

Kyrgyzstan: Mapping the Shadow State

The informal political economy of Kyrgyzstan before the “Tulip Revolution”

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Field Research Report

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Introductory Remarks

This report presents findings from field research conducted in Kyrgyzstan between June 29 and July 31, 2005. The field research was made possible by funding from the Project “Accounting for State Building, Stability and Violent Conflict” at the Institute for East-European Studies of the Free University Berlin, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

In the course of the research¹ I interviewed 18 people from a variety of backgrounds, among them journalists, academics, members of NGO’s and INGO’s and other experts. Due to the nature of my research in order to create a relaxed atmosphere the interviews were not taped, but in most of the cases notes were taken during the interview. In some cases where this seemed inappropriate brief summaries of the main points of the conversations were written down directly after the interview took place. I also gathered data on individuals involved in state politics during the administration of President Askar Akaev from different ministries, the internet, local newspapers and other publications. This database is attached in the appendix of the report. Insights gained from informal conversations with friends, acquaintances, taxi drivers and the literal “man on the street” also contributed to this report. Additional information was drawn from various publications collected prior to or during the research. A list of these publications is also attached to the report.

¹ My research would not have been possible – or at least would have been much harder – without the invaluable assistance of Davletkan Toigonbaeva, who not only bridged many cultural gaps and carried the burden of the bureaucratic hassles that automatically arise when talking to official institutions in post-Soviet space, but also provided an insight as to how young Kyrgyz people think about politics and their society in general.

While most of the foreign experts, members of INGO's and some local academics were very receptive to my inquiries, it proved difficult to get to interview local politicians, journalists or other local experts. Several journalists and politicians refused to meet with me, providing lack of time or, sometimes, lack of motivation as explanation - thus the limited number of interviews. I was received suspiciously by several people who were very reluctant to pass out decent information and answered my questions in a very general manner. Other people gave downright misleading information. Although I was very careful to qualify and to cross-check information it has to be said here that the information gathered during the interviews cannot pretend to be backed by scientifically accepted standards. Rather, it represents a snapshot of personal opinions, anecdotes and rumours. Information given in this report will be marked according to my perceived level of reliability.

Due to this standard of information and the shortness of time – four weeks is too short to do more than to scratch the surface - the information stated in this report is not intended to provide the final answers on the questions posed in my research. This report is intended to be more of a work in progress and a basis for future research. Events in Kyrgyzstan since the finishing of my field research suggests that the study of Kyrgyzstan's political stage remains both interesting and of importance. It seems that the way politics in Kyrgyzstan really work has remained untouched by the so-called "Tulip Revolution". The thorough understanding of how the political system behind the façade of democracy worked under President Akaev is a key to understanding current events in Kyrgyzstan.

I will proceed as follows: first, I will introduce the research framework and the research questions designed prior to the field research on the basis of research done by Dr. Bahodir Sidikov on Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. I will then venture on to present the findings of my field research in July. Special consideration here is give to the question of what the traditional structure of the Kyrgyz society looks like and in what position President Akaev was in terms of this structure. The importance of organized crime in the set-up of the Kyrgyz shadow state is discussed in the third part of the findings of my filed research. In the concluding part the results are checked in terms of the research assumptions and the implications for the nature of the informal political economy in Kyrgyzstan discussed. The final two appendixes contain the bibliography of literature that I used to prepare both my research and this report and a listing of elites involve in the Akaev regime.

Research Framework

Background

After the breakdown of the institutional framework provided by the Soviet Union (SU) the former Soviet states of Central Asia were challenged with building a new political institutional framework that would provide stable and sustainable societal and economic development. The new framework was designed according to and with help of Western standards, such as democracy, rule of law, a capitalistic economic market model and so forth. However, these institutions, implemented from above and by no means internalized in the local population, soon clashed with traditional soviet-type institutions that had been successfully rooted within the society during the membership in the Soviet Union.² As a result institutional gaps opened up between the political culture of the society ‘on the ground’ and the formal constitutional reality of the state system. Neither the state nor the society proved able to fill these gaps by formal means, that is by altering the formal rules of the game.

The gaps were eventually filled by informal institutions designed to distribute power positions within the state apparatus - and the resources attached to these positions – well beyond formal statehood. Talking institutions the informal distribution of power and resources within the state apparatus in post-soviet space is called the “shadow state”³. Functionally speaking certain core functions of statehood are outsourced, or rather lent out, to a set of informal networks and clients of the central state power. At the same time democratic institutions maintained on the surface.

Hypothesis

The central state power, essentially the president and the presidential administration, have an interest to assert their rule with a minimum amount of energy loss. They therefore strive to construct solidarity groups (we-groups)⁴ out of their only loosely - or not at all - organized clients, which keeps the transaction costs of the projection of power (controlling and monitoring, distributing funds, keeping a stable political balance, recalling administrative, political and economic functions if necessary, etc.) lower than they would be if the central state powers were

² Jones-Luong, Pauline (2002). *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Power, Perceptions, Pacts*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

³ Sidikov, Bahodir (2005). *The Shadow State in Central Asia and the Caucasus*. Forthcoming.

⁴ These we-groups have a self-designation as well as a name used by outsiders. For the concept of we-groups in general see Elwert, Georg

to work with unstructured clientilistic networks.⁵ Autonomy of the groups from the central state power is possible only very limited. Access to resources and their distribution is only possible through the state apparatus; furthermore discarding the informal rules of the game would lead to the extermination from the state power map of the group by the central state authorities. As long as the state regime is perceived to be stable by the state elites the we-groups will only realize their interests through the central state powers, not by seeking autonomy from it.⁶

Various units of the society – sub-ethnic groups, regional groups, ethnic minorities, etc. – act as basis and a reservoir out of which structure clientilistic groups are formed by state constructivism. The sub-national discourse fuelled by state constructivism works to contain social conflicts erupted along the lines of the distribution of wealth and resources during transformation and fragments the society.⁷ It therefore allows for easier informal top-down political control through the institutions of sub-national identity. However, the construction of these we-groups is not a congenial strategy solely designed by state elites to strengthen their hold of power. Rather, this strategy is based on the solidarity among the perceived “nashi”, which became a necessity for daily survival after the Soviet Union and with it the institutions that had managed the distribution of resources “from the cradle to the grave” collapsed.

These constructed we-groups function as a strategy for the access to and exploitation of resources available on the territory of the post-soviet state. However, they are not strategic groupings in the classical sense. They do not take part in the competition for resources, but rather in the competition for the right to sell these resources to external actors. Elite exploitation

⁵ The set of political and economic problems in Russia is a vivid example of the difficulties of working with unstructured clientilistic groups in states structured by the Soviet experience. President Putin spent a major amount of his first term in office trying to recall functions and resources that had been outsourced to unstructured clientilistic groups by Boris Eltsin for the sake of political support and state stability.

⁶ For an analysis of factors conducive to regime change see Graubner, Cornelius (2005). *Analysing Regime Change in Post-Soviet Space. A Comparative Approach*. Final Thesis for the Programme International Master of Russian Studies; European University St. Petersburg

⁷ This function can be observed e.g. in Azerbaijan, where, as Sidikov notes, “members of the regional fellowship who live in severe destitution blindly support the representatives of “their” regional grouping, whose fortunes are worth millions of dollars and who won’t spare a cent to support their regional fellows.” See Sidikov, Bahodir (2004). *Novoe ili tradizionnoe? Regionalnyye grupirovki v postsovetckom Azerbajdshane*. in: *Vestnik Evrasii*, 2(25), pp. 151-169. However, as recent events in Azerbaijan show, this mode of conflict processing is far from being sustainable.

in post-soviet space undermines the state budget and thus weakens the state.⁸ The dependency on external buyers renders the strategic groups vulnerable to becoming pawns in a game of external interests.

Research questions

In order to verify the hypothesis for the case of Kyrgyzstan several research assumptions were designed that will have to be falsified in order to prove the hypothesis wrong:

- The distribution of resources is institutionally managed through the shadow state within the realms of patron-client relationships.
- The client groups are constructed as we-groups by the state on the basis of existing groupings.
- The patron of these client groups structured as we-groups is the president or the presidential administration.
- Core functions of statehood⁹ are outsourced to the shadow state.
- Exploiting resources outside the shadow state was not possible; the autonomy of we-groups was limited.

Findings of the research

The traditional organization of the Kyrgyz society

When asserting that a supposed shadow state based on existing grouping is reality in Kyrgyzstan, it seem appropriate to first reflect shortly on what traditional organizational units the Kyrgyz society is based.¹⁰

The classic theme of Central Asian societies - and of the Kyrgyz society in particular - is the theme of tribal and clan structures. In the pre-Russian times the Kyrgyz society was made up by

⁸ Elite exploitation of resources does not necessarily lead to a weakening of the state. In Pakistan, for example, elite exploitation of state resources contributes to the acquisition of weaponry and equipment for the army and thus bolsters state capabilities.

⁹ For a discussion of core functions of statehood see Zuercher, Christoph, Gosztonyi, Kristof, Graubner, Cornelius and Klimisch, Jan-Thilo (2004). *The Future of Intervention: Intervention, Legitimacy and the Reconstruction of Statehood*. Berlin. <http://www.oei.fu-berlin.de/blankensee>

¹⁰ It has to be kept in mind here that not only Kyrgyz live in Kyrgyzstan. There are sizeable and important minorities that have, to some extent, part in the political processes in Kyrgyzstan. According to the 1999 census 65% of the population is Kyrgyz, 13,8% is Uzbek, 12,5% is Russian, 1,1% is Dungan, 1% is Ukrainian and Uygur; while the remaining 5,7% is of German, Jewish and other origin. However, since without a doubt the Kyrgyz are the dominant ethnicity in terms of politics in Kyrgyzstan, this part of the report focuses on the traditional structure of the Kyrgyz society.

some forty tribal units (*uruk*), each of which consisted of different sub-levels units (*top*) that were united by (imagined) kinship links. The *uruks* were united into three big confederations, the so-called Right Wing (*On khanat*), the Left Wing (*Sol khanat*) and Neither (*Ichkilik*).

The characteristic notions of Kyrgyz tribal groupings were a set of shared values (the *achabyya*, said to be adopted from other Muslim societies during the period of Islamisation¹¹), which included loyalty and allegiance towards the family, respect towards elders and mutual support and assistance-relations between the members of the same clan. Janna Khagai describes how this intra-clan support mechanism works:

*“Whatever the social position of a clan member is, he/she is required to foster the well-being of his/her clan. This goes especially for the elite members of the clan, who, by providing opportunities or assistance to the members of their respective networks, count in return on these members’ personal loyalty and respect in order to maintain their status.”*¹²

Incorporation into Tsarist Russia did not influence the traditional organizational structure of the Kyrgyz society. This traditional structure also proved to be remarkably resilient towards Soviet politics that aimed to modernize the Kyrgyz society and thus to weaken the dominance of clan and tribal structures. However, taking a closer look of how these strategies were actually implemented this resilience is a little bit less surprising. One of the first steps of the new Soviet rulers in the 1920’s was the process of collectivisation, intended to make the nomadic Kyrgyz settle down. Families that formerly roamed the high pastures in summer and settled in villages (*ail*) in the valleys in winter were collectivised into collective farms (*kolkhozy*). This process had several characteristics important for clan structures:

- (1) Members of families were settled in the same villages, members of clans in the same regions¹³

¹¹ Temirkoulov, Azamat (2004). *Tribalism, Social Conflict and State-Building in the Kyrgyz Republic*. in: Berliner Osteuropa Info, (21), p. 94

¹² Khagai, Janna (2004). *Constitutional Regimes and Clan Politics in Central Asia*, in: Wallace Johnson and Irina A. Popova, eds. (2004). *Central Asian law: an historical overview A festschrift for the ninetieth birthday of Herbert Franke*. Lawrence: Society for Asian Legal History, Hall Center for the Humanities, University of Kansas, p. 10

¹³ Chingis Aitmantovs famous story “Djamilla“ provides a literary account of this: “(...) It had been so since the time our people had been nomads, when our grandfathers used to break camp and round their cattle up together.. We kept this tradition alive.

(2) Traditional elites were given official position in the new system. What had been formerly a head of an extended family now became the head of a *kolkhoz* or member of a village council.

(3) Villages and regions were included into the Soviet administrative hierarchy.

Through this process informal and formal institutions overlapped as traditional elites were installed into the new, regionalized administrative hierarchy. Their status changed from being elites of informal institutions to being elites of formal, Soviet institutions. Because they were regionally anchored, regional identity became an important part of the clan identity.

However, according to Kathleen Collins, seven decades of Soviet rule actually did have an effect on the traditional Kyrgyz structures: the breaking up of large-tribal structures into smaller clan-based units. According to her, clans in post-Soviet Central Asia can be defined both socially and functionally as

“(..) an informal social institution in which informal or notional kinship based on blood or marriage forms the central bond among members. Clans are identity networks consisting of an extensive web of horizontal and vertical kin-based relations. (...) the informal ties and networks of clan life reduce the high transaction costs of making deals in an environment where impersonal institutions are weak or absent and stable expectations are hard to form. Clans in fact serve as an alternative to formal markets institutions and official bureaucracies.”¹⁴

The often cited North-South divide that runs right through the Kyrgyz is certainly a reality, at least in cultural terms. The Tian Shan Mountains form a natural divide that hindered communication between the northern and the southern parts of Kyrgyzstan. The northern tribes came into contact with the Russians much earlier than the southern tribes, who were part of the empire of Khokant. Because of this, the members of the northern tribes, especially of the clans in the Talas region, occupied dominant positions in Kyrgyzstan after it was incorporated into the Russian empire. Russian imperialism brought the northern Kyrgyz, among other things, literacy in Russian language and the habit to actually write down ones history. This lead to the somewhat bizarre situation that all national heroes around which national identity could be focused are

When our village was collectivized, our fathers built their houses side by side. Actually we were all fellow tribes-men – the whole Aralskaya Street, stretching the length of the village to the river, was inhabited by our kinsfolk.”

¹⁴ Collins, Kathleen (2002). *Clans, Pacts and Politics in Central Asia*. in: Journal of Democracy, 13(3), pp. 137-152.

actually from the North, although before the Russians arrived the South had, due to its more frequent contacts with traders and caravans along the Silk Route, a much more richer and more dominant culture.¹⁵

I am not very convinced that the cultural North-South divide actually translates into a political divide as it is frequently claimed. The roster of ministers, governors and prime ministers shows that it is simply not true that during the presidency of the “Northerner” Askar Akaev “Southerners” did not have a part in the political life of Kyrgyzstan, as - just to cite a few - the examples of Mamat Aibalaev (Minister of Internal Affairs (MVD) 2000-2001 from Osh), Radbek Eshmanbetov (Minister for Emergencies 2001 – 2005 from Osh), Kubanychbek Jumanaliev (Minister of Transport 2001-2004 from Jalal Abad) and Roza Otunbaeva (Minister for External Affairs 1994-1997 from Osh) show.¹⁶

Akaev as the political centre of a clan-based society?

Trying to answer the question if Askar Akaev – or his close surroundings - was the centre of a political patron-client network organized along traditional, in the case of Kyrgyzstan, tribal and clan identity, presents itself as a two-folded challenge: first, the question if politics in Kyrgyzstan are actually clan-based politics has to be answered, then the question, if Askar Akaev could actually have been at the centre of these clan-politics also needs clarification.

Available literature suggests that yes, politics on all levels in Kyrgyzstan is essentially clan politics. According to this view, already the election of Askar Akaev as president in October of 1990 was the outcome of clan negotiations¹⁷ and most – if not all - of the following centre-periphery

¹⁵ Interview with Temirlan Moldogaziev, Bishkek, 25. July 2005

¹⁶ For the origin of other ministers, governors and prime ministers see Appendix 1: Akaev's Elites. The appendix also shows that “Southerners” did not only hold unimportant positions, but were also heads of the so-called power ministries or prime ministers.

¹⁷ The first secretary of the Communist Party, Absamat Masaliev (from Osh) had been discredited in the eyes of Kyrgyz reformers and public alike by his inability to adequately address the socioeconomic problems that had arisen with the breakdown of the Soviet Union and to resolve the riots in Osh and Uzgen in the Summer of 1990 peacefully. A group of reformers from the northern clan, headed by Chingiz Aitmantov (from Talas) saw this as a chance to dispose of the “Southerner” Masaliev and to lift a fellow “Northerner” to the post of the president. The choice fell on Askar Akaev (from Kemin), a scientist who had spend most of his life in Leningrad and Moscow. Askar Akaev had, in this interpretation, four distinct advantages: (1) he was from the North (2) his wife Mairam Akaeva was from Talas and knew Chingiz Aitmantov very closely (3) he was a protégé of Mikhail Gorbachev and thus acceptable to Moscow and (4) he did not have an own power base in Kyrgyzstan and therefore would have to rely on – and be dependent of – the northern clans that had brought him to power.

conflicts and other political events in Kyrgyzstan up until the March 2005 events can be explained by looking through the clan lenses.

My research, however, suggest a different view. From what I have learned during my visit to Kyrgyzstan it seems to make sense that the binding power of clan institutions declines from the community level upwards. Numerous people suggested that clans do play a very important role on community level but a somewhat lesser role on everything above community level. The importance of clans on community level is made clear by the results of the parliamentary elections in February/March 2005. Apart from very few exceptions all the electoral districts were won by candidates from the respective district, even in cases where the candidate lived in another place for most of his live. For elections in general, Kyrgyz candidates apparently will go home to the electoral district in which they were born. Outsiders generally score very badly. The few exceptions where outsiders won electoral districts in the February/March 2005 elections can be attributed to cases where there was only one candidate or where massive administrative resources were applied to secure the victory of the outsider.

One of the main arguments against the resilience of clan identity above community level made was that on regional and national level the resources that a certain individual could control would be of greater importance than his clan affiliation and his position within traditional clan hierarchy. In other words, it is more financial incentives than clan identity that influence political loyalties and policy decisions.¹⁸ An example would be the composition of the Central Election Commission (CEC). It consists of 14 members, half of which are appointed by the president, the other half was appointed by the parliament. Accordingly, of the 14 members only four could be considered to be oppositional before the March 2005 events. However, after the fall of Akaev, the only person that was replaced in the CEC was its head, Imambaev, all the other members swore allegiance to the “new” system.¹⁹ Apparently, the members of the CEC that had formerly been considered to be staunchly pro-Akaev had no problem defecting from him as long as they would still have access to certain resources through their membership in the CEC - even though some of the CEC members came from the North and even from Akaev's home district of Kemin.

¹⁸ Interview with Tim Epkenhans, Bishkek, 7. July 2005 and an UNDP official, Bishkek, 27. July 2005

¹⁹ Interview with an UNDP official, Bishkek, 27. July 2005

Another argument was that clan identity is only one level of identity and that the level of ethnic identity has become more important in the last years.²⁰

Still another issue that came up in one of the interviews was the notion that the only ones actually profiting from clan politics would be the clan elites. Clan elites use their fellow clan members as a resource base and a trump card in power struggles. Once elected to office and thus in the position to be in control of certain (monetary) resources, however, the flow of resources from the clan elites to the clan members is all too weak, sometimes not existent at all. On the other hand, if clan members elected one of their elites into a powerful position and all they got back is maybe a bridge in the village or a new paint job for the local school this is still more than they would have gotten back if somebody else, without any clan ties would have gotten into that position. Still, this kind of one-way flow of resources (bottom-up and a little bit top-down) defies the traditional understanding of clan solidarity networks which would have to be in place if one were to talk about a true clan-based society. It also brings about the problem of a potential class conflict within a given clan. Possible mechanisms to contain such intra-group conflict that were suggested were pride and prestige²¹ – in terms of the old saying “He is a bastard, but at least he is our bastard”.

The answer to the second question is much clearer. My research suggests that Askar Akaev was not a focal point or a central figure pulling the strings in what supposedly was clan-based politics in Kyrgyzstan.

Askar Akaev was born in the village of Kyzyl-Bairak in the Kemin region. Right after school he went to study in Leningrad and, apart from seldom visits to his mother and his siblings that still lived there, never again spent a lot of time in his home region, his supposed clan base. His biography suggests that he lost touch to “his” people pretty soon after he left for Leningrad as he made his way to be an academic in the Soviet Union. I went to both the town of Kemin and to the village of Kyzyl-Bairak to find how people would think and talk about Akaev. Apart from an old woman, who invited me for lunch and that apparently had been his teacher in elementary

²⁰ Interview with Medina Aitieva, Bishkek, 2. July 2005 and Tim Epkenhans, Bishkek, 7. July 2005

²¹ Interview with Temirlan Moldogaziev, Bishkek, 25. July 2005. In support of such conflict processing mechanisms Medina Aitieva (interview in Bishkek, 2. July 2005) noted that during the regime of Akaev it was a prestigious issue to be from Kemin, even if the benefits of being from the same region that Akaev was from were negligible as my visit to Kemin showed.

school I hardly heard anything positive about him there.²² My interlocutors²³ stressed that during the 15 years that Akaev was president he only came to Kemin six times and never to his home village. The Kemin region was not given a special treatment – only 15% of the taxes collected in Kemin for the central government were transferred back to the region²⁴ – and the only thing that Akaev ever did was to build a school in his home village. Both Kemin and Kyzyl-Bairak did not leave an impression of wealthy places. Rather, with their bumpy gravel roads full of potholes and the little houses often in desperate need of repair, they looked like any other rural place in Kyrgyzstan that I saw. The only person who apparently profited from Akaev's rule in Kyzyl-Bairak apparently was his brother. When in 1994 the privatization campaign was implemented – which basically meant distributing the lands that belonged to the *kolkhoz* as there were no other assets to be distributed – every inhabitant received 0,22 hectares of land. Akaev's brother, however, now owns some 170 hectares of land. The neglectance of what were supposed to be “his” clan members suggests that, at least in terms of the ethnological understanding of clans, Akaev was pretty much detached from his clan during his rule.

The analysis of the roster of ministers, governors, judges and prime ministers furthermore suggests that Akaev did not build his power upon clan ties. Rather, his political elites come from a variety of backgrounds: colleagues from the Academy of sciences, former lab assistants, old communist elites, business elites, friends of the Akaev family,²⁵ etc. I compiled a list of 79

²² This interview was of more folkloristic importance as the teacher kept repeating what an attractive young man Askar Akaev was back in the days. She did voice an opinion on Akaev as president of Kyrgyzstan.

²³ My interview partners on 21. July 2005 was the financial administrator in the Akim's office in Kemin and the secretary of the Akim in Kyzyl-Bairak as well as several local persons we met by chance.

²⁴ This rate, as I was told, is slightly below the average of what communities normally received as transfer payments from the centre.

²⁵ Many observers put a lot of emphasis on the special importance of the inner circle of the Akaev family in Kyrgyz politics. The first lady, Mairam Akaeva, was said to have an important saying in questions the regimes personal policy, and a good connection to her apparently was vital to advance ones career. The oldest daughter, Bermet Akaeva, was heavily involved in politics through her active involvement in the “Alga, Kyrgyzstan!” party, which was widely believed as an attempt to create a party of power, and established herself as an important informal player in business. She also won a seat as a parliamentary deputy during the 2005 parliamentary elections. Her husband, Adil Toigonbaev, who is of Kazakh nationality, controls important business sectors and parts of the media, he is also active in the “Alga, Kyrgyzstan!” party. The oldest son, Aidar Akaev, is also heavily involved in certain business sectors. He furthermore enjoys the support of a group of younger, well-educated representatives from the national Security Service and the Ministry of Finance and also won a seat in the 2005 parliamentary elections. The younger daughter and the younger son of the Akaev family were not involved in politics or business.

individuals who held a post in the government between 1990 and 2005.²⁶ Out of these 41 were born in the North (10 in Bishkek, 9 in the Issyk-Kul region, 7 in the Naryn region, 5 in the Talas region, 4 in Kemin and 6 in the Chui region in general), 18 from the South (14 from the Osh region and 4 from the Jalal Abad region), 3 were born outside of Kyrgyzstan (1 in Uzbekistan, 1 in Russia and 1 in Kazakhstan) while for the other 15 data was not available.

Table 1. Akaevs Elites by Origin

Region	North				South		
	Chui	Talas	Naryn	Issyk-Kul	Jalal Abad	Osh	Batken
Number of Elites	20	5	7	9	4	14	0
	Total: 41				Total: 18		

It is remarkable that although nearly everybody I talked stressed the importance of Mairam Akaeva in the personal politics of the regime, only 5 of the individuals on my list were born in Talas and can therefore be expected to have some regional/clan ties to her. However, it has also to be said that where they were born does not always automatically indicate a clan or regional affiliation. Some of the elites born in Chui, for example, are ethnic Uzbeks or Russians, while some others born in the South were Jews or ethnic Koreans. 12 of the persons in my list were grouped as academics (connection to Askar Akaev probably because of their academic background) while 8 were part of the old communist elites.

What is also remarkable is the number of people that at one point of time during Akaev's rule held some sort of office and were removed from that post after a relatively short amount of time. One of my interview partners suggested that toward the end of Akaev's rule nearly everybody who was intellectually capable and willing to hold a political office had been actually part of the system at some point of time for some amount of time and that thus *"the human resources of Kyrgyzstan had become depleted at the time of the Tulip revolution."*²⁷

²⁶ This list is nowhere near complete. I compiled the list from information gathered from literature, the internet and newspaper articles. I also visited several ministries and the presidential administration in order to come up with a more complete list, however, all the official institutions proved to be very reluctant to hand out names of their ministers, prime ministers, etc. In the end, I the only ministry I received information from at all was the Ministry of Finances, which provided me with a complete list of their ministers. For this reason I have to say that the explanatory power of my list is limited. However, it serves as a good starting point allows charting at least some trends. The background information on the individuals is mostly from the "Kto est' kto" at www.akipress.kg or CrisisGroup publications.

²⁷ Interview with Edil Baisalov, 15. July 2005, Bishkek

How did Askar Akaev then rule the country for some 15 years if not through clan politics? Consolidation of the power of the Akaev regime was achieved by the utilization of different patterns of governance. Akaev was able to concentrate formal political power within the presidency through referendums and several “dirty tricks”²⁸. In addition to that, several informal institutions were controlled by the ruling regime.

The predominant strategy was cooption of regional groupings or other individuals with influence on the local population into the state structures, which gave them access to resources in return. Some of the most important income generating assets of Kyrgyzstan – foreign aid, the gold mine in Kumtor, the coal mine in Karakeche, the Manas International Airport (including the very profitable American airbase, the largest – and after the ouster of the Americans from Uzbekistan only – American airbase in Central Asia of vital importance to the Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan), the biggest mobile phone operator Bitel and other licit and illicit enterprises – were controlled by people supportive of the Akaev regime. However, Akaev was apparently not able – or maybe not willing – to tap into one of the most important businesses in Kyrgyzstan at all, the drug business. This allowed for some independence of some actors in opposition to the Akaev regime.²⁹

Other important informal institutions used as modes of governance to ensure loyalty from elites political functionaries were graft and *kompromat*.³⁰ Graft works somewhat like this: in order to insure loyalty corruption is tolerated, if not encouraged. The two functions of this practice are that revenues generated from graft are exchanged for support of the administration, and that the

²⁸ “Dirty trick” as a term was coined by Joel Migdal. Referring to governance methods in Africa he defines it as “illegal method or quick change of law to remove key state figures, pre-empting the emergence of competing power centres, and weakening or destroying groups in agencies already powerful enough to threaten the rulers’ prerogatives.” See Migdal, Joel (1988). *Strong Societies and Weak States*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 223. The dissolution of the Kyrgyz parliament in 1994 was a prime example for such a trick. MPs, who were also members of the state or regional administration by appointment, declared a parliamentary boycott. Akaev used the boycott as justification for dismissing the legislature and thus boosting the presidential powers. See McGlinchey, Eric (2003). *Paying for Patronage: Regime Change in Post-Soviet Central Asia*. Princeton University: Doctoral Dissertation, p. 174

²⁹ Please note that I am not saying that the opposition against Akaev was financed with drug money. However, two of the key individuals involved in mobilisation against the Akaev regime in the March 2005 events, Bayaman Erkinbaev and Jenishbek Nazaraliev, are said to be heavily involved in drug trafficking.

³⁰ For a detailed account of how graft and *kompromat* work in Georgia see Darden, Keith (2002). *Graft and Governance: Corruption as an Informal Mechanism of State Control*. New Haven: Yale University.

receipts of graft, essentially constituting a form of a second (informal) salary, serve as an additional incentive to be granted or licensed to subordinates in exchange for their continued loyalty to the administration. The recipient of graft develops an interest into the stability of the system, because he tries to maximize the revenues from his initial investment. *Kompromat* is a supplementary strategy to bring to control elites who nevertheless decide to rebel against the system. One of the inheritances of the Soviet times in Kyrgyzstan is a powerful and effective surveillance apparatus, the members which had already in those times busied themselves with collecting potentially compromising material about elites in all spheres of society to be used against them at the appropriate moment. When a member of the elite starts to develop his own agenda, an agenda that runs contrary to the administration's agenda, is the appropriate moment to make use of the knowledge of his activities. *Kompromat* can then be used either to blackmail the person into loyalty or to prosecute him on the basis of his wrongdoings. The administration knows of the criminal activities of their subordinates, yet it chose not to follow up on them until the right moment comes. The combination of allowing graft and collecting *kompromat* makes a very strong informal institution to assert control over subordinates and be insured of the loyalty.

Business groups loyal to President Akaev the regime control the majority of radio and TV stations, and thus the most important media outlets in Kyrgyzstan. The control was less complete over printed media, but here the regime was able to exert its influence through the ownership of both the actual printing and the distribution monopoly. Little information exists on exactly how the dynamics between these groups worked to create a stable regime, but it appears as if competition both between the different power groups and within the power groups, here mostly between the older and the younger generation, have been commonplace. Akaev occupied a central position within the system, as he was the only possible referee in conflict situations. This consolidated his position:

“This regime – with its sometimes competing, sometimes cooperating groupings, partly based on clan affiliation, partly on common economic or political interests – has little real core to it, except for the president himself. (...) Each fights for selfish interests and feels little compunction in competing against rivals. Akaev cleverly uses this rivalry against them all.”³¹

³¹ International Crisis Group (2004). *Political Transition In Kyrgyzstan: Problems and Prospects*. Osh/Brussels: Asia Report No. 81, p. 10

The importance of organized crime

When discussing politics in Kyrgyzstan with Kyrgyz friends over beer and Shashlik statements such as “Politician XXX is a criminal”, “Biznesmen XXX is involved in narcotrafficking” or similar will inevitably come up numerous times. Of course it has to be kept in mind that due to socialisation in the Soviet Union the term “criminal” has often times a very different meaning to the Kyrgyz than to a westerner and represents a certain insecurity as to how to deal with the rapid changes of the society after the breakdown of communism. A capitalistic oriented businessman who succeeded to accumulate a considerable amount of wealth may be termed a criminal even though he managed to do so without engaging in criminal activities as his wealth represents the inequality of capitalistic societies and is thus interpreted as a threat to society as a whole – in the old Soviet way of thinking a serious crime.³² Still, it seems that in Kyrgyzstan the issue of criminality is more connected to the political dynamics of the shadow state than in other Central Asian states. Due to the nature of the subject, my findings on this issue are based even more on speculation, rumours and generally vague information than my other results. Still, they are worth sharing because they offer an interesting perspective of how the Kyrgyz state worked behind the official façade in a situation where the president could not rely on traditional clan institutions to ensure loyalty of clan-based regional groupings. Instead, he chose to allow a certain amount of criminal activity to certain regional gangs³³ in return for their loyalty and their non-interference with the central state. One of my interview partners said, that

“Kyrgyzstan lags behind ten years to Russia in terms of criminal development. While the situation there in the mid-nineties was comparable to the situation here today, the political course of Russia today is made possible by the advent of a sizeable middle class and a sizeable section of “clean-hands” business that support President Putin. In Kyrgyzstan this process is not that far yet.”³⁴

³² For a more thorough investigation of the construction of post-Soviet reality in the eyes of western observers see Bäckman, Johan (1998). *The Russian-Genre as a Construct of Reality*. In: Northern Dimensions – The Finnish Institute of International Affairs Yearbook, pp. 87-97

³³ Unfortunately I was not able to find out anything about the real set-up of these regional gangs either through interviews, informal conversations, newspapers or other literature. It thus remains unclear if the criminal gangs work along the lines of clan or other regional identity or more like any “normal” criminal gang where group loyalty is ensured by offering material rewards to members.

³⁴ Interview with Temirlan Moldogaziev, 25. July 2005, Bishkek

There are several areas in which money can be made in Kyrgyzstan on a large scale and several individual (who are, supposedly, the patrons of larger criminal gangs) involved.³⁵ The number one area of criminal activity in Kyrgyzstan is without a doubt drug trafficking. The major producer of opium poppy based drugs in the world throughout the 1990's until today is Afghanistan. In 2004, about two thirds of global opium poppy cultivation took place in Afghanistan. Two main routes of Afghan opium to the European markets, which is still the most lucrative market for heroine, exist: the more traditional so-called "Balkan Route" via Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and then either through Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic or through Albania and the former Yugoslav Republics. This route was dominant in the 1990's, but has lost part of its importance to the so-called "Silk Route", which runs from Afghanistan northwards through Central Asia and Russia. While the exact amount of drugs trafficked through either route remains unclear and disputed,³⁶ UNODC estimates that the share of the "Silk Route" of total opium traffic out of Afghanistan is about 30%.³⁷ In Kyrgyzstan, the major drug transactions take place in the cities of Osh and Bishkek. Tajik groups bring the drugs into the country from Tajikistan, while Kyrgyz groups organize the distribution within the country or traffic the drugs out of the country in cooperation with Russian and Kazakh criminal groups.³⁸ Two names that came up again and again in connection with the drug trafficking were Bayaman Erkinbaev and Jenishbek Nazaraliev. While the former owned³⁹ a "wrestling club" in Osh that he apparently used to recruit his goons, is supposedly involved in all sorts of shadowy enterprises and was elected as a member of the parliament in 2005, the later is a Bishkek based psychiatrist who achieved international fame and considerable wealth through unique methods in treating drug addiction.

Another important crime area is smuggling in general and the transport mafia in particular. In the south, smuggling cotton is a big business. This is due to the situation in Uzbekistan, were the

³⁵ The information in this part of the report is mainly based – unless otherwise noted – on interviews with Emil Juraev (14. July 2005, Bishkek), Temirlan Moldogaziev (25. July 2005, Bishkek) and Ross Balantyne (20. July 2005, Bishkek)

³⁶ Madi, Maral (2004). *Drug Trade in Kyrgyzstan: Structure, Implications and Countermeasures*. in: Central Asian Survey, 23(3-4),p. 259.

³⁷ UNODC (2005). *World Drug Report 2005*. Volume 1: Analysis. Vienna: UNODC, p. 49

³⁸ Up until 1999, the virtual monopoly over the wholesale purchase of drugs in Kyrgyzstan apparently was in the hands of ethnic Turks residing in Kyrgyzstan. Observatoire Geopolitique des Drogues (OGD) (1998). *The World Politics of Drugs 1997-1998*. Paris: OGD

³⁹ Bayaman Erkinbaev was shot dead in Bishkek on the evening of 21 September 2005.

state has a monopoly on the cotton production and therefore farmers have to sell their cotton to the government at fixed prices. For the farmers it this becomes lucrative to sell their cotton illegally to smugglers, who then transport it over the border to Kyrgyzstan (bribing border guards and police to turn a blind eye in the process) and sell it in Kyrgyzstan at world market prices. The main figure associated with smuggling cotton is Alisher Sabirov (nicknamed “the cotton guy”), an ethnic Uzbek from Osh. Until 2001 another big criminal business in the south was gun running to Afghanistan, where the Northern Alliance paid very well. The smuggling route was via Tajikistan and Pakistan, were Kyrgyz criminal groups allegedly financed the campaigns of some candidates friendly to their business in the elections in 1999. In the north, the transport mafia is mainly involved in the benzene transporting business. The business works somewhat like this: The state sets up a company to import all benzene, while the criminals set up a group that actually imports all the benzene - without paying taxes. All it takes to do that is to bribe some officials along the way. The profit margins in this criminal enterprise are very high: the group buys benzene in Russia or Kazakhstan for, say, USD 20 million, transports it to Kyrgyzstan and sells it to the official state company for USD 25 million it has – with minimal expenditures – a profit of 5 million dollars. This business is in the hands of criminal groups from the North who are closely aligned with the Kazakh mafia. One of their main representatives is Rysbek Akmatbaev, who is said to be closely aligned with Askar Akaev’s son, Aidar Akaev.⁴⁰ Rysbek Akmatbaev, born in Karakol in the Issyk-Kul region, was one of the earliest gang leaders after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He was said to control large parts of the north, especially the Issyk-Kul and Chui regions as well as criminal operations in Bishkek. His friendship – or professional relation – with Aidar Akaev apparently was of benefit for both sides: when Aidar wanted to take over a certain company, Rysbek would make sure that he would get it. This cooperation lasted until Rysbek for some unknown reason fell out of favour with the regime and was wanted as the lead suspect in a triple murder case.⁴¹

⁴⁰ A popular joke in Bishkek during the Akaev years went like this: How can you tell when Aidar Akaev has lost money gambling with the Kazakh mafia again? Easy: the gas prices go up.

⁴¹ In July 2005 Rysbek came out of hiding and met with General Prosecutor Azimbek Beknazarov after a general amnesty for people who had been prosecuted by the Akaev regime was announced. As a part of this amnesty, suspects were allowed to move freely in Kyrgyzstan as their cases were reviewed for possible political persecution. Rysbek's brother is Tynychbek Akmatbaev, a member of the parliament and Chair of the Committee on Defence, Security, Law Enforcement and Information Policy (!!!), who was murdered on 20 October 2005 by inmates while he was negotiating in a prison rebellion in so-called Camp 31, 25km away from Bishkek. One of the inmates of that prison, who, due the general conditions in Kyrgyz prisons enjoy a great deal of freedom within the prison system, was the ethnic Chechen gang leader and *vor v zakone* Aziz Batukaev. One of the victims of the triple murder that Rysbek was wanted for was the brother-in-law Batukaev.

Other crime arenas are the gold mine in Kumtor – which accounts for 18% of the GDP of the Kyrgyz Republic - and the coal mine in Karakeche. In both those mines much of the natural resources found remain unaccounted for. Both mines were under control of allies of Askar Akaev. In Kumtor, allegedly the higher paid staff is entirely from Kemin, while the workers are mostly from the village of Barskoon.⁴² The most popular criminal activity in Kyrgyzstan, however, is running a business without paying taxes. Bribing the relevant officials makes this a relatively easy enterprise.

The involvement of criminal elements in Kyrgyzstan is rather striking. In terms of the March events in 2005 it has to be noted, that both Bayaman Erkinbaev and Jenishbek Nazaraliev were important actors in the mobilisation against the regime. This allows for an interesting alternative story of how at least part the so-called revolution came about. Originally Bayaman had been aligned with Askar Akaev, who apparently allowed him to operate without to much interference. Starting from 2000, Aidar Akaev, or better Rysbek Akmatbaev started to expand their business operations more and more. In Kyrgyzstan, a rather small country, such expansion must necessarily be a zero-sum game and so other people started to loose. Apparently Bayaman was among, as towards the end of 2000 he joined the opposition against Askar Akaev, who guaranteed for protection of Aidar Akaev and Rysbek. As the public discontent with the Akaev regime grew in the run-up and the aftermath of the 2005 parliamentary elections, Bayaman saw his chance to both get rid of the influence of Aidar in the South and to actually expand his business to the North. He (and Pavlon Timur Kamichebekov) subsequently provided the oppositional protesters in Bishkek with the muscles to be able to face both the security forces and the private militias – the ones with the white hats – by providing 15 marshrutki full of their wrestling students from Osh and thus tipping the balance in favour of the protesters who could then storm the White House. It was also Bayamans men who patrolled the streets and provided at least some order in Bishkek in the direct aftermath of the revolution.⁴³

⁴² Interview with Scott Hynek, 7. August 2005, Kochkor. Hynek, an American geologist, received this information from a security guard of the Kumtor gold mine from Kemin that he met during his research in the vicinity of the gold mine. If this information is true it would raise again the interesting question of the binding power of clan institutions. The Kumtor gold mine is operated by the Canadian company Canterra, but run by a friend of Akaev from Kemin. Apparently his clan ties were important enough to him to supply his fellow clan members with well-paid jobs in Kumtor.

⁴³ Radnitz, Scott (2005). *All roads lead to Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan's mass mobilization of March 2005*. Berlin: unpublished manuscript

Results in terms of the research assumptions

Coming back to the to my general research framework it is now possible to answer the questions stemming from the general hypothesis on the basis of my research.

The distribution of resources is institutionally managed through the shadow state within the realms of patron-client relationships. This assumption can safely be verified. The analysis of the political proceedings in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan show clearly, that the structuring element behind political decisions is neither democracy nor pressure by stakeholder groups such as civil society, but patron-client networks. In this matter Kyrgyzstan represents a typical post-Soviet Central Asian state. The often quoted saying that Kyrgyzstan is an “island of democracy” or the “Switzerland of Central Asia” can safely be disposed of.⁴⁴

The clients are constructed as we-groups by the state on the basis of existing groupings.

On the basis of my findings I would say that this assumption is not correct. It is true that we-groups based on clan and regional identity do have a certain influence, at least on community level. However, the state did certainly not construct these we-groups, rather they were structured by both the more ancient tribal and clan divisions in pre-Russian Kyrgyzstan, but also to some extent by the institutional realities of the seven decades under (or rather within) Soviet rule. On the contrary, President Akaev has several times tried to contain clan politics and, especially in the beginning of the 1990's, to construct a larger Kyrgyz civic identity that would include not only the sub-ethnic Kyrgyz groups but also the other ethnic groups such as the Russians, Uzbeks, Germans and Dungans.⁴⁵

The patron of these client groups structured as we-groups is the president or the presidential administration. This assumption is definitely not correct. As argued before, even if

⁴⁴ Both of these quotes are attributed to US Secretary of State Strobe Talbot who coined them in 1992. They leave one wondering whether Talbot has ever been to Kyrgyzstan – or to Switzerland.

⁴⁵ The adoption of these policies had probably to do with economic considerations, due to the fact that thousands of members of the minorities had started to leave Kyrgyzstan after the unrest in the Fergana Valley in the summer of 1990, most of them highly educated specialists in their field. Something had to be done in order to stop the brain drain. As a result of these policies many members of the ethnic minorities were integrated into the political process and education, both on elementary and higher level, in foreign languages, mostly in Russian, was made possible. Akaev also created and relied heavily on the usage of symbols which stood for neutrality and Kyrgyzstan as a bridge and mediator between east and west. Those symbols were designed to appeal to all interest groups, not only the ethnic minorities, but also to the western states, Russia, China and the Central Asian neighbours.

President Akaev felt that he was part of some tribe or clan, this has transpired neither to his personal politics nor into more general concessions in terms of privileges or additional resources to his people. Also Maraim Akaeva apparently forgot where she was from when she considered who to reward with a certain post. The structural element of the Akaev regime was rather loyalty to the family that clan or ethnic affiliation

Core functions of statehood are outsourced to the shadow state. This is possible, but based on my research I can not give a definite answer to this effect.

Exploiting resources outside the shadow state was not possible; the autonomy of we-groups was limited. Yes and no – a definite answer in respect to this assumption cannot be given. The most important resources were under control by persons aligned with the Akaev regime, but it cannot be said how far the autonomy went in reality. I did not come across an incident where somebody would have exploited resources without the at least tacit approval of the presidential family or where somebody in control of resources would have rebelled against the regime and got away with it. On the other hand, the regime was apparently not able to tap into the drug business, which allowed some actors at least limited autonomy from the regime.

Conclusion: The Shadow State in Kyrgyzstan

The falsification of some of the research assumptions shows that the setup of the shadow state in Kyrgyzstan – which without a doubt exists – under President Akaev was both similar and different to the setup of other states in region, such as Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan or also Azerbaijan. All these states are what are generally called *neo-patrimonial* states, what basically means that all these states feature presidential systems, where strong powers are vested into the presidency through formal institutions. At the same time the ruling regime controls certain important informal institutions in the realms of patron-client relationships.

However, in all the other states mentioned, the clientilistic network that keeps the state behind the façade of democracy together, is structured along pre-existing we-groups – the Nakhichevanis and Armenistanis in Azerbaijan, the elites from Taschkent and Samarkant in Uzbekistan and Ferghana and ??? in Tadjikistan. In all these cases the inner circle of power around the president is in the centre of these we-groups. This makes for a very stable regime, as possible defectors from the system will not only have to face loss of access to resources and persecution through the official institutions, but also repression through the informal structures of the we-groups. In

Kyrgyzstan, the regime that controlled the shadow state was not structured around pre-existing we groups. Rather, President Akaev knit his clientilistic network rather loosely with people from very different backgrounds and ensured loyalty primarily through the greed of the system elites. Apparently, this made for a much less stable regime.⁴⁶

It seems that in Kyrgyzstan informal mechanisms of rule were not primarily applied top-down (vertically) but rather between different power groups to check the power between the groups (horizontally). The regime was not a unitary actor, but consisted of various competing power groups, where the president took more the role of a regulator of these conflicts. This system was stable for as long as the president was accepted in this position, but proved to be rather fragile as soon as the various groups did not accept the position of the president as only possible guarantor of stability and equilibrium of the system any more. While in Azerbaijan several stake holding regional groupings also existed, Heydar Aliev was in firm control of the situation. He did not have to rely on a rather blurry and fluid concept such as acceptance by the different groups, but could coerce the different groupings to a large degree to loyalty.

Appendix 1: Literature

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⁴⁶ Keeping in mind that some of the groups that President Akaev co-opted into his system had a very obvious criminal background this is somehow not very surprising.

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