strengthened and reproduced by the institutions of local government themselves. This is what it means to say that the institutions of local government reshaped local social ties and state-society relations, as I attempted to show in chapters three through six.

The institutions of local government in Kazakhstan also shaped local social ties and state-society relations. But not in the same way and not with the same outcome. In Kazakhstan, the institutions of local government created after independence disembedded local officials from local social contexts and alienated local populations from the process of local governance, creating significant space between state and society. There, the institutions of local government dictate that village officials are appointed, not elected. The result is that they are more likely than their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan to be selected from outside the village, dispatched and sent *to* a place, rather than originating from it. This means that they are less likely to govern among their life-long social acquaintances. In other words, they are less likely to have deep and overlapping social ties.

However, even when local officials are selected from among the village population in Kazakhstan—which they commonly are, more frequently than we might expect under a system of appointments—the process of everyday village governance renders these officials’ social ties relatively unimportant. That is, even if the local official has deep social ties in the village to start, he or she rarely activates or mobilizes them through the process of village governance. Those social ties are kept outside of the state, and might even begin to wither away as they become increasingly neglected.

Why can’t local officials in Kazakhstan do as their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan and utilize these social ties if they have them? As I show in chapter four, Kazakhstan’s centralized budgetary system makes local officials more dependent on higher levels of state administration. There, village officials do not decide what projects to undertake, or how to implement them. Funds are allocated for specific projects as determined at the district- or provincial-levels, or even in the capital city. The local officials’ job is merely to carry out orders from above,

regardless of (and possibly in contradiction to) local communities' preferences. Put differently, the local official in Kazakhstan rarely or never activates his or her own social networks in the process of village governance.

In fact, as I showed in chapter four, because the process of local governance in Kazakhstan is so dependent on higher levels of administration—and not on the local population—village officials spend much of their time outside of the locality. In practice, village governance does not occur in the village at all, and the village official spends the majority of his or her time in the district or provincial center, meeting with the authorities who dictate which jobs will be performed and how. Thus, even the native-born candidate for office is likely to govern as an absentee official. Indeed, village officials in Kazakhstan depend on higher authorities not only for *how* they will do their jobs, but *whether* they will do so at all. As noted above, higher-level administrators are not only the gatekeepers to scarce village resources, they also decide who will be appointed to which village administration and when they will be removed. For the village-level official, the social ties that matter most are with higher-level officials in the state administration, who will determine what job they will do, how they will do it, and whether they can have a future in state service.

In chapter five, I laid out the impact that these different patterns of local social relations have on broader state-society relations. Because local officials in Kyrgyzstan are embedded members of local communities and participate in villages' moral economy, they are among the most trusted officials in the entire state apparatus. Data from local research organizations, NGOs, and state bodies offer strong support for this claim.

In addition, the ethnographic data I presented in this chapter show that the distinction between local and non-local officials in Kyrgyzstan has become politically meaningful to

ordinary people. Local officials in Kyrgyzstan are deemed more trustworthy and honest precisely because they are long-standing members of the community. Not only are they perceived to have a direct stake in their own communities' development, they also have personal obligations to help many of its individual members, who are not merely "citizens," but also "friends," and "relatives." In contrast, the incentives and motivations of outsiders to help local residents or develop local infrastructure is open to question, and perhaps tinged by widespread perceptions that officials at a greater distance—in the capital city especially—are disinterested in local problems and also hopelessly corrupt. Indeed, the same data that show local officials to receive the highest marks for trust and effectiveness also show central authorities in Bishkek to be the least well regarded, and the most likely to be perceived as corrupt.

In Kazakhstan, by contrast, the disembedded and absentee local official is not responsive to local interests or particular requests for help and assistance from individuals within the community. This is for the reasons described above. Formally, it is not part of a local officials' job to respond to local interests or complaints. But, even informally, as an outsider to the community, local officials lack the same private or personal obligations to individuals as their Kyrgyzstani counterparts. In these settings there may still be a moral economy in the village, but the local official plays no part in it, owes favors to no one, and lacks a sense of personal obligation to do anything. If we can say that the local official in Kyrgyzstan is likely to have both public and private obligations to his or her community, we can add that the Kazakhstani counterpart has neither public nor private obligations. The boundaries between the public and private realms are, thus, drawn differently in each state, and so too is the relationship between state and society.

This points toward significant differences in the patterns of state-society relations in each state. While data show that the local official in Kyrgyzstan is among the most trusted and praised in the entire state apparatus, as I described above, local officials in Kazakhstan are almost universally despised. If not viewed as corrupt and self-interested, village officials there are typically regarded as ineffective, uncaring, and nonresponsive to local needs.

The social dislocation of village officials in Kazakhstan is further reinforced by the role played by the president's political party, *Nur Otan*. The party's public campaigns encourage citizens to interact directly with the party, not with the state administration. In fact, as I showed in chapters four and five, *Nur Otan* has proven to be relatively responsive to local demands, sometimes taking action against corrupt local officials on citizens' requests, thereby further distancing the social alienation of local officials from the community while simultaneously bolstering the president's own popularity. Indeed, even Nazarbayev's staunchest critics concede that his levels of public support are broad, deep, and genuine. This, again, stands in marked contrast to Kyrgyzstan, where local officials are more highly regarded than those in the capital city.

What broader effects did these local social ties have on bureaucratic centralization? In answering this question, the analysis presented in this dissertation not only disaggregates the state into center and periphery, but further breaks down the periphery into province, district, and village. If changes in local social ties had no effects beyond the village level, it would be difficult to suggest that they affected broader patterns of state formation. But, as this dissertation demonstrates, through the data presented in chapters two and six, the patterns of relations between central authorities and their provincial governors—who are their highest-level regional functionaries—follow from differences in social ties at the village level. In this way, the effects

of local social relations in the village are traced upward to the district and provincial levels, leading to dramatically different center-periphery politics surrounding regional appointments.

Indeed, despite their significant differences in the institutions of local government, both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan adopted the same formal systems for the administration of provinces. They are both unitary states, provincial governors are supposed to represent the central authorities in the regions, not the populations living there, and central authorities retain the formal authority to appoint and remove their provincial governors for any reason, or no reason at all. As I discussed in chapter two, the central authorities in each state also adopted similar policies to manage and control regional cadre in an effort to ensure their subordination and centralize state authority. Cognizant of the challenges that socially embedded governors could present to the centralized hierarchical administration of the state, central authorities in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan adopted the same formal policy of “cadre rotation,” seeking to continually shuffle regional personnel across regions, and between center and periphery, thus undermining their independent social bases in the periphery.

Cadre rotation is hardly unique to post-Soviet Central Asia. In chapter two I present historical data from multiple world regions and across different eras of history to demonstrate that cadre rotation has long been a strategy adopted by aspiring national rulers. As a matter of historical significance for post-Soviet states, cadre rotation was also frequently employed in the Soviet Union itself, and well known to the officials who came of age in the Soviet era. What all of these historical cases show is that cadre rotation tends to go hand-in-hand with the process of bureaucratic centralization: the purpose is to disembed officials from regional social contexts and make them more dependent on, and better integrated into, the state’s administrative hierarchy.

Yet, as I also showed in chapter two, Kazakhstan succeeded in implementing this policy while Kyrgyzstan failed. Using an original database of governors' biographies and career trajectories in every province from 1991 to 2013, I showed that governors in Kazakhstan had previously served as the governor of some other province in nearly half of all cases; but, in Kyrgyzstan this was true in only fourteen percent of cases. Moreover, local communities in Kyrgyzstan have often mobilized against central authorities when the tenure of a native governor is challenged, or when Bishkek seeks to bring in an outsider from a different region. There, we see numerous instances of "people's governors" being installed by local supporters, directly undermining the central government's appointment authority. Oftentimes, central authorities conceded to these choices, in effect, forfeiting their ability to select and control their own top-level regional officials. In short, politics at the provincial level—though formally identical in each case—show dramatically different patterns in outcomes, suggesting significant ongoing challenges for the project of bureaucratic centralization in Kyrgyzstan, but relative success in Kazakhstan.

Chapter six examines some of these contentious episodes in empirical detail. By doing so, it demonstrates clear links between the local, district, and provincial levels. In fact, many of Kyrgyzstan's insurgent "people's governors" were former village-level authorities with deep life-long connections to their home villages. In chapter five, I outlined the career trajectories of two prominent examples, Koisun Kurmanalieva and Dzhumagul Egamberdieva. Parallel examples of prominent local officials forcing their way onto the provincial and national stage also included parliamentarians—like Abdimutalip Kochkorbaev and Esengul Isakov—who had long careers in their home-village governments.

The same pattern characterized the contentious tenure of Melis Myrzakmatov, the mayor of Osh city from 2009 to 2013.³⁴¹ Myrzakmatov used his dense networks of local social ties to resist Bishkek's multiple attempts to fire him; formally, national authorities had the legal authority to do so, but repeated mass rallies in support of Myrzakmatov undermined their actual power. Likewise, I show that in the course of Kyrgyzstan's two revolutions, in 2005 and 2010, there were numerous instances of both district- and provincial-level administrative offices being ransacked and occupied by local elites and their local supporters, usually friends, family and acquaintances from their home villages.³⁴² Indeed, the proximate causes of both revolutions were center-periphery conflicts over who could hold what office. Also, the process through which both revolutions unfolded entailed local elites, deposed regional officials, and other local notables activating and mobilizing social ties in their home villages and districts against Bishkek.

The same chapter demonstrates that current and former officials in Kazakhstan's regions did not enjoy the same levels of social support in their contests for power with central authorities. The most famous of these cases stems from the short-lived Democratic Movement of Kazakhstan (DVK). The DVK sought to eliminate President Nazarbayev's constitutional authority to appoint regional governors, among other things. The primary leader of the DVK, Galymzhan Zhakiyanov, himself the incumbent governor of Pavlodar *oblast*—though, in accordance with cadre rotation, also the former governor of Semipalatinsk *oblast*—called for the direct election of governors, thereby creating social links between the top-level regional state officials and local populations. When the president summarily fired Zhakiyanov—along with

³⁴¹ As I explained in chapter six, Osh City has a hybrid administrative status. As a city, it falls under the domain of the same local-self government system as villages. But, as the second-largest city in the country, it also has the administrative status as an independent province. During Myrzakmatov's tenure, the position of mayor was appointed, not elected; thus, it closely resembled the position of provincial governor.

³⁴² Tellingly, a similar dynamic occurred for those falling from power; when both Presidents Akaev and Bakiev fled from office in 2005 and 2010, respectively, they both sought refuge in their home villages, seeking to mobilize their own life-long acquaintances for support.

dozens of his DVK cohorts—nobody protested. Later, when prosecutors issued a warrant for Zhakiyanov’s arrest, the insurgent governor did not seek refuge in his home region, or in Pavlodar, where he was not a native anyway. As indicative of his thin social ties to ordinary members of society and total dependence on other state elites, Zhakiyanov turned instead to the westerners who supported his goals of decentralizing power. He hunkered down in the French, British, and German Embassies in Almaty until Kazakhstani authorities could negotiate his release. After ultimately serving jail time, he went into self-imposed exile like many of his upstart predecessors.

At the broadest level of center-periphery politics and cadre control, a clear contrasting pattern can be seen in these two states: Kyrgyzstan’s socially embedded regional and local elites who challenge the capital city have often succeeded in seizing and holding power in their regions, effectively wresting those offices from the state’s administrative hierarchy. Their counterparts in Kazakhstan, however, end up in jail or exile. Without social bases of support in the regions, efforts to challenge central authority become futile, and the offices of the state become firmly integrated into the president’s “vertical of power.” Put differently, officials in Kazakhstan’s regions have been disembedded from society and integrated into the state hierarchy, thus facilitating bureaucratic centralization; their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan maintain deep social ties to their communities, undermine the state’s administrative hierarchy, and hinder bureaucratic centralization.

III. Implications and Conclusions

Among the contributions of the research presented here is to suggest that local social ties and political organization are endogenous to the process of state formation. National authorities

do not always contend with preexisting social forces in the periphery. Rather, the strategies they pursue and institutions they build can have unintended consequences, even reshaping the very social forces that they seek to control going forward. This finding also suggests that state formation is not only an elite process; ordinary people also play a role, to the degree that they are—or not—enmeshed in deep and overlapping social relations with state officials in their own territories.

As I have also suggested, this theoretical insight might stem from the historical context of state formation in the neoliberal era of globalization. International policy actors in the post-Cold War period have been quick to promote—if not force—their preferences for democratization and decentralization on newly independent states. This is true regardless of how centralized these states are to begin with. Thus, this research also highlights a weakness in the developmental strategies of international policy actors: while democratization might be a noble goal, the unintended consequences of decentralization on state formation must also be considered. That is, democratization and decentralization can transform local social ties and state-society relations in ways that undermine bureaucratic centralization and state effectiveness.

Thirdly, this research suggests that both the literature on state formation and the international policy community share a problematic ontology of state formation and political development. Almost without exception, “the state” that is undergoing formation (or deformation and decentralization) is treated as a singular entity. The argument made here not only urges us to disaggregate the state into its component parts (Migdal 2001), but also to suggest that different parts of the state can develop independently of one another, changing the ways in which the different parts fit together, and in the ways they connect to society. If this is true, then the “state” is not undergoing formation at all; rather, villages, districts, provinces, and

capital cities are undergoing their own processes, sometimes in ways that do not coherently align with each other. The state-society relationships that are forged in villages, for example, might undermine central authorities' strategies for cadre control in provinces. In Kazakhstan, the provincial-level policy of cadre rotation complemented the institutions of government that were developed in villages in small cities; in Kyrgyzstan, the same provincial-level policy clashed with different institutional developments at the local level, however. The way that ongoing changes in provinces and villages interacted with each other, in turn, had dramatic impacts on the capital city, on relations between center and periphery, and in the overall levels and quality of bureaucratic centralization in each case.

At the same time, the proposition that state formation may take place in multiple arenas simultaneously is an empirical question as much as a conceptual and theoretical one. The fact that states might not always develop as or into coherent entities does not preclude the possibility that such a developmental path exists. We should treat state cohesion as a developmental question, asking not how or why "states" develop, but whether and under what circumstances relatively singular cohesive centers emerge that encompass regions and localities within a centralized administrative structure. Thus, this study responds to Migdal's call for an "anthropology of the state" (Migdal 2001: 97-134). It also follows anthropologists who have urged us to pay closer attention to all levels of state and society when exploring the reconfiguration of state power in the post-communist context. An "ethnography of the state" asks us to study the state "at close range from within its daily routines and practices," to "treat states not as things but as sets of social processes and relations," and to use these perspectives to better understand the "destatizing" and "restatizing" tendencies in the postsocialist era (Verdery 1996: 209).

With regard to the specific cases of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, competing explanations might stress these two states' overall levels of economic wealth, and the fact that one state is more democratic than the other. As I discussed in chapter 1, a reorientation toward social ties and state formation is not so much an alternative to these other approaches, but an effort to explain how and why disparities in economic wealth and democratization shape different trajectories and outcomes of administrative centralization. Kazakhstan's wealth not only insulated it from the demands of international donor organizations, but also enabled central authorities to maintain a centralized budget system that better ensured the dependence of subnational officials at all levels of administration. The onset of economic crisis in Kyrgyzstan following independence, by contrast, not only made it more dependent on international donors for policy advice and assistance, but also meant that local officials were less reliant on Bishkek for resources and direction, giving them higher levels of autonomy from the center while simultaneously more dependent on their own local social networks.

Likewise, this approach does not dismiss the differences in regime type between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, but stresses precisely how and why specific regime characteristics shape the process of bureaucratic centralization. This study focused primarily on differences in regime characteristics at the subnational level, as manifested in each state's institutions of local government. In shifting perspectives from normative theories about regime transition toward state formation, this study sheds light on aspects of regimes that have received relatively less attention, as I noted at the outset of this chapter. Indeed, the findings of this study have many implications for the possible relationships between bureaucratization and democratization, two issues that are much studied, but not always in connection with each other. Sadly, for the proponents of democratization, the findings presented here suggest that these two processes are

not fully compatible with each other. This, however, merely echoes the idea that democratization can only proceed where strong state institutions already exist (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992: 63-69) and reflects the tautological proposition that one cannot decentralize power that has not first been centralized. What is different about the approach taken here is that it contributes to this debate by drawing our attention to how local social ties and state-society relations affect (and are affected by) these processes. It seems that bureaucratization and democratization might be incompatible precisely because of the different kinds of local social relations that each are built upon.³⁴³

Drawing on Max Weber's images of bureaucracy, I have stressed that bureaucratization goes hand-in-hand with social disembeddedness, extracting state officials out of local social contexts and integrating them into the administrative structures of the state. It is for this reason that state bureaucrats—to the degree that they have truly been disembedded from society—are (or are supposed to be) dispassionate, unfeeling, and unmoved by the particularistic situations of individuals' or communities' circumstances.

When fully developed, bureaucracy also stands, in a specific sense, under the principle of *sine ira ac studio* [without anger and fondness]. Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it is "dehumanized," the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation (Weber 1978: 975).

It is for this reason, perhaps, that democracy is so valued. Democracy socially grounds an already bureaucratized state, makes it more representative of and responsive to social demands from the bottom-up. If bureaucratization entails the dehumanization of the state, to borrow Weber's terminology, then democratization entails its re-humanization. But, as this study suggests, a key qualifier in this proposition is that the state be *already* bureaucratized.

³⁴³ In fact, when bureaucracies are discussed in the context of democratization, the focus is almost always on the rule of law rather than social ties. Thus, the development of a rational-legal bureaucracy is seen as establishing the impartial rules necessary for democracy to function, but it does so without considering the effects that democratization itself has on the formation of a functioning administrative system.

Democracy might soften the edges of a rigid bureaucratic structure, but it can undermine the potential for bureaucratization to occur in the future if it has not been accomplished already. To reiterate a theme that was highlighted above, power that is not yet centralized cannot be decentralized, and authority that is not concentrated cannot be devolved.

What difference does it make if state administration is centralized and cohesive at all? Since this study focuses primarily on whether and how state administrative bureaucracies are centralized, it can provide only limited and inconclusive answers to this secondary yet extremely important question. I provide tentative and anecdotal examples here not with the intention that they should provide definitive answers so much as to suggest avenues for further research. Broadly speaking, administrative centralization and cadre control might affect other key processes of state formation, the stability of the political order, and the nature and quality of state governance.

First, as others have argued, the centralization of bureaucratic administration is crucial for realizing other aspects of state formation, including the nationalization of taxation and the monopolization of coercion (Tin-bor Hui 2005: 38-53; Vu 2010). This suggests that bureaucratic centralization and the control of cadre are prerequisites for the formation of other key components of state power. If central authorities cannot control their own subordinates, and appoint whom they want where they want them, it follows that they will not have full command over policymaking and implementation. This also tends to be the view from the center. As Stalin noted early in his tenure, giving orders is not enough; it is “necessary to choose cadre in such a way as to fill the various posts with people who are capable of carrying out the policy directives, able to understand the directives, able to accept these directives as their own and

capable of putting them into effect. Otherwise the policy becomes meaningless, becomes mere gesticulation.³⁴⁴

The analysis in this dissertation is centered on the question of how central authorities achieve this control. It is based on the assumption that central authorities do, in fact, see the subordination of regional cadre as an important priority and a prerequisite to achieving other goals for the state, and for their own leadership. This assumption is grounded in the actual cadre policies of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and as expressed through policy documents and interviews with state officials in both states, as described in chapter two. It does not, however, offer conclusive evidence that national authorities are justified in making this a priority. Whether control over cadre is truly a prerequisite for the fulfillment of other state goals is an empirical question, and one that can only be addressed through additional research.

At the same time, the lack of cadre control in Kyrgyzstan but not in Kazakhstan does provide some anecdotal evidence that control over cadre shapes the realization of state policy and power in key ways. For example, the failure of central authorities in Kyrgyzstan to integrate Melis Myrzakmatov into the state's administrative apparatus also undermined their monopoly on coercion, and their ability to establish political stability in the south after the revolution in April 2010. Not only did central authorities accuse Myrzakmatov of participating in the subsequent ethnic conflicts that erupted in June of that year, which they were trying to quell, but Myrzakmatov himself proposed the establishment of his own police forces, which would operate outside of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It was the very fact that leaders in Bishkek were unable to remove or replace Myrzakmatov that he was able to act with such strident

³⁴⁴ The 12th Party Congress, April 1923.

independence and insubordination. And it was the fact that he had such a dense network of local grassroots support that authorities in Bishkek struggled to remove or replace him.

Related to this, control over cadre in a centralized administration might contribute to the creation of a more stable political order. The analysis presented in this dissertation shows that political instability in Kyrgyzstan has entailed contentious politics over regional appointment and representation. Central authorities, in numerous different instances since 1991, have been challenged by protest mobilization when attempting to fire, replace, remove, and rotate cadre. This account does not capture every element of Kyrgyzstan's two revolutions, nor does it fully explain why they happened, but it does highlight the appointment politics that were part of these events, which have often been overlooked in other accounts. It is not a coincidence, in this light, that state building, cadre control, and political stability have often been explicitly linked by central authorities in Kazakhstan during the post-independence period, as noted in the beginning of this chapter.

Additionally, bureaucratic centralization and control over cadre have major implications for the quality of state governance. Prior research, for example, shows that the centralization of administration and the ways in which elites are integrated into or interact with the bureaucracy shape the degree to which central authorities can achieve economic growth and industrialization (Evans 1995; Kohli 2004).

The data presented in this dissertation do not allow us to draw any conclusions about whether Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan is better governed, only that they are differently governed. Because these data stem largely from citizens' own accounts of how they understand, interact with, and evaluate the state, it does not speak to objective differences in the quality of state governance or the provision of public goods. Moreover, even these subjective bases of

understanding the state do now allow us to evaluate state governance as an aggregate category. The key dynamic uncovered by these data is that people have different ways of evaluating and understanding the work of state officials at different levels of administration, based, in part on the way that state institutions structure their own relationships and interactions with those officials. Kyrgyzstan's system of local self-government is responsive to local demands and is evaluated positively by ordinary people. But those same people are likely to criticize, denounce, and disparage the work of officials in the capital city. Conversely, the evaluation of the work of local officials in Kazakhstan is resoundingly negative, yet support for the president and his political party appears to be deep and genuine. In short, this study does a better job problematizing the aggregate concept of state governance than evaluating what makes it better or worse.

There are other notable shortcomings that stem from this. For example, emphasizing the differences in local governance between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan has the analytical effect of homogenizing villages and small cities within each state, rendering internal variations in local governance invisible. Uncovering the variations in local governance within each state—rather than between them—suggests a series of additional questions to be answered. For example, how do variations in local social ties and state-society relations across regions and localities in a single state shape other important domestic processes? How do differences in the social relations between ordinary people and local officials shape the social dynamics of corruption, democratization, and economic growth? Additional research is needed to answer these questions.

Finally, additional research would be needed to test the generalizability of these findings. The scope conditions of this study are limited to states that are newly independent, non-

democratic, and unitary. Within these limitations, the general proposition is that the centralization of state administration will be hindered in territories where the social ties between state officials and ordinary people are deep, multiple, and overlapping. Other post-Soviet Central Asian states—Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—would be the most suitable cases for testing, modifying, and expanding this proposition in future research.

Annex:

Diagram 3.1a: Captions and Commentary for Diagrams 3.1b, c, d, and e

Diagrams 3.1b, c, d, and e were made by village executives in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. In most instances, local officials made drawings by their own initiative while trying to explain the distinctions between levels of government. The four selected here, two from each state, are representative of a larger sample of fifteen different images.

There are two patterns: local officials in Kyrgyzstan depict local government as separate from and parallel to the state while their counterparts in Kazakhstan depict the local and the state as a unified and integrated and hierarchical structure.

Kyrgyzstan

Diagrams 3.1b and c were drawn by two different *ayil okmotu* in Kyrgyzstan, one from the north and one from the south. They both depict non-hierarchical relationships between the “state” and the “locality.”

Diagram 3.1b shows the government (*okmot*) divided into two components that are parallel, rather than hierarchical. The left side depicts the levels of “state administration,” while the right side depicts “local self government” (or LSG, here denoted as *MSU*). The English language caption at the bottom distinguishing “state” versus “local” structures was added later for clarity.

Diagram 3.1c also points to the separation between “state” authority and “local” authority. State authority (*gosudarstvennaya vlast*) is on top and local authority (*mestnaya vlast*) is on the bottom. Despite the vertical orientation of this diagram (compared to the horizontal orientation of 3.1b), the horizontal line running through the middle is meant to depict the mutual separation and independence of each realm.

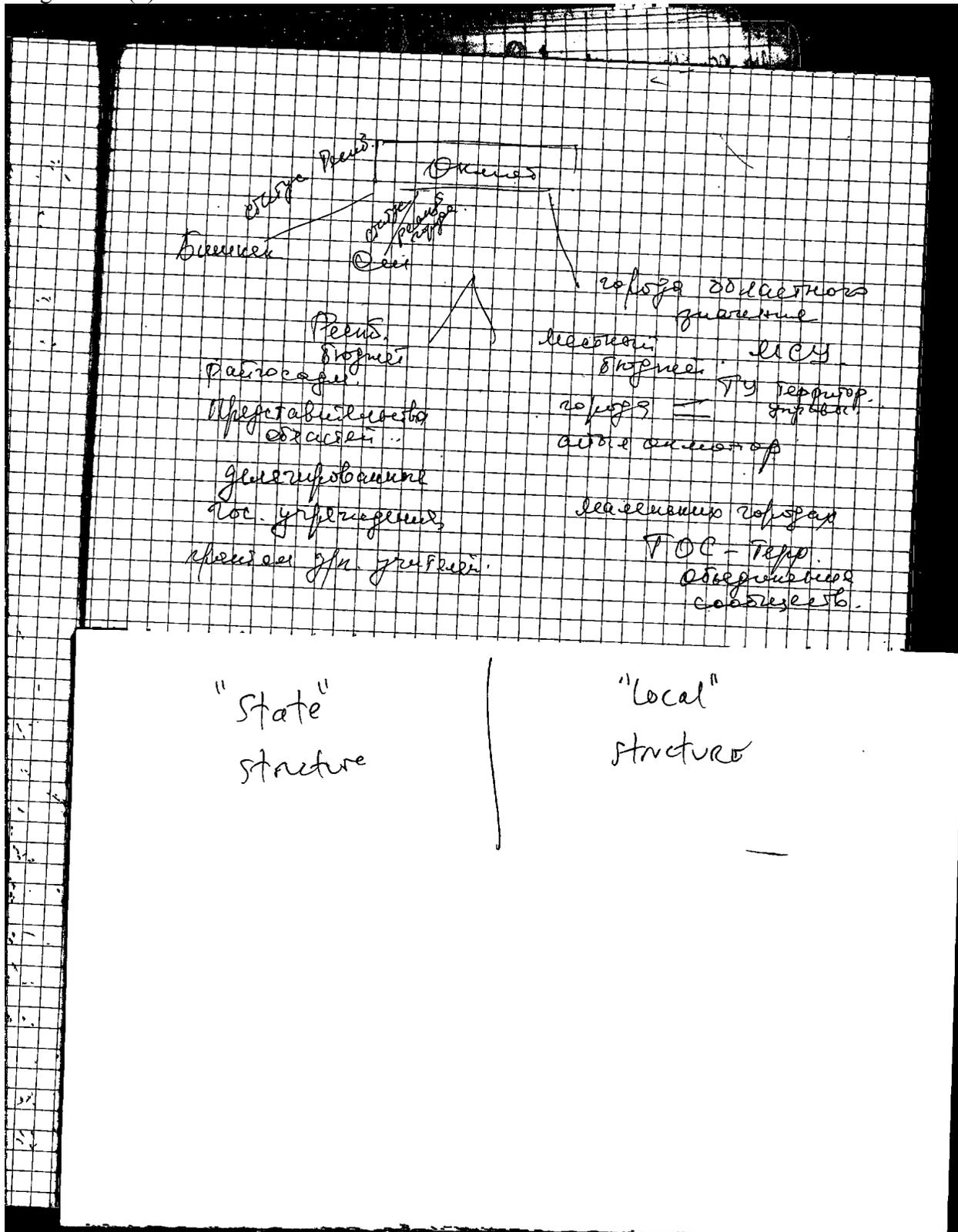
Kazakhstan

Diagrams 3.1 d and e were drawn by two different village *akims* in Kazakhstan, also from different regions. Here, hierarchy and subordination are the key themes as the local level is depicted as being a subsidiary part of the state, rather than as independent form of authority parallel to it.

Diagram 3.1d is the state hierarchy drawn as a pyramid, with subordinate *akims* positioned in the pyramid’s lower levels. The diagram also notes the parallel structure of the president’s party (here simply called “the party”) with the “leader of the party,” Nazarbayev himself, at the top station of the pyramid.

Diagram 3.1e also has a clear hierarchical structure. It shows the “government” at the top, with provinces, districts, and villages in descending subordinate positions. Astana and Almaty are noted as parallel structures to the provinces and were labeled subsequently by me (the English label “village” was also added later, under the original designation of *selo*).

Diagram 3.1(b)



"State" structure

"Local" structure

Diagram 3.1(c)

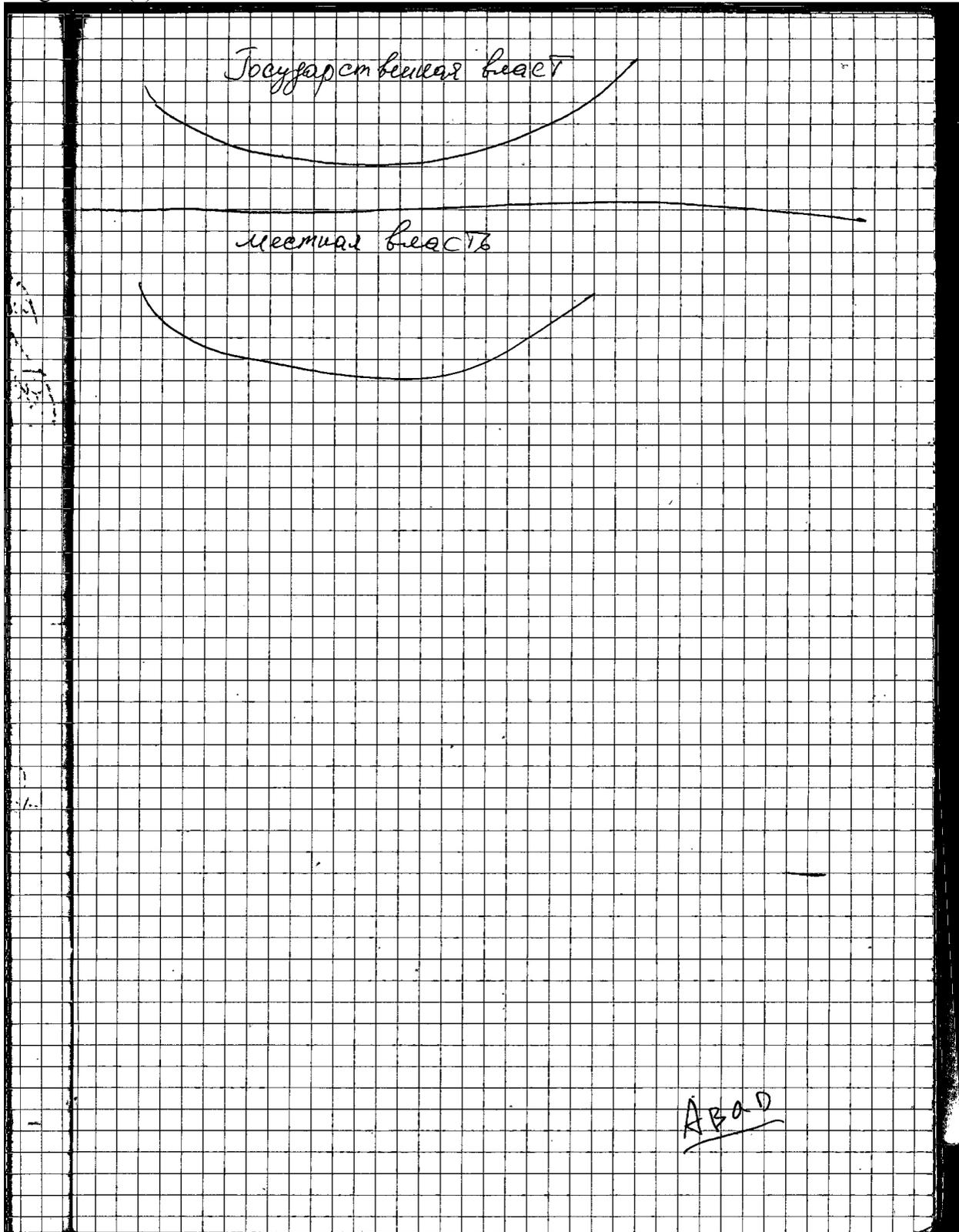


Diagram 3.1(d)

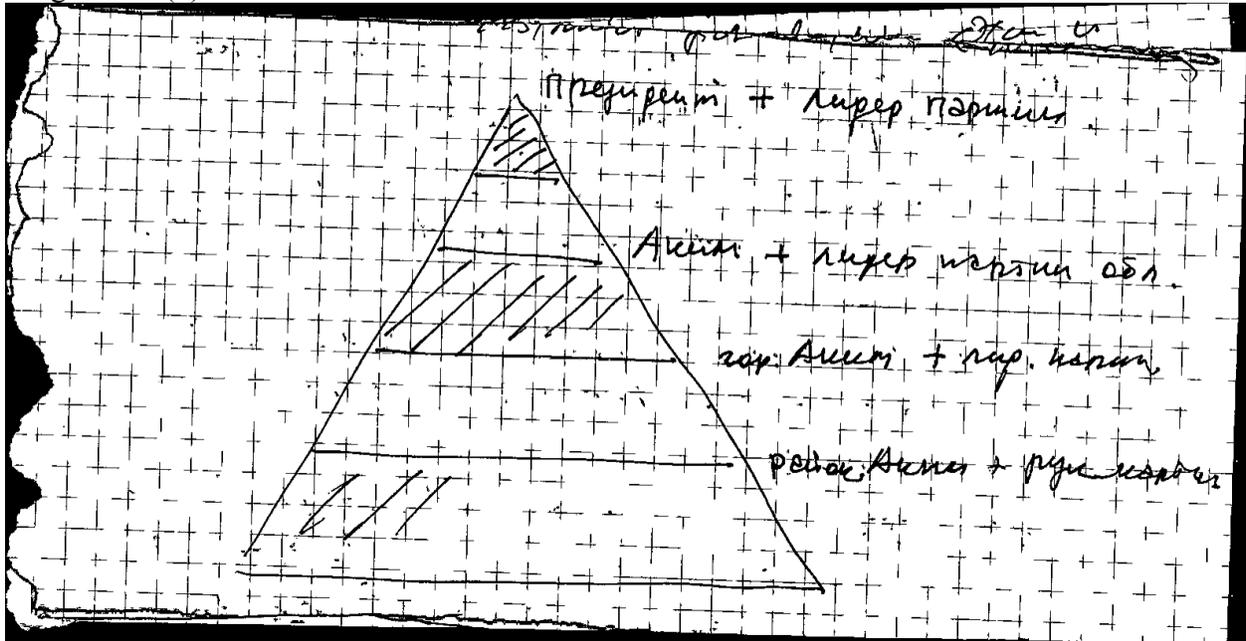
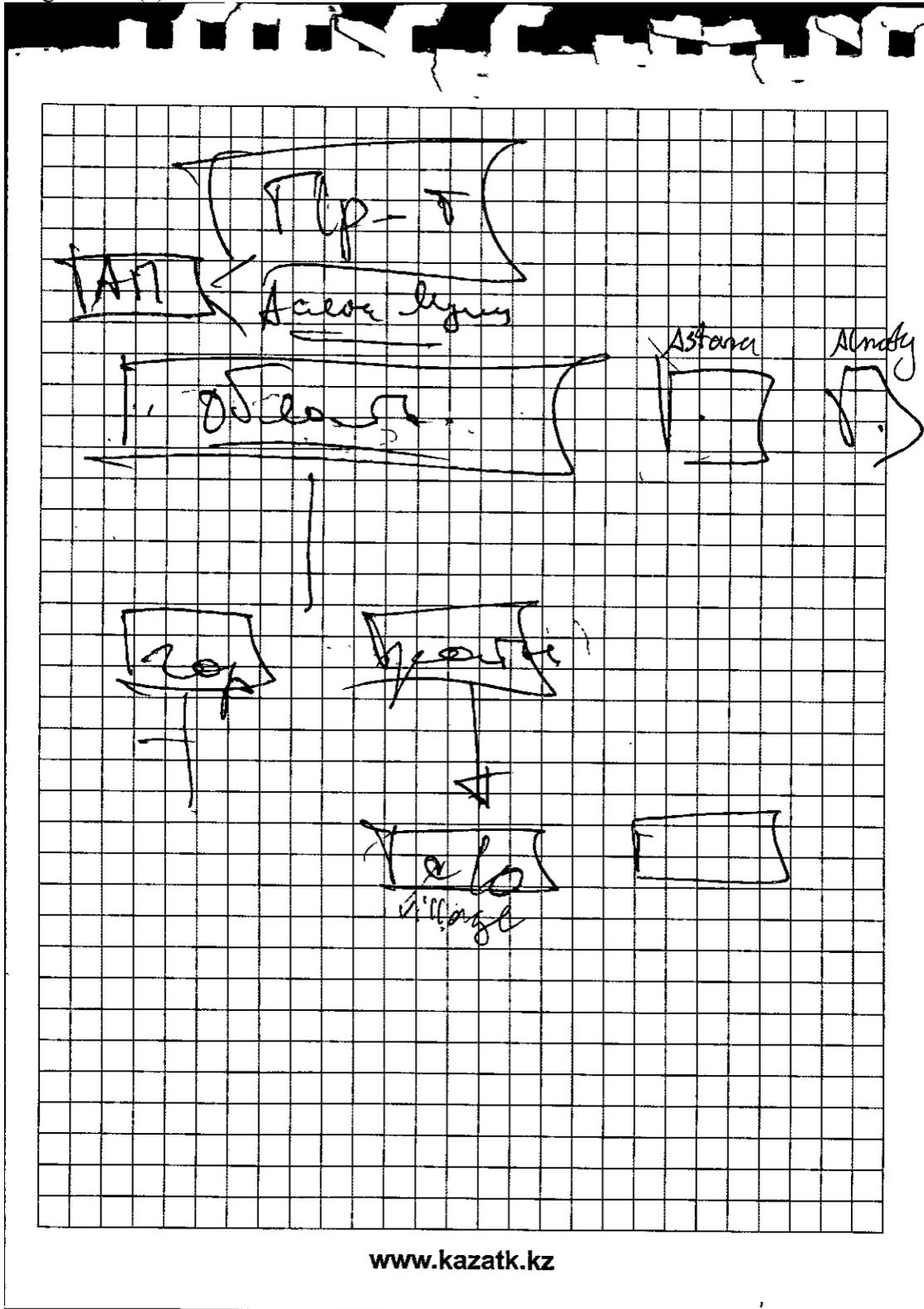


Diagram 3.1(e)



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