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**DEMOCRACY – A TREE WITHOUT ROOTS ON THE  
STEPPE OF CENTRAL ASIA**

by

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December 2006

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**DEMOCRACY – A TREE WITHOUT ROOTS ON THE STEPPES OF CENTRAL  
ASIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis combines transitology and structural analyses to examine the obstacles to democracy in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The transitology approach analyzes the impact of domestic political factors (clan politics, corruption, and political Islam) and external influences on each country's transition to post-communist rule. The structural analysis focuses on those economic and societal factors that impact the country's ability to foster and sustain democratic reforms. For both countries, the complex interplay of clan politics and rampant corruption is the dominant factor in stifling democratic reforms. External influences were important in the case of Kyrgyzstan, though not determining, but were basically inconsequential in Uzbekistan. In terms of structural factors, economic underdevelopment in each country has stifled the emergence of a large middle class and served as a catalyst for societal dissatisfaction. In Uzbekistan, this dissatisfaction is being channeled into clan politics and political Islam because of President Karimov's repression of political opposition and dissent. In Kyrgyzstan, advanced progress on economic reform and an emergent civil society allow for more outlets for dissent, political dialog and meaningful democratic reforms. The United States must continue to assist Kyrgyzstan in completing its economic reform agenda and possibly play a greater role in helping guide amendments to the constitution. In Uzbekistan, the United States must rely on economic reform incentives tied to concrete milestones and look to engage the next generation of leaders with targeted assistance to achieve political and economic reforms.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. BACKGROUND

The terror attacks of September 11, 2001 fundamentally changed how the United States approached national security and how it viewed Central Asia. The stationing of U.S. troops in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, along with massive amounts of U.S. aid flowing into the region, were clear indicators that these countries were pivotal to the fight against international terrorism. This new geopolitical reality also produced expectations that U.S. influence in the region would be a catalyst for political and economic reform in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Indeed, the National Security Strategy issued by the Bush administration in 2002 underscored the world view that long-term stability and security can only be achieved by spreading democracy and expanding the concept of the market economy:

the United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world....poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders.<sup>1</sup>

Fifteen years after gaining independence, and over five years since the September 11 attacks, all five Central Asian republics remain mired in authoritarianism. Uzbekistan and even Kyrgyzstan, which offered some semblance of hope for reform, continue to be ruled by autocrats. Why has democracy failed to take root in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan? Were these states simply ill-suited for democracy in terms of societal structure or did domestic and/or external political dynamics determine the fate of democratic reforms in these countries? These are the fundamental questions addressed by this thesis.

The newly independent republics of Central Asia are vital to the battle against Islamic fundamentalism and are in desperate need of economic and political reform. In

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<sup>1</sup> White House Press Office, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Sep 17, 2002), p. ii. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf#search=%22nss%202002%22>

retrospect, they should have been the front line in the Bush doctrine of spreading democracy. The overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the subsequent U.S.-led effort to install a democratic regime opened a window of opportunity for lasting political change in the region. Furthermore,



Figure 1. Central Asia Map.<sup>2</sup>

it held the promise of reversing the rise of militant Islam in Central Asia, which goes against the general nature Islam practiced in the region. The problem is that the administration's policy with respect to the Central Asian republics was forced to strike a balance between promoting democratic and economic reforms and engaging the ruling regimes as cooperative partners in the Global War on Terror. So far the results are less than encouraging. U.S. criticism of the Uzbekistan government in the wake of the Andijon massacre in May 2005 and the subsequent expulsion of U.S. troops from the

<sup>2</sup> Map downloaded from Indiana University:  
[http://www.indiana.edu/~afghan/maps/central\\_asia\\_map.jpg](http://www.indiana.edu/~afghan/maps/central_asia_map.jpg)

country is one example. The continued suppression of opposition political parties across the region, in spite of the hope promised by the 2005 Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan, is symptomatic of the struggle to achieve meaningful reforms.

Furthermore, any emphasis on democratic reforms clashed with Russian security strategies in Central Asia. After September 11, Russia and the United States faced a common enemy (Islamic fundamentalism combined with terrorism) for the first time since the Second World War. Russian and American security strategies with respect to Central Asia merged on the need to maintain regional stability in Central Asia and eliminate radical Islamic threats. Russia, however, links stability in the region to the status-quo regimes. As Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov put it, “By uncertainty we mean a political or military-political conflict or process that has a potential to pose a direct threat to Russia's security, or to change the geopolitical reality in a region of Russia's strategic interest. Our top concern is the internal situation in some members of the Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS], the club of former Soviet republics, and the regions around them.”<sup>3</sup> By promoting freedom and democracy in Central Asia, the United States is attempting to introduce the very uncertainty that Moscow fears in its near abroad. It is against this backdrop that one must consider the impact of external influences on the promotion of democratic reform.

## **B. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH**

How realistic are U.S. expectations that democratic reforms can and will take hold in the Central Asian republics? The goal of this thesis is to isolate the fundamental obstacles to democracy in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and point to policy options that the United States can utilize to overcome these obstacles. With independence thrust upon them by the break-up of the Soviet Union, the eventual emergence of democracy seemed a reasonable expectation as other former Soviet republics were moving toward democratic governance. However, only the Baltic Republics (Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia) have managed to achieve fully democratic regimes. Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and Russia continue to struggle with democratic reforms. Belarus, Azerbaijan

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<sup>3</sup> Federico Bordonaro, “Why Russia Must Be Strong”, *Asia Times On-Line* (24 Feb 2006): [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central\\_Asia/HB24Ag02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/HB24Ag02.html) (28 May 2006).

and the five Central Asian republics (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan) remain mired in authoritarianism.

Though democracy has faltered in the entire region of Central Asia, this thesis focuses on Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan because, in many ways, the expectations for democracy were greater in these two countries than in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan or Tajikistan. Civil war plagued Tajikistan from 1992 to 1997. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are petroleum exporting states and considerable evidence points to the negative impact of petroleum wealth on democracy.<sup>4</sup> Comparative analysis between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan will help isolate the effect of economic development and other structural factors on the emergence of democracy. This case study approach will enable a clear focus on the politics of the transition process and its effect on the resulting power structure. Specifically, the thesis will examine the impact of structural factors and the domestic and external facets of transition politics in terms of their effect on democracy. Armed with a clearer understanding of why democracy has failed to take root, the United States can craft a better long-term strategy for promoting democratic ideals.

### **C. THESIS ORGANIZATION**

The chapters in the thesis are organized to incrementally approach the major research question by using a case study approach. Chapter II provides a comprehensive literature review that highlights the critical research on the emergence of democracy in general and with respect to Central Asia. Chapters III and IV are the main chapters of this thesis and cover the plight of democracy in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, respectively. Each chapter focuses on the structural foundations (economic development, class structure, and civil society) for democracy as well as the political dynamics of regime transition. The goal is to ascertain the impact of these different factors on the development of democracy in each country. Finally, Chapter V will summarize the major findings of the research with respect to these two core trajectories – structural foundations and political dynamics. It will also address the policy implications for the

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?", *World Politics*, 53, no. 3 (2001): 325-61.

United States in terms of achieving meaningful democratic reforms in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Data will consist largely of primary and secondary sources. Analysis of structural factors will rely heavily on economic development data from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Secondary sources will provide data on civil society in the region as well as the role of Islam. Analysis of transition politics will rely primarily on secondary sources (journal articles), although some primary sources will include public opinion surveys, societal attitude studies and data from U.S. governmental agencies. Finally, measurement of democracy will rely on Freedom House rankings, Polity IV data and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index rankings.

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## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. DEFINITION OF DEMOCRACY

The first step in this analysis is tackling the definition of democracy. Defining democracy is especially critical in characterizing forms of government that lie somewhere between electoral democracy and authoritarianism. According to Freedom House, electoral democracies are characterized by a competitive multi-party political system, universal adult suffrage for all citizens, regularly contested elections with ballot secrecy and the absence of massive voter fraud, and significant public access of major political parties to the electorate.<sup>5</sup> Levitsky and Way, in analyzing the distinction between modern democracies and semi-democratic regimes utilize a similar definition of democracy, pointing to four minimum requirements: 1) Executives and legislatures are chosen through open, free and fair elections, 2) virtually universal adult suffrage, 3) political rights and civil liberties (including freedom of the press, freedom to associate and the freedom to criticize the government), and 4) elected authorities possess real authority to govern.<sup>6</sup> They classify semi-democratic states as “competitive authoritarian” regimes, where violation of one or more of these four requirements is frequent and serious enough to give an advantage to the government in competing with the opposition. This study will use three main democracy indicators: Freedom House ratings, Polity IV metrics and Bertelsmann Transformation Index ratings.

### B. THEORIES ON THE EMERGENCE OF DEMOCRACY

Well before the Bush administration hailed democracy as a tool for changing the world order, social scientists have been studying the factors that influence democracy’s successful emergence. The arguments fall into one of two categories. Some argue that certain societal conditions dictate whether democracy will emerge and, if so, whether it will endure. Others insist that structural variables insufficiently describe the complex

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<sup>5</sup> Freedom House, “Methodology”, Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=35&year=2006> (Jan 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism” *Journal of Democracy*, 13, no. 2 (2002): 53.

process that determines the nature of a governmental regime in transition. Instead, they point to the more pivotal role of political actors and the dynamics of the decision-making during the regime transition. The distinction between these two schools is critical. If structural variables are the only causal factors, then external pressure for political reforms is doomed to fail; and the only viable mechanism for effecting democratic reforms is to build-up key structural elements in each state.

### **C. STRUCTURAL PRECONDITIONS FOR DEMOCRACY APPROACH**

The causal factor approach to analyzing democracy's emergence and sustainability can be broken down into procedural and structural camps. Schmitter and Karl, for instance, point to certain procedural requisites that are essential for democracy to succeed and remain stable.<sup>7</sup> These include inherent and protected guarantees of political rights, civil rights and the rule of law. Structural arguments stipulate that democracy's emergence and success hinge on economic and societal institutions as well as the democratic beliefs and attitudes of its citizens. Lipset championed the argument that certain societal characteristics are paramount. He highlighted economic development, urbanization and education as foundations for democracy, though not necessarily as guarantors of its stability.<sup>8</sup> The link between economic development (though not necessarily market liberalization) and democracy has gained considerable support. Burkhart and Lewis-Beck used empirical data to effectively outline the positive relationship between democracy and economic development.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, economic stability, or at least the absence of serious economic crisis, is viewed as critical for stability and success in emerging democracies.<sup>10</sup> Przeworski and Limongi reinforced this

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<sup>7</sup> Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "What Democracy Is...and Is Not", in *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, ed. Patrick O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2004), 224-5.

<sup>8</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites for Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy", *The American Political Science Review*, 53, no. 1 (1959): 69-105.

<sup>9</sup> Ross E. Burkhart and Michael E. Lewis-Beck, "Comparative Democracy: the Economic Development Thesis", *American Political Science Review*, 88, no. 4 (1994): 903-10.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Haggard and Robert Kaufman, "Economic Adjustment and Prospects for Democracy", in *The Politics of Economic Adjustment*, ed. Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 321.

view, postulating that, once established, the survival of democracy was intimately linked to the state's level of economic development.<sup>11</sup>

#### **D. TRANSITOLOGY APPROACH TO DEMOCRACY**

The alternative view holds that structural pre-conditions for democracy are insufficient in explaining its emergence or survivability. One argument in this vein focuses on the nature of transition itself, or transitology. Rustow argues this approach in advocating that the nature of the process of regime change holds the key to democracy's chances for emergence. He puts forth a dynamic model of regime transition, noting that "not all causal links run from social and economic to political factors."<sup>12</sup> The only requisite condition in his model is a sense of national identity. The transition from oligarchy to democracy in this dynamic model proceeds through three distinct stages. The first stage is preparatory and involves a prolonged political struggle over one or more profound issues, often involving the emergence of a new elite class in society. The second stage is characterized by a deliberate decision on the part of political leaders to accept the diversity of the national unity and institute crucial aspects of democratic procedure. The final stage is habituation, whereby democratic institutions become entrenched as politicians and citizens learn to place their faith in the rules of the democratic system.<sup>13</sup> Geddes similarly argues against causal pre-conditions, albeit acknowledging a strong link between economic development and democracy. She advocates a model based on the characteristics of the authoritarian regime undergoing transition. Of the three main types of authoritarian governments in her study, military regimes are the most likely to produce democracies due to the military's general indifference to long-term governance. Furthermore, the single-party regime (which represents post-communist states), is the most resilient (although transition to democracy is possible), but it is also the least understood.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Fish highlights the inherent

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<sup>11</sup> Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts", *World Politics*, 49, no. 2 (1997): 155-83.

<sup>12</sup> Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model", *Comparative Politics*, 2, no. 3 (Apr 1970): 337

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 352-61.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 99, no. 2 (1999): 115-44.

problems with procedural and structural theories, particularly as they relate to the post-Communist experience, though he grudgingly notes the fact that economic development is “weakly” tied to democratization. He postulates that variations in democracies across post-Communist states are best described by a “political constructivist” approach, which focuses on the outcomes of political struggles and choices that took place during regime change. He emphasizes the importance of autonomous political actors and the strength and differentiation of political parties. The core explanatory variables that determine the nature of the regime transition are the strength and development of autonomous societal organizations (civil society and political parties), the choice of constitutional form (specifically the extent to which power is dispersed), and the extent of economic reform. In examining these causal mechanisms, he views the process of regime transition as purely political and not societal.<sup>15</sup>

#### **E. DEMOCRACY THEORY AND CENTRAL ASIA**

The debate over democracy’s failure in Central Asia draws on the two main approaches cited above, centering on either structural factors or the politics of the transition process. McFaul, for instance, places political power and ideas at the center of his analysis of causal paths from communism to either democracy or dictatorship.<sup>16</sup> He argues that that ideologies and the balance of power between the ancien régime and democratic challengers in the initial phase of the transition period are the key causal variables in determining the end result of the post-communist transition. Others, however, focus on structural variables. Matveeva argues that post-Soviet transitions in Central Asia cannot be attributed solely to political manipulations, but are the product of fundamental structural elements (societal structure, civil society, education and class structure).<sup>17</sup> Anderson cites an insufficient civil society as the key to Kyrgyzstan’s struggles with democratic reforms.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Green echoes this view, arguing that

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<sup>15</sup> M. Steven Fish, “Postcommunist Subversion: Social Science and Democratization in East Europe and Eurasia,” *Slavic Review*, 58, no. 4: Special Issue: Ten Years After 1989: What Have We Learned? (1999): 794-823.

<sup>16</sup> Michael McFaul, “The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship, Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World”, *World Politics*, 54, (2002): 212-44.

<sup>17</sup> Anna Matveeva, “Democratization, Legitimacy and Political Change in Central Asia”, *International Affairs (Royal Institute for International Affairs, 1944-)*, 75, no. 1(1999): 23-44.

the lack of civil society is directly related to democracy's slow progress in the entire region.<sup>19</sup>

Islam is also an important factor when examining democracy in Central Asia. There are generally two schools of thought with respect Islam's impact on the emergence of democracy. One approach argues that Islam fosters a political culture that is incompatible with democracy. Bernard Lewis, for example, points to the non-democratic nature of Islam, arguing that Islam, itself, promotes political acquiescence and thus is the source of Muslim society's lack of democratic values.<sup>20</sup> Tessler and Gao identified four general explanations to explain the lack of democracy in Muslim states: the resource curse, which is not directly related to Islam (wealthy Muslim states providing extensive services with no taxes have little pressure to democratize), lack of class conflict, the inability of opposition groups to join forces, and the political tradition of Islam (in which democracy, pluralism and popular sovereignty are profoundly alien).<sup>21</sup> Zartman, however, adroitly notes that Islam is generally supportive of democratic governance, but the dialectical relationship between Islam and democracy breeds conflict when the particular form of political Islam precludes the range of options embodied in procedural democracy. The incompatibility arises, he argues, when political Islam limits candidates for power to those who subscribe to the true path of the Muslim faith.<sup>22</sup>

Another school of thought challenges these findings by pointing to Muslim success stories, questioning the appropriateness of defining democracy in Western terms, which may not apply rigidly in Muslim societies, or by focusing solely on the structural factors that limit democracy in Muslim states. Hoffman examined the compatibility of Islam and democracy at the individual level in comparison with Christian societies in

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<sup>18</sup> John Anderson, "Creating a Framework for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52, no. 1 (2000): 77-93.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Green, "Comparative Development of Post-Communist Civil Societies", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54, no. 3 (2002): 455-71.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 48.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Tessler and Eleanor Gao, "Gauging Arab Support for Democracy", *Journal of Democracy*, 16, no. 3 (2005): 83- 97.

<sup>22</sup> William Zartman, "Democracy and Islam: The Cultural Dialectic", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 524, Political Islam (1992): 189.

emerging democratic states in Eurasia.<sup>23</sup> He concluded that Muslims are actually more compatible with democracy than Christians. Similar results were reported by Rose in his study of Muslim attitudes about democracy in Central Asia.<sup>24</sup> Nasr focused attention on structural preconditions, identifying the interplay of three key structural and procedural factors that impact the rise of democracy in Muslim societies: withdrawal of the military from the politics, rise of an important private sector and increased competition for votes.<sup>25</sup> Finally, Walker identified three crucial factors from the structural and procedural factors camp: the role of key state institutions (free speech and media, rule of law, elections), the strength of civil society (civic associations) and income distribution.<sup>26</sup>

In general, there is a great deal of scholarship on the nature of democracy's emergence and survivability, but there is no overall consensus on what factors dominate the process. The next two chapters will examine the plight of democracy in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and will draw on both of these approaches (transitology and structural factors) in an attempt to isolate the main obstacles to democracy in each state. Each chapter focuses first on the political factors that influenced the nature of the post-communist regime and then the structural conditions and their impact on the state's capacity for supporting democratic reform.

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<sup>23</sup> Steven Ryan Hofmann, "Islam and democracy: Micro-level indications of compatibility", *Comparative Political Studies* 37, no.6 (2004): 652-76.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Rose, "How Muslims View Democracy: Evidence from Central Asia", *Journal of Democracy*, 13, no. 4 (2002): 102-11.

<sup>25</sup> Vali Nasr, "The Rise of Muslim Democracy", *Journal of Democracy*, 16, no. 2 (2005): 13-27.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Walker, "The Democratic Mosaic", *The Wilson Quarterly*, 28, no. 2 (2004): 28-36.

### **III. KYRGYZSTAN CASE STUDY**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

For many reasons, Kyrgyzstan represented the greatest hope for democratic and economic reforms in Central Asia in the post September 11 world. Throughout the mid-1990s the country's development of a democratic society was in-line with that of many states in East and Central Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, when Askar Akayev was elected president following independence, Kyrgyzstan became the only Central Asian republic that elected as its leader someone other than the leading Communist Party member. Though Akayev was indeed a former member of the party, he was not the incumbent leader of the Republic, and that appeared to be a significant change. However, these hopes proved short-lived as Akayev's initial economic and political reforms failed to take hold and he subsequently lost enthusiasm for further movement toward democracy. Also, despite the perceived success of the Tulip Revolution, which resulted in Akayev's ouster in 2005, the country's new leadership offered much of the same in terms of authoritarian rule. The November 2006 protests over the battle for constitutional reform reflect growing frustration with the country's authoritarian government and slow progress toward democratic reform.

This chapter aims to examine why democracy failed to take root in Kyrgyzstan and why the initial hopes went unfulfilled. It will do so by focusing on the structural foundations (economic development, class structure, and civil society) for democracy as well as the internal and external factors that impacted the political dynamics of regime transition. Economic development and class structure indicators will be derived primarily from World Bank and International Monetary Fund sources. Assessments of civil society in Kyrgyzstan, as well as analysis of the political dynamics, will rely predominantly on academic analysis.

#### **B. STATE OF DEMOCRACY**

The state of democracy is assessed by examining Freedom House, Polity IV, and Bertelsmann Transformation Index metrics. Together, these systems provide a comprehensive evaluation of the country's democratic institutions, the degree to which

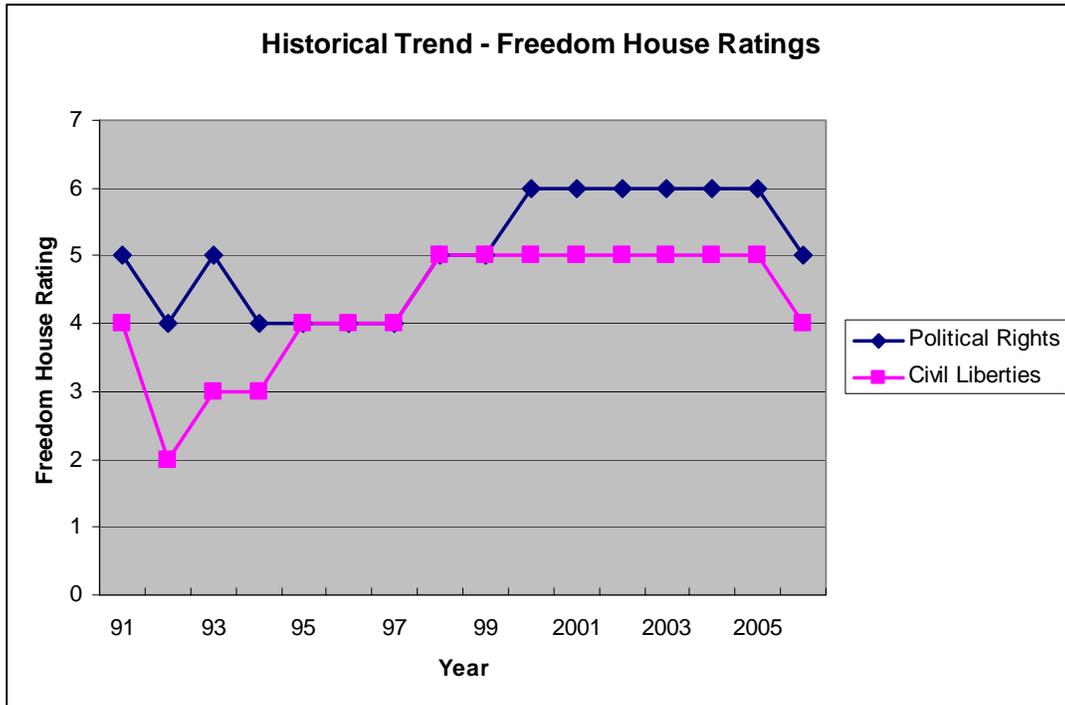
power is shared within the government, and the extent of political representation by the people. As Kyrgyzstan's ratings below illustrate, the country's formally democratic institutions are largely subject to the interests of the political leadership, and paternalistic networks now dominate the state bureaucracy.

**1. Freedom House Ratings**

The 2006 Freedom House ratings for Kyrgyzstan are presented in Table 1 below. The historical trend of Freedom House ratings is presented in Figure 2. The scores are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with a rating of 1 indicating the highest degree of freedom and 7 the least. The Freedom House ratings process is based on a checklist of ten political rights questions and fifteen civil liberties questions.

Political Rights Rating	Civil Rights Rating	Overall Rating
5	4	Partly Free

**Table 1. 2005 Freedom House Ratings for Kyrgyzstan.**<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 2. Historic Trend of Freedom House Ratings for Kyrgyzstan**<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2006", <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2006&country=6996> (November 2006).

## 2. Polity IV Metrics

Polity IV indicators for Kyrgyzstan are outlined in Table 2 and the historical trend is presented in Figure 3. The variables for Table 2 are defined as follows:

- Polity: Ranges from -10 to 10 (-10 = high autocracy; 10 = high democracy)
- Democ: Ranges from 0 to 10. Openness of political institutions (0 = low; 10 = high)
- Autoc: Ranges from 0 to 10. Closedness of political institutions (0 = low; 10 = high).

Polity	DEMOC	AUTOC
-3	1	4

Table 2. 2003 Polity IV Indicators - Kyrgyzstan.<sup>29</sup>

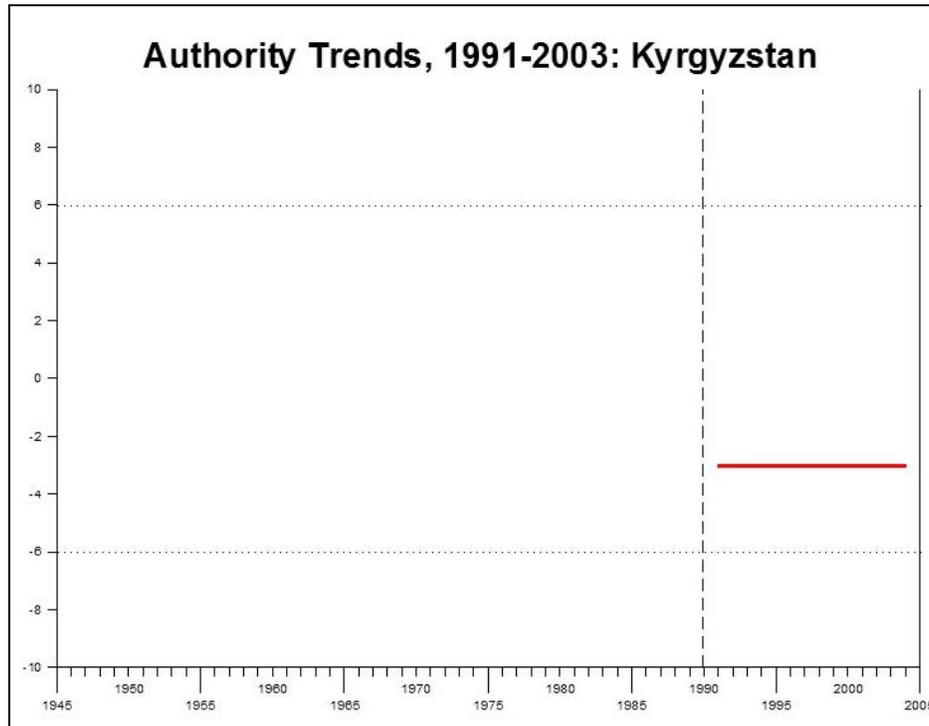


Figure 3. Annual Polity Scores for Kyrgyzstan.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2006", <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2006&country=6996> (November 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Polity IV Project. "Polity IV Country Report – Kyrgyzstan", [http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/polity/country\\_reports/Kyr1.htm](http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/polity/country_reports/Kyr1.htm) (July 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

### 3. Bertelsmann Transformation Index

Finally, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) is a global ranking system that evaluates a country’s progress toward a market-based democracy in terms of political and economic performance. The BTI reports two indices: democracy status and market economy status, with a higher score indicating more progress toward a market-based democracy. The democracy status score is composed of five criteria, each evaluated on scale of one to ten:

- Stateness: clarity about the nation’s existence as a state, with adequately differentiated power structures
- Political participation: the extent to which the population has political freedoms and determines who rules the country
- Rule of law: the extent to which state powers check and balance each other and ensure civil liberties
- Stability of democratic institutions: the capability of democratic institutions to perform and the extent to which they are accepted
- Political and social integration: the existence of stable patterns of representation for mediating between society and the state.

Kyrgyzstan’s overall 2006 score for BTI democracy status is 4.08, which places it in the category of “moderate autocracy”. The country’s overall score for 2003 was 3.8, placing it in the category of “autocracy”. The breakdown for these scores is presented in Table 3. Kyrgyzstan has demonstrated slight improvement from 2003 to 2006, though it still remains moderately autocratic.

<b>BTI Year</b>	<b>Stateness</b>	<b>Political Participation</b>	<b>Rule of Law</b>	<b>Stability of Democratic Institutions</b>	<b>Political and Social Integration</b>
<b>2003</b>	6.0	4.0	4.0	1.0	4.0
<b>2006</b>	7.3	3.8	3.8	2.0	3.7

**Table 3. BTI Democracy Status Indicators for Kyrgyzstan – 2003 and 2006.**<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Bertelsmann Transformation Index, “Bertelsmann Transformation Atlas”, <http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/46.0.html?&L=1> (June 2006).

#### **4. Trend Toward Autocracy**

The combination of Freedom House, Polity IV and BTI indicators clearly underscores the autocratic nature of the Kyrgyzstan regime. Equally concerning, however, is the fact that the trend is not improving. According to Freedom House, however, it is actually getting worse (see Figure 2). Though the initial period of independence showed slight improvements in civil and political rights, the trend toward autocracy began in 1997 and the country slid into “Not Free” status in 2000. Throughout the mid and late 1990s, President Akayev used numerous constitutional reforms to consolidate power in the executive branch. The shift toward full autocracy was capped by the 2000 legislative and presidential elections, which, unlike the elections of the early 1990s, were considered neither free nor fair. Though the events surrounding the Tulip Revolution in 2005 marked a hopeful shift, the country is still ruled by an authoritarian regime with the trappings of democracy. Further analysis of Kyrgyzstan’s transition process from communist rule will shed more light on this trend.

#### **C. TRANSITOLOGY APPROACH – THE POLITICAL TRANSITION FROM COMMUNISM**

Analyzing Kyrgyzstan’s transition from communism to its current authoritarian regime from a transitology perspective can be somewhat complicated. Multiple factors contributed to the steady rollback of democratic reforms in Kyrgyzstan throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. This section will analyze the impact of external pressures as well as domestic political dynamics on the state of democratic reforms in the country. To do so, it is necessary to first summarize the key events since independence that shaped the country’s political destiny and then break down the most important causal factors.

##### **1. From Communism to Kyrgyzstan’s Version of Democracy**

Kyrgyzstan declared independence from the Soviet Union in August 1991. Two months later, a divided parliament failed to elect the Communist Party first secretary as the country’s first president. The parliament instead elected Askar Akayev, the president of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences and a champion of Gorbachev’s policies of measured reform. Akayev introduced multiparty elections and embarked on economic

reforms, vowing to transform the country into the Switzerland of Central Asia.<sup>32</sup> The country's first post-Soviet constitution was adopted in 1993, creating a presidential system with a bicameral legislature composed of a 45-member People's Assembly (upper house) and a 60-seat Legislative Assembly (lower house).<sup>33</sup>

In the parliamentary elections of 1995, no party won a clear majority. A mix of former communist officials, intellectuals and clan leaders captured most of the legislature seats. Akayev won reelection later that year and in 1996 voters overwhelmingly approved amendments that substantially increased presidential powers, such as the power to dissolve parliament. This increase in presidential power coincides roughly with the decline in Freedom House indicators for civil and political rights.

The elections of 2000 represented a further erosion of democratic norms. Opposition parties, including the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (PDMK), el Bei-Bechora (The People's Party) and Ar-Namys (Dignity) were barred from competing in the February parliamentary elections due to minor technicalities. Furthermore, the chairman of Ar-Namys, Felis Kulov, ran as an independent candidate for parliament and lost in the runoff election by a conspicuously large margin despite having a substantial lead in the first round of elections. International observers, including observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) noted significant voting irregularities, including attempts to bribe voters, tabulation fraud, and state media bias.<sup>34</sup> The elections were deemed neither free nor fair. The October 2000 presidential election was also seriously flawed. Leading opposition candidates were arrested or denied registration. Additionally, international monitors again cited numerous voting irregularities (ballot box stuffing, biased media coverage, exclusion of opposition

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<sup>32</sup> Martha Olcott, *Central Asia's Second Chance* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 41.

<sup>33</sup> Constitutional amendments adopted in February 2003 created a unicameral legislature with 75 deputies after the 2005 parliamentary poll.

<sup>34</sup> Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Election Observation Mission, *Kyrgyz Republic: Parliamentary Elections, 20 February and 12 March 2000, Final Report* (Warsaw: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, April 10, 2000).

candidates). Kulov was subsequently arrested in 2002 on charges of abuse of power, forgery and complicity in committing a crime. He was finally released in July 2005.

The run-up to the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2005 saw significant preparations by opposition parties to challenge Akayev's authoritarian rule. Several political blocs and coalitions were established throughout 2004. With Kulov still incarcerated, a significant number of opposition groups supported former Prime Minister Kurmanbek Bakiyev for the October presidential elections. Furthermore, it remained unclear if Akayev would amend the constitution and therefore be allowed to seek another term. Kyrgyzstan held parliamentary elections in February 2005. The OSCE monitored the elections and determined that once again they failed to comply with international norms for free and fair elections. The OSCE similarly criticized the March runoff elections, though Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) observers deemed them free and fair. Nevertheless, public perceptions of voter fraud in the runoff elections sparked sporadic protests, which erupted into massive demonstrations (the "Tulip Revolution") and calls for Akayev's government to resign. President Akayev fled the country after protesters seized the presidential administration building. In the aftermath, Bakiyev was named prime minister and acting president by the old legislature (elected in 2000). Presidential elections were held in July 2005 and Bakiyev easily won with over 88 percent of the vote. International observers noted significant improvements in the electoral process, but still reported some irregularities.

The argument can certainly be made that Kyrgyzstan's regression toward autocracy had its roots in the move toward a superpresidential form of government in 1996. A superpresidential regime is characterized by an executive power that dwarfs the other branches of government in terms of resources and power, a president who enjoys decree powers, a legislature with little authority to challenge or impede presidential power, and constitutional provisions that make it virtually impossible to impeach the president. Superpresidentialism is contrasted with autocracy only insofar as the president does not enjoy total power and is subject to periodic elections.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the design

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<sup>35</sup> John Ishiyama and Ryan Kennedy, "Superpresidentialism and Political Party Development in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53, no. 8 (2001): 1178.

of the electoral system also had a detrimental effect. The initial electoral system employed in Kyrgyzstan was based on single-member district plurality rules. These systems generally impede development of political parties in comparison with those that employ proportional representation or a mixed system. Indeed, in an analysis of political party development in post-Soviet states, political party development in Kyrgyzstan (in 2000) ranked lower than Ukraine, Armenia and Russia.<sup>36</sup>

## **2. External Pressures**

Martha Brill Olcott notes that by the mid-1990s, “partly under pressure from leaders of neighboring states, not to mention from his own family, President Akayev lost his enthusiasm for democratic reform and began to behave more like the other Central Asian rulers.”<sup>37</sup> What was the extent of external pressure on Akayev with respect to democratic reforms? More specifically, how much pressure and/or assistance did the United States provide for these reforms and why did it not yield any success? This section will examine these questions in more detail.

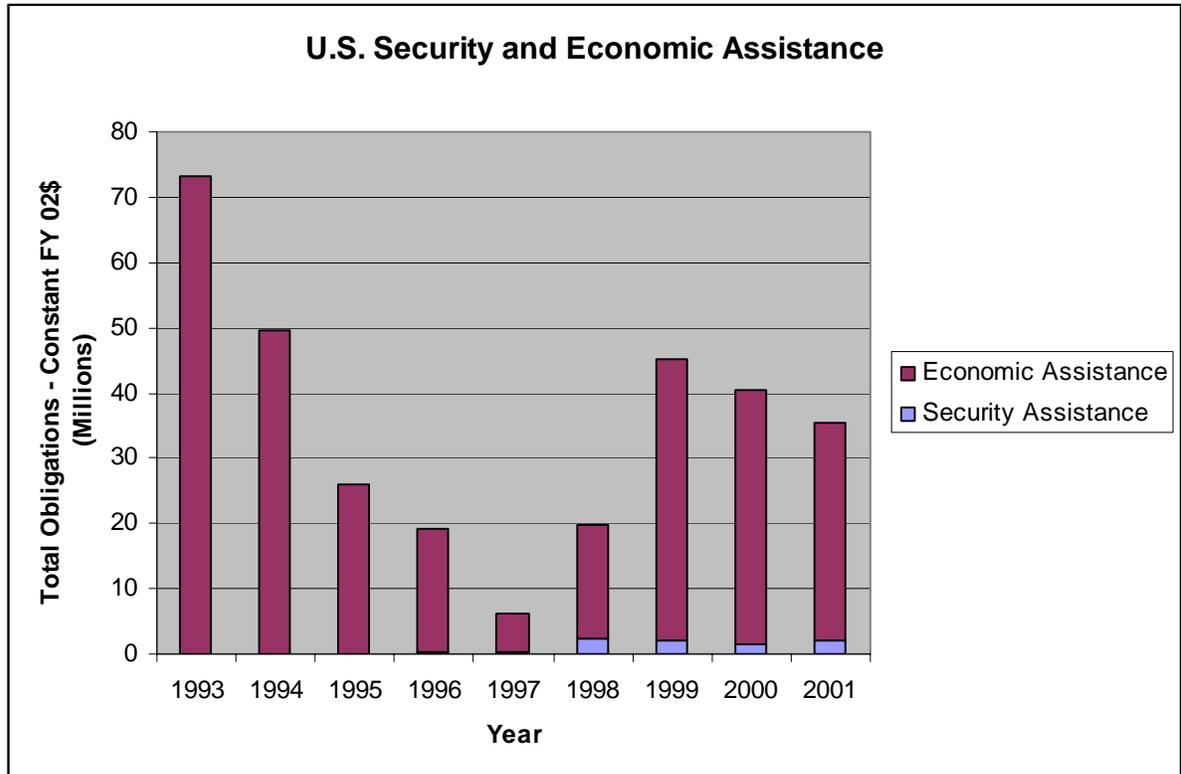
Prior to September 11, the United States provided considerable assistance to Kyrgyzstan, much of which flowed through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). From 1993 to 2001, the United States provided about \$317 million in assistance to Kyrgyzstan, primarily for economic development (see Figure 4 below) In 1994 the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), through a cooperative agreement with USAID, established an office in Kazakhstan to provide democracy assistance in Central Asia. More offices were opened in other Central Asian states (to include Kyrgyzstan) in 1997. The primary mission of the IFES was to focus on political party development, election monitoring and other election-related assistance. This continued to be the case through 1999, at which point USAID and IFES were forced to reassess their focus. According to an IFES report: “It was at this time that IFES’s activities underwent a shift in focus to the promotion of civic education through a curriculum development project to improve instruction and information on democracy in

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<sup>36</sup> John Ishiyama and Ryan Kennedy, “Superpresidentialism and Political Party Development in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53, no. 8 (2001): 1185.

<sup>37</sup> Olcott (2005), 130.

secondary schools.”<sup>38</sup> In essence, the new USAID approach was to help build “democracy from below” by emphasizing a more open democratic culture and focusing on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and more open media outlets.<sup>39</sup> The rationale behind this shift was that democracy promotion in Central Asia was working, in practice, against the governments. As long as the ruling regimes remained in power in Central Asia, democracy reform efforts would be seriously constrained.



**Figure 4. U.S. Security and Economic Assistance to Kyrgyzstan Prior to 2001.**<sup>40</sup>

Kyrgyzstan also received considerable development assistance from international institutions. The World Bank provided a substantial amount of funding, much of which was supposedly linked to progress on economic and political reform. Kyrgyzstan became

<sup>38</sup> Gina Gilbreth Holdar and David Ogle, *Evaluation of IFES Civic Education Programs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan*, prepared under contract AEP-I-820-00-00022-00 for USAID Central Asia Regional Mission (Jun 2003), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Sylvia Babus, “Democracy-Building in Central Asia Post-September 11”, in *In the Tracks of Tamerlane – Central Asia’s Path to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Daniel Burghart and Theresa Sabonis-Helf (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Center for Technology and National Security Policy, 2004), 120.

<sup>40</sup> USAID, <http://www.usaid.org> (Sep 2006)

a member of the World Bank and the International Development Association (IDA) in 1992. Since then, the IDA has committed about US\$776 million for 38 projects in the country.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank's private sector development arm, has committed over US\$49 million in its own funds for investment in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>42</sup> Finally, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), as of December 2005, had signed over €174 million in investments, predominantly in the country's private sector. As Olcott points out, however, much of the aid that was linked to progress on democratic reforms came in the form of loans and not grants. Though the country had the capacity to expand these reform projects, it did not have the capacity to repay debts. This, she argues, is where the United States and other Western donors missed the opportunity to provide added financial assistance in one of the key areas of democratic reforms.<sup>43</sup>

The Bush administration's new National Security Strategy and its emphasis on spreading democracy ushered in a new approach to linking assistance funds to democratic reforms. However, the renewed security focus on Central Asia in the aftermath of September 11 seemed to work against this effort. In March 2002 President Bush included key elements of a performance and incentive-based concept of foreign assistance in his proposed Millennium Challenge Account. The program reflected impatience with undemocratic, non-reforming governments and sought to link assistance to demonstrated political will for democratic reforms. However, the pressing need to provide security assistance to the Central Asian states in order to stem the threat of rising militant Islamism diminishes this new strategy of linking aid to reform. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Lynn Pascoe's testimony to Congress on U.S. policy in Central Asia summed up the paradox nicely:

...we believe it is strongly in our national interest to engage fully with these governments to urge the political and economic reforms that we judge are essential to alleviate the conditions that breed terrorism....It is extremely difficult to convince Central Asian leaders that long-term

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<sup>41</sup> World Bank, <http://web.worldbank.org> (Sep 2006).

<sup>42</sup> International Finance Corporation, [http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/eca.nsf/Content/KyrgyzRepublic\\_Home](http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/eca.nsf/Content/KyrgyzRepublic_Home) (Sep 2006).

<sup>43</sup> Olcott (2005), 131.

economic and democratic reforms are necessary to eliminate the roots of terrorism if we are not willing to help them counter terrorism in the short term and prove that we will be engaged for the long term.<sup>44</sup>

The end result is that the Bush administration continues to encourage reforms, but still refuses to firmly tie security assistance or economic development aid to demonstrated progress toward democracy. U.S. democracy assistance in Kyrgyzstan continues to prioritize civil society development, civic advocacy, political party development, parliamentary transparency and independent media. However, very little of this assistance is geared toward direct engagement with the government.<sup>45</sup> Though this is basically a necessity driven by past experience, it is important to realize the fact that it limits U.S. influence. Even the influx of World Bank development funds and cautionary warnings that these funds are linked to reform hold little leverage in Central Asia. As Kazakhstan's political advisor, Ermukhamet Ertysbaev, noted following remarks a speech by the President of the World Bank in April 2002, "Foreign investors don't care where they are investing money, be it a dictatorship or democracy."<sup>46</sup>

On the other side of the coin, Akayev also faced pressure from neighboring states, namely Uzbekistan and Russia. Though the pressure was significant, it is debatable whether it influenced him to turn away from his initial enthusiasm for democratic reforms. As Kyrgyzstan's primary trading partner, Russia's leverage was tied to trade and foreign debt. As the United States began basing aircraft at the newly constituted airbase near Bishkek, the Russian Duma cast aside a promise to reschedule Kyrgyzstan's \$133 million debt. As a result, Akayev was forced to reassure Moscow that American bases would not conflict with Russian interests.<sup>47</sup>

Additionally, Russia secured its own basing rights in the country. Though the Kant airbase has limited military importance (only a limited number of aircraft and about 700 personnel are based there), it provides an advanced post from which Moscow can exert

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<sup>44</sup> Babus (2004), 126.

<sup>45</sup> USAID, *USAID/Kyrgyzstan Operational Plan FY 2006 – June 13, 2006*, (USAID Development Experience Clearing House), 2-3.

<sup>46</sup> Ahmed Rashid, "Russia, China Warily Watch for American Intrusions in Central Asia", *Eurasia Insight*, May 3, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav050302.shtml>, (Sep 2006)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

diplomatic leverage.<sup>48</sup> Uzbekistan's primary leverage over Kyrgyzstan lies in its role as the country's primary energy supplier. Kyrgyzstan imports most of its natural gas from Uzbekistan, most of which is governed by gas supply contracts involving barter deals of electricity, water and hard currency. However, most of these deals have not worked in the long run, as Kyrgyzstan is often late in payment and Uzbekistan often cuts off the supply to force payment. Uzbekistan cut off the supply in December 2000 and again in January and October of 2001. The bottom line is that Uzbekistan and Russia continue to hold considerable leverage on the Kyrgyz government, but it is doubtful that this translates directly into pressure to abandon political reforms. A much more plausible driving factor was simply Akayev's recognition of the fact that Washington was much more concerned with fighting the War on Terror than in building democracy. The establishment of a U.S. base in Uzbekistan all but confirmed that logic. That being the case, much of the regime's resistance to and abandonment of reform is likely due to domestic political factors, which is the subject of the next section.

### **3. Domestic Politics**

Domestic political concerns lie at the heart of Akayev's abandonment of political reforms. What were his primary reasons for concentrating power and authority in the executive branch and how did he accomplish it? These are the underlying questions addressed in this section. Specifically, this section will cover the role of clan politics, the impact of corruption, and the role of Islam in terms of influencing Akayev's political decisions.

#### ***a. The Impact of Clan Politics***

A major factor in domestic politics in Kyrgyzstan is the role of clans. Identity is a key factor with respect to democracy in ethnically diverse states emerging from a communist legacy. Indeed, Rustow's transitology model lists only one requisite background condition for possible transition to democracy - national identity.<sup>49</sup> The Kyrgyz ethnic group comprises approximately 65 percent of the population, with Uzbeks

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<sup>48</sup> Igor Torbakov, "Moscow Aims to Restore its Influence in Central Asia", *Eurasia Insight*, December 5, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav120502a.shtml> (Sep 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Rustow (1970), 350.

and Russians being the dominant minority groups (13.8 and 12.5 percent, respectively).<sup>50</sup> However, clan politics seriously complicates the identity issue in Central Asia. A clan is “an informal organization comprising a network of individuals linked by kin-based bonds. Affective ties of kinship are its essence.”<sup>51</sup> Kathleen Collins, in her study of clan politics in Central Asia, notes that three conditions give rise to regime durability via pacts between clans. These conditions, which were all present in Kyrgyzstan as it gained independence, are 1) a shared external threat that induces cooperation, 2) a balance of power among the major clan factions and 3) a legitimate broker, or leader, assumes the role of maintaining the pact.<sup>52</sup> Akayev assumed this role of broker and was backed by a strong clan coalition that formed to take power back from Moscow. Kyrgyz identity is traditionally determined by ties with one of three clan groupings, known as “wings”. They are comprised of the Ong (the right), Sol (the left) and Ichkilik (neither right nor left). The left wing includes seven clans in the north and west. Among them, the Buguu clan provided the first administrators of the republic during the early Soviet era, but its influence declined after the purges of the 1930s and another northern clan, the Sarbagysh, gained dominant status. Since Stalin’s reign, this clan has provided most of Kyrgyzstan’s leaders, including Akayev. The right wing contains only one clan, the Advigine, which has its roots in the southern part of the country. The Ichkilik, which also has strong links to southern Kyrgyzstan, is actually a group of many clans. Collins argues that “If a transition takes place—instigated by an exogenous shock, such as independence—the informal pact will foster a durable transition but not a democratic one.”<sup>53</sup> The evidence from Kyrgyzstan’s electoral process is compelling. Akayev placed his kinsmen in positions of power as regional or local governors. They, in turn, used the hierarchical networks of clan patronage to influence voters’ preferences. The results of the 2000 parliamentary election also give ample evidence of the dominant role of clans in Kyrgyzstan’s political system. In that election, independents, primarily clan notables,

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<sup>50</sup> CIA World Factbook, <http://www.cia.gov> (Mar 2006).

<sup>51</sup> Kathleen Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics, Evidence from Central Asian Trajectories”, *World Politics*, 56 (2004), 231.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

won 73 or 105 seats despite a reformed electoral law intended to give political parties more representation.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, informal power sharing arrangements among the northern and southern clan groupings helped maintain stability throughout the first decade of the country's independence. Much of the political unrest in the country since 2002 is reportedly linked to the northern clan's reluctance and/or inability to address complaints from the southern clan groups.<sup>55</sup>

***b. The Influence of Corruption***

Coupled with the impact of clan politics is the pervasiveness of corruption in Kyrgyzstan, which undoubtedly influenced Akayev's abandonment of democratic reforms. Corruption in the public sector refers to the abuse of public office for private gain. High levels of corruption have been endemic in Central Asia since these countries gained independence and Kyrgyzstan under Akayev's rule was certainly no exception. According to a 2003 television broadcast in Kyrgyzstan, "almost all people in Kyrgyzstan encounter extortion at schools, universities, police offices, hospitals, customs offices, state motor-vehicle and customs inspectorates. Plants and factories encounter...bribery even more often than ordinary citizens."<sup>56</sup> Data reported by Transparency International underscore this point. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is reported annually by Transparency International and is based on polling data of business people and analysts collected by independent surveying institutions. A CPI score of 10 represents a clean rating. A CPI score less than 3 represents rampant corruption. CPI scores for 2005 are presented in Table 4. Of the 159 countries surveyed, Kyrgyzstan ranked 134<sup>th</sup>. Relative to the other Central Asian Republics, Kyrgyzstan scored slightly better than Uzbekistan, but worse than Kazakhstan. More importantly, all of the Central Asian states fall into the category of rampant corruption. Moreover, a look at the historical data indicates that corruption in Kyrgyzstan has remained consistent. Prior to the 2005 Transparency

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<sup>54</sup> Freedom House, "Nations in Transit 2006: Kyrgyzstan", <http://www.freedomhouse.hu/nitransit/2006/kyrgyzstan2006.pdf> (Nov 2006).

<sup>55</sup> Alisher Kamidov, "Kyrgyzstan's Unrest Linked to Clan Rivalries", *Eurasia Insight*, June 5, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav060502.shtml> (Jul 2006).

<sup>56</sup> Mark Berniker, "Corruption and Poverty Threaten Kyrgyz Growth Forecasts", *Eurasia Insight*, March 13, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav031303.shtml> (Jul 2006).

International report, the organization scored Kyrgyzstan only two other years, once in 1999 and again in 2004. Both years the country scored a rating of 2.2.<sup>57</sup> Worse still, since Akayev’s ouster in 2005, the level of corruption appears to be worsening. According to one report, bribery rates have risen by 200 to 500 percent, as the new Bakiyev administration struggles to consolidate power and bureaucrats at all levels take advantage of their regulatory power.<sup>58</sup>

Country	2005 Corruption Perception Index (CPI)	Ranking
United States	7.6	17 <sup>th</sup>
Kazakhstan	2.6	110 <sup>th</sup>
Russia	2.4	128 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>134<sup>th</sup></b>
Uzbekistan	2.2	143 <sup>rd</sup>
Tajikistan	2.1	150 <sup>th</sup>
Turkmenistan	1.8	157 <sup>th</sup>

**Table 4. 2005 Corruption Perception Index Scores for Central Asian States.**<sup>59</sup>

*c. The Impact of Islam in Kyrgyzstan Politics*

Islam as an independent variable is a difficult concept. Kyrgyzstan is about 80 percent Muslim and around 11 percent Russian Orthodox.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the Muslim population is predominantly Sunni, adhering to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, the largest of the four schools of Islam and formerly the official school of the Ottomans.

<sup>57</sup> Transparency International, [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2006](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2006) (Nov 2006).

<sup>58</sup> “Rampant Corruption Makes Kyrgyzstan a ‘Faltering State’”, *Eurasianet Business and Economics*, December 21, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav122105.shtml> (Jul 2006).

<sup>59</sup> Transparency International, [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2006](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2006) (Nov 2006).

<sup>60</sup> U.S. State Department, “Kyrgyzstan: International Religious Freedom Report 2005”, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51562.htm> (5 Jun 06)

The Hanafi school is generally considered to be the school most open to new ideas.<sup>61</sup> The classical Sunni political philosophy calls for a ruler that is, most importantly, Muslim. Additionally, the ruler must be competent, willing to listen to religious scholars and establish law and order. Moreover, a core political concern for modern Muslims is the desire to limit arbitrary personal rule and replace it with the rule of law.<sup>62</sup> Of course, the Soviet legacies, along with nomadic and clan traditions, loom large with respect to the practice of Islam in Central Asia.<sup>63</sup> Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the communist state discouraged the practice of all religions, stressing secular values over spirituality.

The end result is that Islam is definitely subordinate to secular concerns in Kyrgyzstan, even with respect to the political philosophy. Only one-fifth of Muslims in the country assert that they constantly follow religious rules; 63 percent say they sometimes adhere to religious practices; and one-sixth do not engage in religious practices at all.<sup>64</sup> In their attitudes toward democracy, 61 percent of the population believes that democracy is better than any other form of government; a response that does not vary between Muslims, Orthodox and non-believers.<sup>65</sup>

In general, the dominance of Islam in a particular state is defined by three factors: Islam's status as the official state religion, the extent to which Islamic political parties exercise or share power, and the role of Islamic law in the country's legal code. In looking at these three factors as they apply to Islam in Kyrgyzstan, it is clear that Islam does not play a major role in the political system. The judicial system is based solely on civil law. Furthermore, the Constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion and separation of church/mosque and state, though the government does restrict the activities of radical Islamic groups deemed a threat. Finally, Article 8 of the Constitution prohibits

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<sup>61</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 2000), 97.

<sup>62</sup> Gudrun Krämer, "Islamist Notions of Democracy" in *Political Islam* ed. Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 76.

<sup>63</sup> For an overview of Islam in Central Asia, refer to Gulnoza Saidazimova, *Central Asia: Region Returns to Muslim Roots* (Aug 4, 2005) Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/08/771f522e-17ad-4851-90a7-a237f7e04413.html> (Jun 2006).

<sup>64</sup> Rose (2002), 105.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

the formation of political parties based on religious or ethnic grounds. The only subversive role played by Islam in the country's political system is linked to radical Islamic groups that pose a threat to stability. These groups include the non-violent Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a group that advocates the peaceful overthrow of existing Central Asian governments and the reestablishment of a caliphate in the region that is guided by Islamic law. Hizb-ut-Tahrir reportedly has about 3,000 members in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>66</sup>

#### **4. Summary**

In general, Kyrgyzstan's transition from communist rule showed signs of promise and then eventual regression and disappointment. The election of Akayev over communist candidates offered great promise for democratic reforms in Kyrgyzstan since this represented a shift in the balance of power away from the ancien régime. The regression away from full democratization is certainly due to political decisions made by President Akayev and other political elites, but societal pressure for reform was lacking until 2005. In her analysis of Kyrgyzstan's transition from communist rule, Martha Olcott makes the point that the United States missed a prime opportunity to pressure the Akayev regime to turn the corner with democratic reforms in time for the 2005 parliamentary elections. She notes that U.S. incentives (in the form of increased aid and possibly contracts for Kyrgyz companies in the reconstruction of Afghanistan) could have convinced Akayev to uphold democratic norms. Instead, she argues, Washington chose not to prioritize democratization and refused to divert the necessary attention and resources to influence Akayev's behavior.<sup>67</sup> The data presented above, however, calls this argument into question. Domestic political factors played a much more dominant role in terms of pushing Akayev away from democratic reforms. The power of clan politics and the pervasive corruption in Kyrgyzstan were the real driving forces that shaped Akayev's moves to consolidate and concentrate power in the executive branch.

Of course, this type of transitology analysis ignores questions about the structural foundation for democracy and whether this was sufficient for democracy to thrive in

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<sup>66</sup> Alisher Khamidov, "Islamic Radical Organization Steadily Increases Support Base in Kyrgyzstan", *Eurasia Insight*, September 5, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav090502a.shtml> (Jun 2006).

<sup>67</sup> Olcott (2005), 132.

Kyrgyzstan in the first place. Are political choices alone the reason for democracy's failure in Kyrgyzstan; or was the country simply ill-suited, structurally, for democracy to begin with? The following section will address this structural side of the debate.

#### **D. ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURAL FACTORS**

In his analysis of the transitology approach, Thomas Carothers is highly critical of the tendency of scholars to banish the idea that there are structural pre-conditions for democracy, arguing that a country's chances of democratizing are strongly influenced by underlying economic, social and institutional conditions.<sup>68</sup> This section will analyze the critical structural variables that are often referred to as the foundation for democracy. A key part of this is an examination of economic development and the country's transition toward a market economy. Also, education levels, urbanization and income distribution are important insofar as they related to the development of a middle class. Finally, civic institutions and societal attitudes toward democracy are essential for generating opposition parties and support for democracy.

##### **1. Economic Development Factors**

The experiences of countries in East and Southeast Asia confirm the complex interconnection between politics and economics. In other words, it is impossible to liberalize the economy without liberalizing public life as well. Even President Jian Zemin of China declared during his visit to the United States in November 1997: "We believe that, without democracy, there can be no modernization."<sup>69</sup> For these reasons, it is important to look at Kyrgyzstan's economic development as well as its reform process. Comparative economic indicators for Kyrgyzstan (2005 figures) are presented in Table 3 below. Education and other human development indicators are presented in Table 4. While Gross Domestic Product (GDP), unemployment, and poverty figures relate directly to economic development, the GINI Index quantifies the level of income distribution.<sup>70</sup> The Human Development index is a composite index that combines measurements in life

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm", *Journal of Democracy*, 13, no. 1 (2002), 15-7.

<sup>69</sup> *The New Republic*, 24 November 1997, 45.

<sup>70</sup> The GINI Index is based on a comparison between actual income distribution and uniform income distribution. Perfect distribution of income would equate to GINI Index of 100.

expectancy, education indicators, and standard of living figures. The education index measures a country's relative achievement in adult literacy as well as enrollment in primary, secondary and tertiary education. In general, the figures present a bleak view of the Kyrgyz economy; the country has poor economic growth, high unemployment and excessive poverty. On the other hand, the living standards indicators reflect the fact that Kyrgyzstan represents a medium level of development relative to many other developing countries, as classified by the Human Development Report. However, the current state of economic development is only part of the overall picture and the statistics fail to capture the entire story; it is also important to examine Kyrgyzstan's transition from a soviet-style command economy toward a market-oriented system.

Country	GDP Growth	Per Capita GDP	Unemployment	GINI Index	Population Below Poverty
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>\$2,100</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>United States</b>	3.5%	\$41,800	5.1%	45	12%
<b>Russia</b>	6.4%	\$11,100	7.6%	40	17.8%
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	7.2%	\$1,800	0.7%*	26.8	28%
<b>Mongolia</b>	6.2%	\$1,900	6.7%	44	36.1%

\* Note: Official statistic, but underemployment is reportedly 20%.

**Table 5. Kyrgyzstan Economic Indicators.**<sup>71</sup>

Country	2005 Human Development Index	Combined Gross Enrollment Tertiary, Secondary and Primary	Education Index	Urbanization
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<b>0.702</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>34.0%</b>
<b>United States</b>	0.939	92%	0.97	79.8%
<b>Russia</b>	0.795	88%	0.95	73.3%
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	0.709	76%	0.91	36.8%
<b>Mongolia</b>	0.679	74%	0.90	46.1%

**Table 6. Kyrgyzstan Living Standards Indicators.**<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> CIA World Factbook, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/> (Jun 2006).

<sup>72</sup> Human Development Report, "Human Development Report 2004", 219-35, <http://www.hdr.org>

The collapse of the Soviet Union was devastating to the economies of the newly independent states; this was especially the case in Kyrgyzstan. In 1990, approximately 98 percent of Kyrgyz exports were destined for other parts of the Soviet Union.<sup>73</sup> As a result, the country's economic performance following the Soviet collapse was worse than any other republic except Armenia, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan (which were all racked by war). By 1996, Kyrgyzstan's GDP had decreased to 53.1 percent of the 1990 level. The total volume of industrial and gross agricultural output had declined to 38.8 percent and 64.5 percent of the 1990 levels, respectively.<sup>74</sup> These declines seriously impeded the transition to a market economy.

Nevertheless, the country did undertake significant reform efforts. Following the collapse of the ruble zone in 1993, Kyrgyzstan became the first CIS country to establish its own currency, with the help of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) macro-stabilization program. Additionally, the country's privatization of small and medium sized enterprises (SME) is essentially complete. The level of privatization of SMEs reached over 70 percent by 2004, and this sector engages approximately 60 percent of the population.<sup>75</sup> There are still, however, a number of large state-owned enterprises, including utilities, agribusiness and mining, as well as some in the tourist industry. Tables 5 and 6 below highlight Kyrgyzstan's successful economic reform process. For these tables, a value of 1 indicates little or no progress; a value of 4.3 indicates standards similar to advanced economies. The country's progress on reforms is impressive; Kyrgyzstan gained accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1998.

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<sup>73</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, Apr 2006, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5755.htm> (Jun 06).

<sup>74</sup> Umirserik Kasenov, "Post-Soviet Modernization in Central Asia: Realities and Prospects", in *Central Asia – The Challenges of Independence*, ed. Boris Rumer and Stanislav Zhukov (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998) 33.

<sup>75</sup> Olcott (2005), 106-7.

<b>Price Liberalization</b>	<b>Trade and Foreign Exchange System</b>	<b>Competition Policy</b>	<b>Large-Scale Privatization</b>	<b>Small-Scale Privatization</b>
4.3	4.3	2	3	4

**Table 7. Kyrgyzstan Economic Transition Indicators (2003).<sup>76</sup>**

<b>Governance and Enterprise Restructuring</b>	<b>Banking Reform and Interest Rate Liberalization</b>	<b>Securities Markets and Non-Bank Financial Institutions</b>	<b>Infrastructure Reform</b>
2	2.3	2	1.3

**Table 8. Kyrgyzstan Economic Transition Indicators (2003).<sup>77</sup>**

In spite of the country's successful transition program, it still suffers from economic decline. Expectations that rapid liberalization of the economy would produce economic prosperity in the future were not unfounded or unrealistic. However, these results never materialized. Kyrgyzstan's free trade policy, for instance, was economically viable, but the country could not secure support for it from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan or Russia, because none of these states was interested in opening their markets to Kyrgyz goods.<sup>78</sup> As the country worked to achieve stabilization in the early 1990s, with an emphasis on reducing the level of inflation, it created an artificially high exchange rate for the Kyrgyz *som*. The result was an unfavorable balance of payments problem and reliance on international financial agencies (foreign credits and loans) to maintain the economy. Although the Paris Club eased Kyrgyzstan's debt burden in March 2002, its external debt still exceeds \$2 billion, about 93 percent of its GDP. Furthermore, over \$190 million of this debt is owed to Russia. The major donors for Kyrgyzstan's external debt are the World Bank and the IMF, accounting for over \$750 million of the country's debt.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), *EBRD Transition Report 2003*

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Olcott (2005), 41-2.

<sup>79</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Strategy for the Kyrgyz Republic* (16 Nov 2004), 1.

The economic road ahead for Kyrgyzstan remains uncertain. The country's biggest challenge is the reduction of poverty, which is especially acute in the southern population. Furthermore, its reform process continues. The country introduced wide-reaching agricultural reforms designed to spark private sector participation, but growth in this sector is limited. Kyrgyzstan also took steps to boost foreign investment in its gold and hydroelectric industries, with varying degrees of success. Infrastructure reform also remains a priority. As indicated above in Table 5, this represents the least successful aspect of the country's transition process. Kyrgyzstan's infrastructure is characterized by a generally low quality of services and inefficiency, requiring extensive investment. Furthermore, the public sector has not been able to carry out upgrades and maintenance due to fiscal constraints. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) transition strategy for Kyrgyzstan recommends further reforms to advance commercialization of infrastructure services.<sup>80</sup> In the end, Kyrgyzstan economists view the future through a less than optimistic lens, failing a dramatic change in the investment and trade climate in the region. Though the dream of becoming a Central Asian Switzerland is gone, it still sees itself as the doorway to China, since Kyrgyzstan and China are the only WTO members in the region. However, accession of Russia and Kazakhstan to the WTO will circumvent this scenario, as the old Soviet rail system favors both of these countries over Kyrgyzstan.<sup>81</sup>

In general, economic development indicators provide intriguing data, but fail to sufficiently illuminate the reasons for democracy's failure in Kyrgyzstan. Economic indicators such as per capita GDP, poverty and inflation rates clearly point to a distressed economy, but the pace of economic reforms puts the country on track to achieve a fully market-oriented economy, which provides the best hope for recovery and growth of a middle class and civil society in the country. Furthermore, comparison of Kyrgyzstan's economic indicators with other developing countries highlights the fact that these economic factors are not necessarily causal with respect to democracy. Mongolia and

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<sup>80</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Strategy for the Kyrgyz Republic* (16 Nov 2004), 25-6.

<sup>81</sup> Olcott (2005), 110.

Moldova, for instance, are also economically distressed but have slightly better records with respect to democracy.

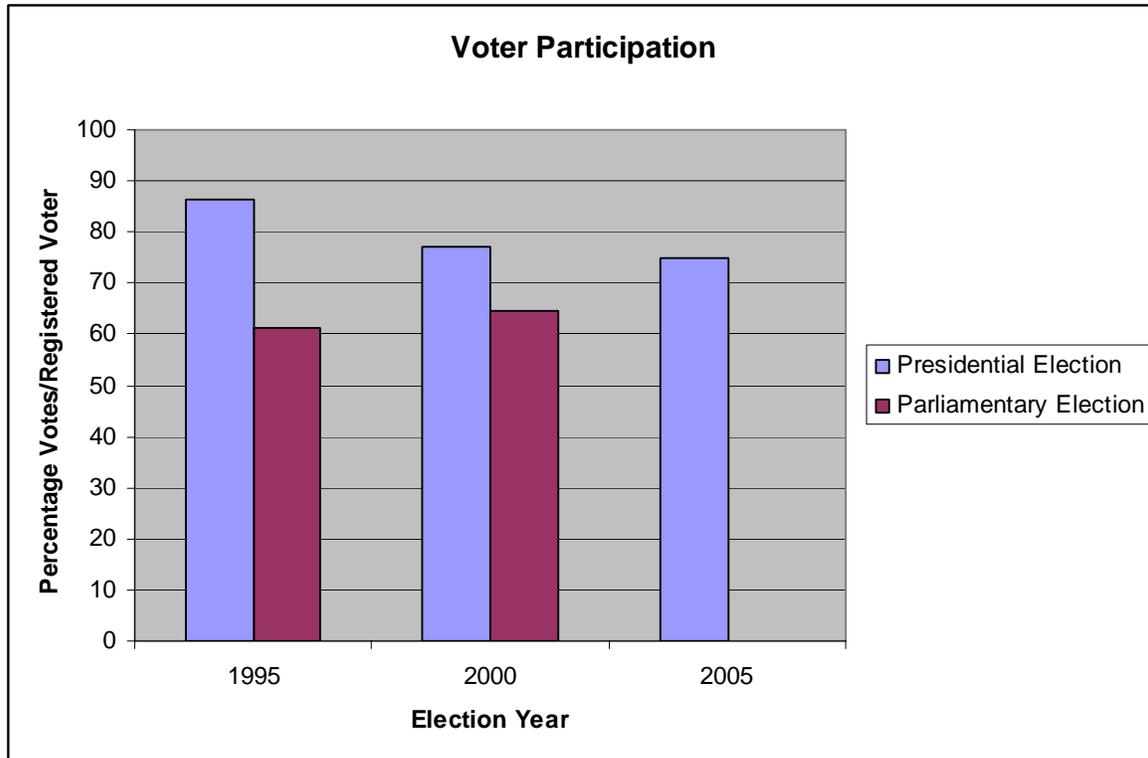
## **2. Societal Attitudes and Civil Society**

Coupled with economic performance, prospects for democracy are also intimately linked to societal attitudes and beliefs as well as the emergence and development of civil society. This analysis will focus on attitudes about democracy, and the interaction between the state and civil society in Kyrgyzstan.

Voter participation and societal attitudes toward democracy are two key indicators of the structural foundation for democracy, especially in emerging democracies. In Kyrgyzstan, the voting trend indicates strong popular support for democratic ideals. Voter participation figures for Kyrgyzstan's presidential and parliamentary elections are presented in Figure 2 below and show strong participation across the board, though this may be a hold-over from mandatory voter participation laws in the Soviet Union. More importantly, studies on societal attitudes toward democracy are also relatively positive. In his study on societal views about democracy in Kyrgyzstan, Richard Rose found that relatively strong support for democratic ideals and democratic governance cut across religious and socioeconomic lines. Social divisions within society had the strongest influence on support for democracy in his study. For example, 53 percent of the minimally educated Kyrgyz supported democracy, while 69 percent of the higher educated supported it.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Richard Rose, "How Muslims View Democracy: Evidence from Central Asia", *Journal of Democracy*, 13, no. 4 (Oct 2002), 109.



**Figure 5. Kyrgyzstan Voter Participation Trends.<sup>83</sup>**

Civil Society is also a key factor in determining democracy's chance for birth and survival. Indeed, Robert Putnam postulated that even non-political organizations in civil society are vital for democracy because they build social capital, trust and shared values.<sup>84</sup> Like most post-communist states, Kyrgyzstan embarked upon independence without a strong civil society. Nevertheless, today's Kyrgyzstan boasts one of the most vibrant civil societies in the entire region. The general perception of civil society in Central Asia is that its development is hampered by traditions such as deference to authority, kinship-based allegiances and Islam. Furthermore, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kyrgyzstan are perceived as existing only at the initiative and expense of the West. In her in-depth analysis of civil society in Kyrgyzstan, Kelly McMann rebuts these misperceptions.<sup>85</sup> Instead, she notes that the dominant influences

<sup>83</sup> Center on Democratic Performance, *Elections Results Archive*, <http://cdp.binghamton.edu/era/countries/kyr.html> (Jun 06).

<sup>84</sup> Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 185.

<sup>85</sup> Kelly McMann, "The Civic Realm in Kyrgyzstan, Soviet Economic Legacies and Activists'

on civil society in Kyrgyzstan are Soviet economic legacies and economic underdevelopment. Party-state ownership of municipal buildings results in civic organizations looking to the state for office space and facilities. Furthermore, the country's dire economic conditions translate into less opportunity for developing alternative resources. In the end, however, civic leaders' desire for state assistance, she argues, bodes well for Kyrgyzstan. Cooperation between NGOs and governments tends to foster political and economic development. The challenge is for the civic organizations to convince the government of the importance of cooperation while maintaining their independence from the state. There is ample evidence, however, of the growing influence of Kyrgyzstan's civic realm. The For Reforms coalition, comprising roughly 20 political parties and NGOs, organized a mass protest on May 27, 2006 to call for accelerated reforms.<sup>86</sup>

#### **E. CONCLUSION**

In the end, what does this analysis reveal? Conventional wisdom dictates that the transition from communism to democracy must begin with economic reform in order to build a foundation for democratic reforms. Indeed, most post-Soviet states embarked on economic reforms in tandem with the introduction of democratic institutions. Initially, Kyrgyzstan followed this pattern as well. The election of Akayev, a reform-minded academic, was accompanied by market-oriented economic reforms and the promise of democratic reforms. However, several factors combined to derail this plan as Akayev established an autocratic regime. The influence of external actors failed to push Akayev aggressively enough to force him further down the path toward democratic reform. The United States, in particular, failed to ensure that development aid was concretely tied to progress on reform. Furthermore, it is clear that U.S. security concerns in the post-September 11 world put democracy building as a secondary priority behind fighting terrorism in the region, a fact easily discerned by leaders in the region, including Akayev. Furthermore, the impact of other external actors, such as Uzbekistan and Russia, was also

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Expectations", in *The Transformation of Central Asia*, ed. Pauline Luong (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 213-45.

<sup>86</sup> Elena Chadova, "Kyrgyzstan's Leaders Face Pressure from Multiple Sources", Eurasianet, 26 May 06, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav052606.shtml> (May 06).

relatively inconsequential in terms of Akayev's choice to abandon democratic reforms. The real driving force for Akayev was the combination of clan politics and the rampant culture of corruption within the government. The consolidation of clan politics helped stabilize a manipulated form of democracy, with Akayev as the main broker of the dominant clan. Additionally, the fledgling civil society and middle class in Kyrgyzstan was simply incapable of mounting a concerted opposition effort against government resources. The old cliché that absolute power corrupts absolutely seems appropriate in describing Akayev's abandonment of his ideals with respect to democracy.

Analysis of structural factors produces a complex set of results. Although the country has made significant progress toward a market-oriented economy, economic underdevelopment and poverty remain. This certainly stifles the development of a middle class segment in the country, but it also hampers the development of a fully independent civil society. Together, these two factors provide a synergy that enabled Akayev to smother the development of democracy with little resistance from the public. Nevertheless, an embryonic civil society does exist in Kyrgyzstan, with growing influence and the ability to organize mass demonstrations. Furthermore, overall support for democracy remains fairly strong within society, cutting across religious and socio-economic lines. Also, Islam remains a non-factor in Kyrgyzstan's political system and has had no detrimental effect on democracy. The secularization of Kyrgyz society is largely due to a lasting Soviet legacy and Central Asian traditions, making it difficult for political Islam to establish a strong foothold. The bottom line is that economic and structural indicators alone do not adequately explain democracy's failure, but they certainly enabled Akayev to have a freer hand in concentrating power in the executive branch.

On a positive note, democracy does seem to be just around the corner in Kyrgyzstan as opposition parties are still active and civil dissatisfaction with the regime continues to mount. Of course, this seems to have been the case since Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991; and many could argue that nothing has really changed. Autocratic rule remains entrenched and the regime continues to manipulate electoral campaigns by barring and/or jailing opposition candidates. The only real hope for democratic reforms

seems to be further development of the middle class segment of society and international pressure to reform electoral procedures and tackle the massive corruption at all levels of government. This holds the promise for more effective civic society and, subsequently, more public pressure on the government to institute real political reforms. The November 2006 protests in Kyrgyzstan over the delayed drafting of constitutional reforms have the potential to help transition the country toward more democratic governance. The question remains, however, whether the forces pushing for constitutional change can overcome the entrenched forces of clan politics and corruption.

How does this analysis relate to U.S. policy options? In general, assisting or promoting democracy requires patience, a long-term commitment and a multi-dimensional approach. There are various avenues which can help bolster democracy in a country, but it is important to acknowledge that these methods are not without pitfalls. Working to build-up civil society, for instance, does not guarantee that the result will favor democracy. Some civil associations may even hinder democracy if they place their own interests over political freedom. The majority of democracy assistance programs focus on procedural democracy, working to ensure free and fair electoral processes.<sup>87</sup> These also can prove lacking, as states may hold frequent and fair elections but suppress civil society and restrict freedom of information. Finally, economic development aid may help build a middle class, but does not necessarily empower that segment of society to demand political reforms. If the United States and now NATO can gain a more secure environment in Afghanistan, the impetus for embracing regimes in Central Asia without regard to their progress on democratic reform will begin to wane. Then and only then can the United States exert real pressure on Kyrgyzstan's leadership and link development aid to performance on political reform.

The key to promoting democracy in Central Asia is deciding between the various methods available and balancing those with limited resources. The 2006 U.S. National Security Strategy acknowledges the fact that each of the five Central Asian Republics requires a unique foreign policy approach. It also affirms that these policies form part of

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<sup>87</sup> Kevin Quigley, "Political Scientists and Assisting Democracy: Too Tenuous Links", *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 30, no. 3 (Sep 1997), 565.

a larger strategy for the entire region: “we must pursue those elements simultaneously: promoting effective democracies and the expansion of free-market reforms, diversifying global sources of energy, and enhancing security and winning the War on Terror.”<sup>88</sup> Moreover, President Bush also acknowledged that every state moves at its own pace toward a democratic form of governance.

Every nation that travels the road to freedom moves at a different pace, and the democracies they build will reflect their own culture and traditions. But the destination is the same: a free society where people live at peace with each other and at peace with the world.<sup>89</sup>

In Kyrgyzstan, the EBRD and the IMF are aiding in economic development, which will hopefully strengthen civil society and the middle class. The major focus for fostering democratic reforms should be on procedural aspects. Kyrgyz civic and opposition groups are active and demanding reforms, but the government continues to corrupt the electoral process. It will continue to pursue this course until pressured by outside forces or internal opposition to allow greater procedural democracy. However, the Bakiyev administration has not yet consolidated its power base in Kyrgyzstan and should be much more susceptible to external pressure from the United States. Furthermore, the United States can afford to be bolder in trying to build political opposition in the country in the hope of furthering the path toward democracy. There are already signs that the United States is working to destabilize Bakiyev’s government.<sup>90</sup> This type of bold pressure is exactly what is needed to force reform to the surface. However, it must be carefully gauged and tangible moves toward political reforms must be quickly followed with substantial amounts of development aid.

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<sup>88</sup> U.S. National Security Strategy (March 2006), 40.

<sup>89</sup> President George W. Bush, Transcript of Speech to the United Nations, September 19, 2006. <http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/09/19/bush.transcript/index.html> (Sep 2006).

<sup>90</sup> M. Bhadrakumar, “Kyrgyzstan Edging Toward More Turmoil”, *Asia Times Online*, April 27, 2006, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central\\_Asia/HD27Ag01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/HD27Ag01.html) (Sep 06).

## **IV. UZBEKISTAN CASE STUDY**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

While Kyrgyzstan may have presented a high degree of hope for democracy as the states in Central Asia gained independence, the same cannot be said of Uzbekistan. Islam Karimov, the country's first and only president since the Soviet Union collapsed, was a communist technocrat by background and was handpicked by Gorbachev to lead the Uzbek republic during the perestroika era. In the last years of Soviet rule, Uzbekistan was beginning to show signs of an emerging culture of political participation. Two pro-democracy political parties, Birlik (Unity) and Erk (Liberty), began to emerge as opposition parties to Karimov's Popular Democratic Party, which was essentially a renamed version of the former Communist Party. Karimov was overwhelmingly elected the country's first president in 1991 against an opposition candidate from Erk. After eliminating reform-minded rivals within his own party in early 1992 with the dismissal of onetime vice president Mirsaidov, Karimov forced the leaders of Birlik and Erk into exile and effectively destroyed the parties. Since then, only pro-government opposition parties (as oxymoronic as that may sound) have been allowed to compete in elections. Moreover, Karimov completely banned religion-based political parties for fear of rising Islamic fundamentalism in the country. Throughout the 1990s, Karimov continued to repress political opposition and basically shun Western criticism of the country's non-existent reform efforts.

The new geopolitical environment in Central Asia after September 11 brought renewed hope for reform in Uzbekistan. However, despite increased aid and diplomatic efforts, the country remained resistant to overtures from the West and Karimov remained recalcitrant about the repression of all political opposition. The expulsion of U.S. troops from the base at Karshi-Kanabad in 2005 following U.S. criticism of the Andijon massacre is a clear indication that Karimov is in no hurry to implement meaningful democratic reforms or submit to U.S. influence.

Karimov is clearly the major obstacle to democracy in Uzbekistan. This chapter will examine the major factors that have influenced Karimov's moves to consolidate

power in Uzbekistan and stymie political reforms. To accomplish this, the research will examine the role of external actors as well as the role of domestic influences, to include political Islam, corruption and clan politics. Furthermore, it is important to analyze the structural foundations (economic development, class structure, and civil society) in the country insofar as they relate to the public's ability to demand and/or embrace reform.

Data for this case study will include both primary and secondary sources. Economic development and class structure indicators will be derived primarily from World Bank and IMF sources. Assessments of civil society in Uzbekistan will rely primarily on academic analysis. Analysis of the factors shaping Karimov's drive to concentrate power and suppress political reform will be based largely on academic analysis. The end goal of this chapter is to identify the major forces that influenced Uzbekistan's path toward autocracy and posit alternative mechanisms that the United States might consider to bring about reform.

## **B. STATE OF DEMOCRACY**

Democracy is evaluated by examining Freedom House, Polity IV, and Bertelsmann Transformation Index metrics. These provide a comprehensive evaluation of the country's democratic institutions, the degree to which power is shared within the government, and the extent of political representation by the people. Uzbekistan's ratings below clearly illustrate that the country's political institutions are largely subject to the interests of the ruling elite.

### **1. Freedom House Ratings**

The 2006 Freedom House ratings for Uzbekistan are presented in Table 9. Scores are based on a checklist of ten political rights questions and fifteen civil liberties questions. Ratings range from 1 to 7 (1 indicates the highest degree of freedom and 7 the least). Uzbekistan received the worst possible ratings. The historical Freedom House ratings for Uzbekistan are presented in Figure 6.

Political Rights Rating	Civil Rights Rating	Overall Rating
7	7	Not Free

Table 9. 2005 Freedom House Ratings for Uzbekistan.<sup>91</sup>

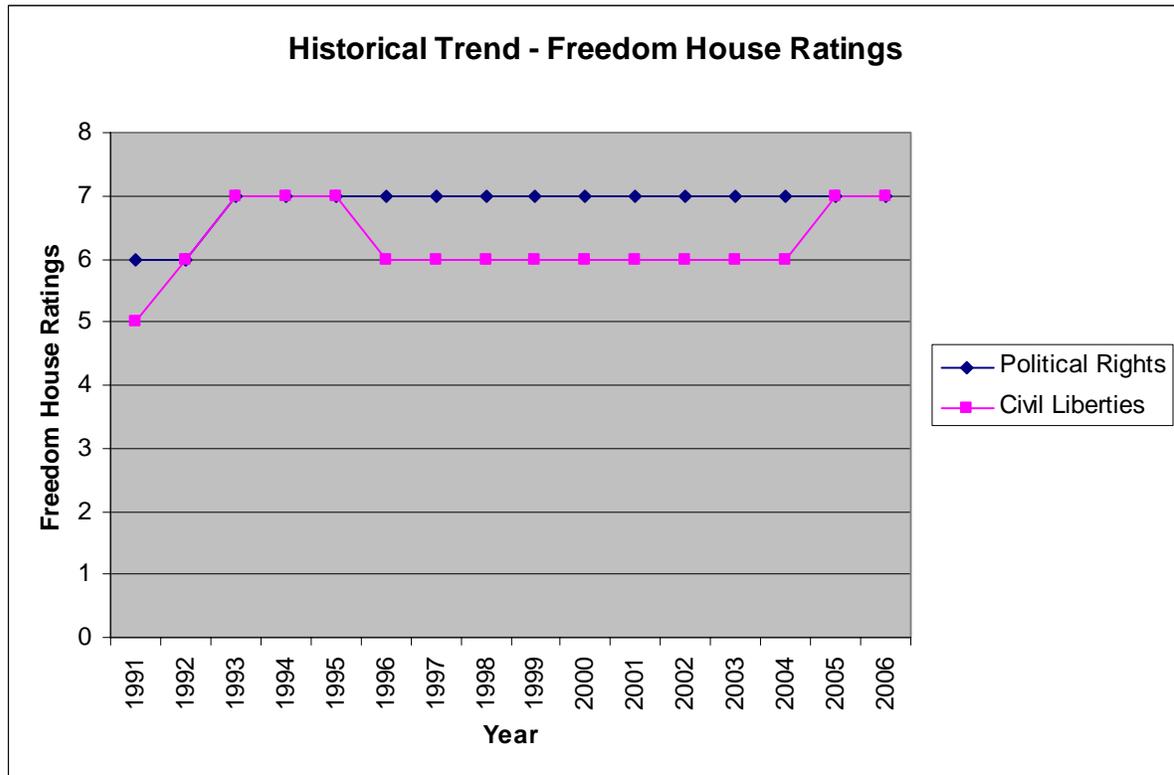


Figure 6. Historic Trend of Freedom House Ratings for Uzbekistan.<sup>92</sup>

## 2. Polity IV Metrics

Polity IV indicators for Uzbekistan are outlined in Table 10 and the historical trend for the country’s polity scores is presented in Figure 7. Again, the variables are defined as follows:

- Polity: Ranges from -10 to 10 (-10 = high autocracy; 10 = high democracy)
- Democ: Ranges from 0 to 10. Openness of political institutions (0 = low; 10 = high)

<sup>91</sup> Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2006- Uzbekistan”, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2006&country=7086> (Nov 2006).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

- Autoc: Ranges from 0 to 10. Closedness of political institutions (0 = low; 10 = high).

Polity	DEMOC	AUTOC
-9	0	9

Table 10. 2003 Polity IV Indicators – Uzbekistan.<sup>93</sup>

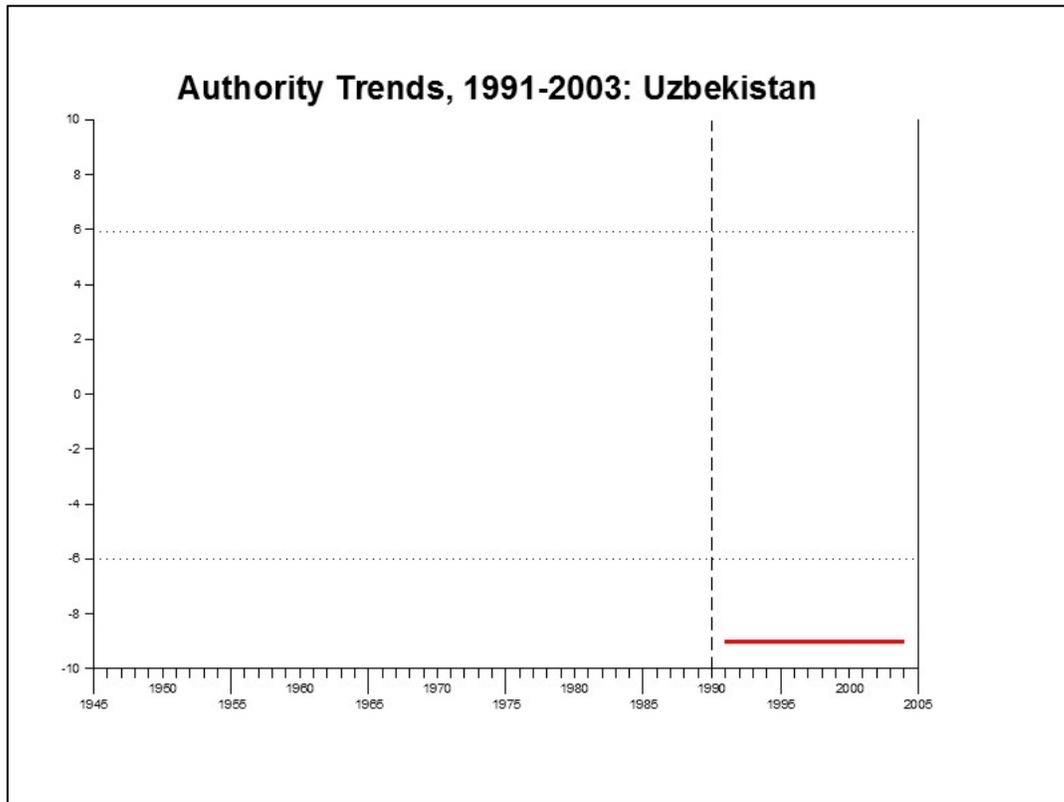


Figure 7. Annual Polity Scores for Uzbekistan.<sup>94</sup>

### 3. Bertelsmann Transformation Index

Finally, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) is a global ranking system that evaluates a country's progress toward a market-based democracy in terms of political and economic performance. The BTI reports two separate indices: democracy status and market economy status. A higher score indicates more progress toward a market-based

<sup>93</sup> Polity IV Project Country Report – Uzbekistan, [http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/polity/country\\_reports/Uzb1.htm](http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/polity/country_reports/Uzb1.htm) (Aug 2006).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

democracy. The democracy status score is composed of five criteria evaluated on scale of one to ten:

- Stateness: clarity about the nation’s existence as a state, with adequately differentiated power structures
- Political participation: the extent to which the population has political freedoms and determines who rules the country
- Rule of law: the extent to which state powers check and balance each other and ensure civil liberties
- Stability of democratic institutions: the capability of democratic institutions to perform and the extent to which they are accepted
- Political and social integration: the existence of stable patterns of representation for mediating between society and the state.

Uzbekistan’s overall 2006 score for BTI democracy status is 3.13, which places it in the category of “autocracy”. This score is virtually unchanged from the previous score reported in 2003 (3.0). The breakdown for these scores is presented in Table 3 below and clearly indicates that the country is making very little progress toward democratic rule.

<b>BTI Year</b>	<b>Stateness</b>	<b>Political Participation</b>	<b>Rule of Law</b>	<b>Stability of Democratic Institutions</b>	<b>Political and Social Integration</b>
<b>2003</b>	8.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	2.0
<b>2006</b>	6.8	1.8	2.6	2.0	2.7

**Table 11. BTI Democracy Status Indicators for Uzbekistan – 2003 and 2006.**<sup>95</sup>

#### **4. Trend Toward Autocracy**

The combination of Freedom House and Polity IV indicators underscores the fact that Uzbekistan is ruled by a completely authoritarian regime. In relative terms, the situation can get no worse. The initial period of independence showed flickering hopes for democracy, as evident by Freedom House’s “Partly Free” rating of 1991. This hope, however, was extinguished by 1992; and the country has remained consistently authoritarian ever since. The country’s constitution provides for a presidential system

<sup>95</sup> Bertelsmann Transformation Index, “Bertelsmann Transformation Atlas”, <http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/atlas.0.html?&L=1> (Aug 2006).

with a formal separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. In practice, though, the executive branch under Karimov dominates all aspects of political life. It controls and represses civil society as well as all opposition movements. Moreover, opposition parties are systematically denied registration and freedom of the media is nonexistent. The constant Polity IV score of -9 is indicative of these facts. However, to analyze the factors that influenced the development of this polity in Uzbekistan, it is necessary to examine the transition process from communism in more detail.

### **C. TRANSITOLOGY APPROACH – THE POLITICAL TRANSITION FROM COMMUNISM**

A transitology analysis of Uzbekistan's transition from communism to the current regime is not nearly as complicated as analyzing the transition in Kyrgyzstan. The key factors that shaped Karimov's concentration of power in the early 1990s are essentially domestic in nature, though external factors played an auxiliary role as well. This section will analyze the impact of external pressures as well as domestic political dynamics on Karimov's steady repression of political opposition and civil society. To do so, however, it is first necessary to summarize the key events since independence that shaped the nature of Karimov's hold on power.

#### **1. From Communism to Autocracy**

Uzbekistan's transition from communism began on December 29, 1991 when over 98 percent of the country's electorate approved a referendum on independence. In a parallel vote, Islam Karimov was elected the country's first president with an overwhelming 88 percent of the vote. Karimov's only opposition in this election was Mohammed Solih from the Erk Party, who challenged the results and charged election fraud. After the election, Solih was arrested briefly and then released; he fled Uzbekistan and went into exile in 1992. The Erk had a strong pan-Turkist tendency and was able to reach agreement with the country's leadership and register as a political party.<sup>96</sup> The main opposition group, Birlik, was the first political grouping in the country outside of

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<sup>96</sup> Shireen Hunter, *Central Asia Since Independence* (London: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1996), 51.

communism. It was founded in November 1988 with the initial goal of reviving the Uzbek language and culture while seeking greater sovereignty (not independence) for Uzbekistan. However, it was barred from the election and later refused legal registration as a political party. Religious-based political parties were banned entirely out of fear of militant, political Islam.

Karimov's administration proposed a new constitution in September 1992 that outlined a system in which the president would act as head of state and of the government and be popularly elected to a five-year term. It also limited the president to no more than two consecutive terms and called disbandment of the existing parliament in favor of a smaller legislature. Parliament approved the new constitution unanimously in December 1992. Further constitutional revision in May 1993 also served to concentrate power in the executive branch. Karimov reorganized the cabinet of ministers, combining the posts of president and chair of the cabinet of ministers.

Elections for the first post-Soviet legislature, the Oly Majlis, were held in December 1994 and January 1995 and marked a further consolidation of Karimov's hold on power. Only one other party besides Karimov's People's Democratic Party (PDP), the Fatherland Progress, was allowed to compete in the elections. Fatherland Progress was composed of members of the urban-based intelligentsia and the business community who were essentially supportive of Karimov and the PDP. Regional political organizations were also allowed to submit candidate nominations. The results were telling in terms of Karimov's control of the institution. Almost 95 percent of the deputies in the new legislature were former Communist Party members and candidates nominated by regional political organizations won nearly two-thirds of the seats. On its second day in session, the Oly Majlis voted to conduct a popular referendum to extend Karimov's term of office. In March 1995 the country approved this referendum (allegedly by 99 percent) and extended Karimov's first five-year term in office until 2000.

A series of bombings in Tashkent in February 1999 brought about even more repression of political opposition. The regime blamed the explosions on radical Islamic groups and Karimov's administration began eliminating potential and actual religious

opposition, arresting over 7,000 “religious extremists”.<sup>97</sup> In the December 1999 parliamentary election, five parties competed; and the election was strongly criticized by international election observers. All of these parties supported Karimov and differed little in their political platforms. In the January 2000 presidential election, Karimov defeated his only opponent, Abdulhasiz Dzhahalov – a Marxist history professor, garnering 92 percent of the vote.

Karimov continued to consolidate power and repress political opposition in the post-September 11 climate. In January 2002 voters overwhelmingly (allegedly by 91 percent) approved a nationwide referendum to extend the presidential term from five to seven years, taking Karimov’s term to 2007. Voters also approved a constitutional change to replace the 250-member, single chamber Oly Majlis with a bicameral parliament consisting of a 120-seat lower house (with members elected by popular vote for five-year terms) and a 100-member upper house (with 84 representatives elected by regional councils and 16 appointed by the president). International observers reported serious concerns about the validity of the referendum. Finally, in April 2003 the parliament approved legislation that provided former presidents with immunity from prosecution. Elections for the lower house of the new parliament were held in December 2004. Only the five pro-government parties were allowed to participate and opposition groups (including the Erk and Birlik) boycotted the election. OSCE observers criticized the voting as falling significantly short of international standards for democratic elections.<sup>98</sup>

## **2. External Pressures**

Olcott characterizes the political system of Uzbekistan as “fundamentally different from that of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and much less responsive to influence from the outside.”<sup>99</sup> But how and why has Karimov remained so resistant to external influence? Moreover, with respect to political reform, what was the real extent of

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<sup>97</sup> Olcott (2005), 49.

<sup>98</sup> Freedom House, “Country Report – Uzbekistan (2006)”, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2006&country=7086> (Sep 2006).

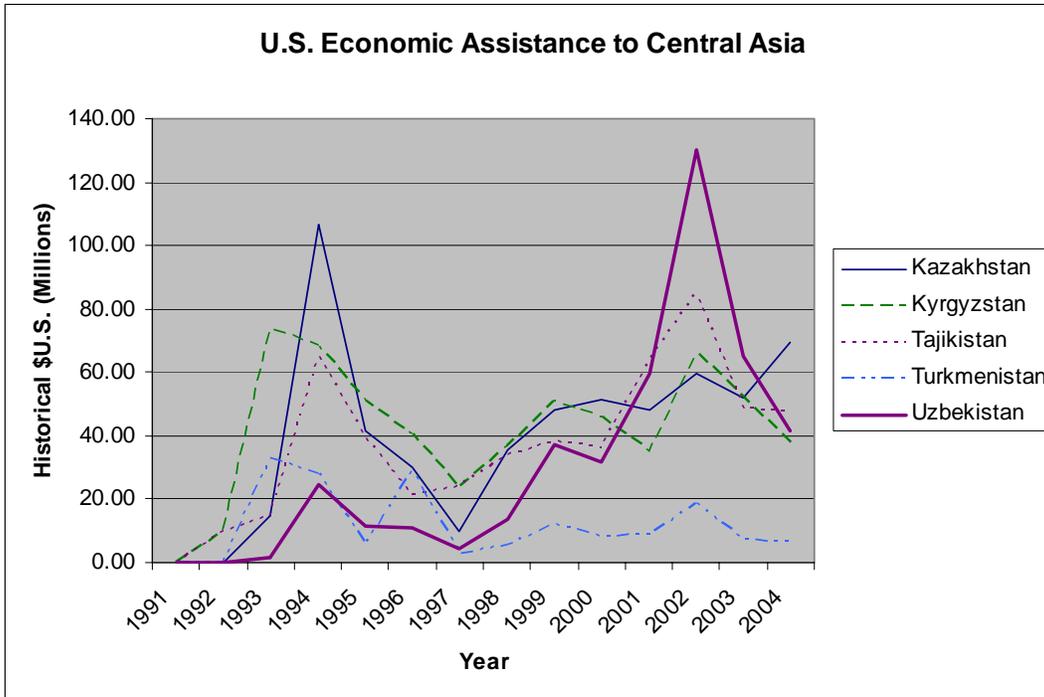
<sup>99</sup> Olcott (2005), 148.

external pressure on Karimov's regime, both before and after September 11? This section will examine these questions in detail.

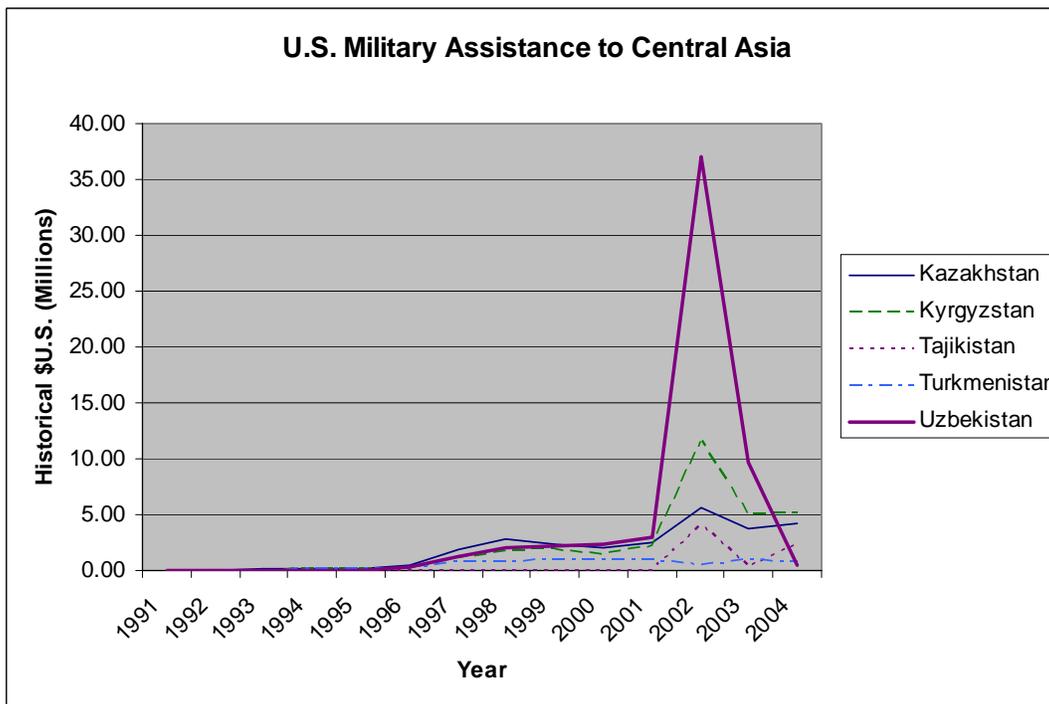
Prior to September 11, economic and military aid from the United States was relatively limited due to concerns over Uzbekistan's human rights record and lack of progress toward democratic reform. Three interrelated factors made successive U.S. administrations wary of supporting Uzbekistan: the absence of a strategy of democratic reforms and economic liberalization, the perceived absence of geostrategic assets, and the priority given to relations with Russia.<sup>100</sup> The impact of these factors can be seen in the amount of aid received by the different Central Asian states before and after the September 11 attacks. Before September 11, despite Uzbekistan's position as the most populated and militarily powerful state in Central Asia, the United States gave the country little priority. Figure 8 below tracks total U.S. economic assistance to Central Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan received the lion's share of economic assistance among Central Asian states prior to the September 11 attacks. In fact, even Tajikistan (and sometimes Turkmenistan) garnered more economic assistance than Uzbekistan in the pre-September 11 environment. The story was much the same with respect to U.S. military aid to the region. As depicted in Figure 9, the entire region warranted very little attention in terms of military aid prior to the September 11 attacks. Uzbekistan warranted even less attention. The country gained a dominant position relative to the other countries only after the Global War on Terror began.

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<sup>100</sup> Shahram Akbarzadeh, *Uzbekistan and the United States* (London: Zed Books, 2005), 56-7.



**Figure 8. U.S. Economic Assistance to Central Asia – 1991 to 2004.**<sup>101</sup>



**Figure 9. U.S. Total Military Assistance to Central Asia – 1991 to 2004.**<sup>102</sup>

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) began providing assistance to Uzbekistan in 1992. Since then, it has committed more than \$300 million in programs to support Uzbekistan's democratic institutions, social sector, and economic growth. These are typically implemented in the form of contracts and grants by local and international organizations.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, in 1994 the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), through a cooperative agreement with USAID, established an office in Kazakhstan to provide democracy assistance in Central Asia. In 1999 USAID and IFES refocused their efforts across the region by targeting NGOs and more open media outlets. However, political concerns over the lack of progress on reform influenced the amount of assistance provided to Uzbekistan. As illustrated in Figure 10, USAID funding to Uzbekistan tended to lag behind that to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, except for a brief window of increased funding related to the War on Terror.

Development assistance from international institutions to Uzbekistan has also been limited due to Karimov's resistance to implementing reforms. After the country gained independence, Karimov insisted that his country not rush into drastic privatization and reform programs, instead opting to proceed slowly and try to find Uzbekistan's own unique model for reform and development. Karimov was hesitant to borrow from international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, fearing it would undermine the country's independence. The country did not seek IMF credits until financial difficulties forced Karimov's hand in 1994.<sup>104</sup> In 1991 the EU established a credit line of \$1.626 billion for the former Soviet republics to help restructure their economic systems. Uzbekistan did not sign an agreement with the EU to receive its share of this credit line until 1994. As of December 2005, the EBRD had signed investments in Uzbekistan totaling €599 million, helping to generate another €877 million from other sources.<sup>105</sup> However, the EBRD is currently restricting its investments to private sector

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<sup>101</sup> USAID, "U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants [Greenbook]", [www.usaid.org](http://www.usaid.org) (Oct 2006).

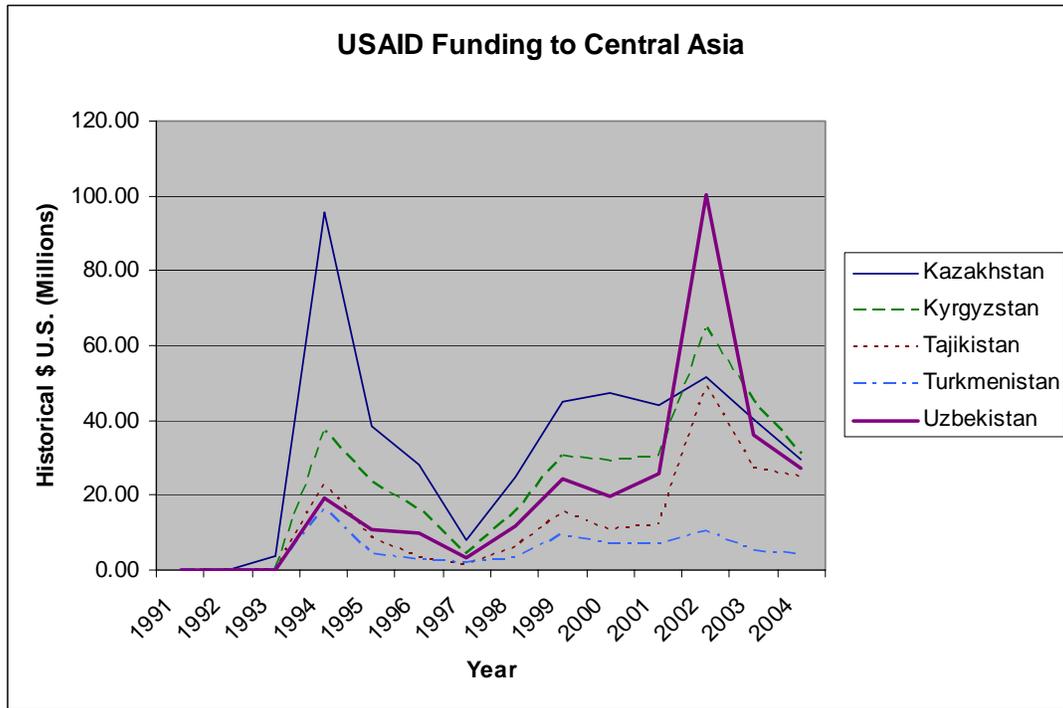
<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> USAID, <http://centralasia.usaid.gov/page.php?page=article-5> (Sep 2006).

<sup>104</sup> Hunter (1996), 80-1.

<sup>105</sup> EBRD, "EBRD Country Factsheet – Uzbekistan", <http://www.ebrd.com/pubs/factsheet/country/uzbek.pdf> (Sep 2006).

activities due to the country’s lack of commitment to promoting democracy and market reforms.



**Figure 10. Total USAID Funding to Central Asia – 1991 to 2004.**<sup>106</sup>

Karimov’s obsession with maintaining Uzbekistan’s independence from outside influence also limited the amount of cooperation with Russia. This was especially the case in the first years of independence, as Uzbekistan refused to participate in Russian-backed regional organizations. Karimov was evidently conscious of the perceived threat of what he termed “great-power chauvinism and aggressive nationalism” with respect to Russia’s proclivity to strong arm influence in its near abroad.<sup>107</sup> Of course, relations with the West cooled in the post September 11 environment as Europe and the United States became increasingly critical of the country’s human rights record. This has resulted in a notable drift back toward Russia; a drift that has become increasingly evident since the 2005 Andijon events. In November 2005, Uzbekistan and Russia signed a pact of

<sup>106</sup> USAID, “U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants [Greenbook]”, [www.usaid.org](http://www.usaid.org) (Sep 2006).

<sup>107</sup> Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 29-9.

allegiance that created a framework for each to come to the aid of the other in response to perceived threats to peace or acts of aggression.<sup>108</sup>

Figures 8, 9 and 10 above highlight the huge increases in U.S. funding to Uzbekistan after the September 11 attacks. These increases, coupled with greater cooperation between the United States and Uzbekistan in the War on Terror, undoubtedly sparked hope for greater U.S. influence in the country. Olcott points to a “honeymoon period of about six months, in late 2001 to early 2002, when observers hoped that increased U.S. engagement might lead to much-needed political reforms.”<sup>109</sup> Indeed, Karimov’s March 2002 visit to Washington resulted in five signed agreements between the two countries and committed the Uzbek government to support democratic reforms.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, any moves toward reform were token, at best; and by late 2003 the U.S. State Department was formally condemning Uzbekistan for its human rights record.<sup>111</sup> In analyzing Uzbekistan’s foreign policy relations between Russia, the United States and other countries in the region, Abdullaev concludes that the Uzbekistan believed that its relationship with the United States did not produce the expected dividends in terms of financial aid. More importantly, in spite of Karimov’s token concessions, the United States continued to pressure him on human rights and legalization of political opposition. Furthermore, the perceived resolution of the Islamic threat from Afghanistan made Karimov less inclined to make concessions to either Russia or the United States, resulting in a general trend toward isolation.<sup>112</sup> Karimov’s crackdown on political dissent in Andijon in May 2005 was simply a continuation of this trend; as was the U.S. criticism.

The bottom line is that, after sharp increases in development and military aid to Uzbekistan in the wake of September 11, the United States still commanded little in

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<sup>108</sup> International Crisis Group, “Asia Briefing Number 45 - Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul”, Crisis Group Briefing Papers (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 6 Feb 2006), 8.

<sup>109</sup> Olcott (2005), 149.

<sup>110</sup> U.S. State Department, “Factsheet on United States-Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership, March 12, 2002”, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2002/8736.htm> (Sep 2006).

<sup>111</sup> Peter Slevin, “U.S. Gives Uzbekistan Failing Grade on Rights”, *Washington Post*, January 11, 2004, A18.

<sup>112</sup> Evgeniy Abdullaev, “Uzbekistan: Between Traditionalism and Westernization”, in *Central Asia at the End of Transition*, ed. Boris Rumer (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 271-3.

terms of influence for political reforms in the country. Olcott points out that, unlike the situation in Kyrgyzstan, the elite support base for political reforms in Uzbekistan was very limited, and the country simply did not have the capacity to absorb large increases in foreign aid targeted at political projects.<sup>113</sup> This leads, of course, to the next line of questioning. Since Karimov was so resistant to external influence, what were the major domestic factors that influenced his political choices? That is the subject of the next subsection.

## **2. Domestic Politics**

Domestic political concerns and their influence on Karimov's decisions to stifle political reform in Uzbekistan can be broken down into several major factors. Interestingly, these factors both resemble and, at the same time, represent a departure from those that influenced Akayev in Kyrgyzstan. This section will outline the influence of clan politics, the pervasive role of corruption, and the role of political Islam in Karimov's consolidation of executive power.

### ***a. The Impact of Clan Politics***

As stated earlier, national identity is a critical factor in Rustow's transitology model of the transition to democracy; it is the only requisite condition. Uzbekistan is one of the most homogeneous countries in Central Asia, with 80 percent of the population comprised of Uzbeks. The remaining 20 percent includes Russians (5.5 percent), Tajiks (5 percent), Kazakhs (3 percent), and others.<sup>114</sup> As in most of the Central Asian states, however, national identity is complicated by the interplay of clan and ethnic/regional identities. Pride in ethnicity for Uzbeks stands at 51 percent, significantly higher than figures for other ethnic groups in the country - Kazakhs (39.1%), Tartars (25%), Russians (19.8%), and Tajiks (14.3%).<sup>115</sup> However, most Uzbeks link their self-identity to their local origin, which can essentially be broken down into four major clan strongholds – Tashkent, the Ferghana Valley, Samarkand and Bukhara (comprising a

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<sup>113</sup> Olcott (2005), 149

<sup>114</sup> CIA World Factbook (1996 estimates), <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/uz.html> (Sep 2006).

<sup>115</sup> Timur Dadabaev, "Post-Soviet Realities of Society in Uzbekistan", *Central Asian Survey*, 23, no. 2, (2004) 144.

single group), and Khorezm.<sup>116</sup> Ironically, Karimov himself acknowledges the debilitating effect of clan politics on the country's progress toward democracy.<sup>117</sup>

Clan politics is a major influencing factor in domestic political decisions in Uzbekistan. The power struggle between the major clans played a key role in Karimov's rise to power shortly before the Soviet Union's collapse. As Collins points out, from 1985 to 1988 Gorbachev pursued a policy to purge the Central Asian republics of clan-based corruption and wide-scale clan abuses. Thousands of individuals were removed from positions of power in the Kyrgyz and Uzbek republics. In Uzbekistan, Sharof Rashidov was dismissed, removing his extensive personal clan network, based around the city of Jizzakh. His replacement, Inamzhan Usmonkhodjaev, began promoting his own Ferghana Valley clan and, as a result, was also removed on Gorbachev's orders. Rafiq Nishanov was installed, but since he was viewed as too subservient to Moscow, Uzbek clan elites aimed to regain control. This led to informal negotiations among leaders of the major Uzbek clans and their subsequent support for Karimov, since he "was not entrenched in any one network but rather was a balancer and legitimate broker."<sup>118</sup> The interplay between Karimov and Uzbekistan's major clans is analogous to that of Akayev in Kyrgyzstan – he serves as a power broker. All three conditions that give rise to regime durability via pacts between clan were present in Uzbekistan as the country became independent: 1) a shared external threat that induced cooperation (Afghanistan), 2) a balance of power among the major clan factions and 3) a legitimate broker assumed the role of maintaining the pact.<sup>119</sup>

Though Karimov does exercise authoritarian control in Uzbekistan, the reality is that power is essentially divided among several major clans, which are territorial in origin. The most powerful of these clans is the Samarkand; Karimov and several key government leaders are native Samarkand. Other government leaders from the

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<sup>116</sup> Timur Dadabaev, "Post-Soviet Realities of Society in Uzbekistan", *Central Asian Survey*, 23, no. 2, (2004) 148.

<sup>117</sup> Karimov (1998), 65.

<sup>118</sup> Collins (2004), 240-1.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

Samarkand included the former Minister of Finance, Jamshed Saifiddinov and the former minister of Justice, Alisher Mardiyev. Of the numerous other clans, the Tashkent clan is the second most dominant. Other important clans include the Ferghana Valley clan and the Khorezm clan (based in the north Uzbekistan cities of Khiva and Urgench).<sup>120</sup> Muhammad Salih, Karimov's opponent in the 1991 election, was from the Khorezm clan. After driving Salih into exile, Karimov severely repressed his clan. Members of the Tashkent clan, however, are firmly integrated into the administrative system and positions in the scientific and cultural arenas. Timur Alimov, for instance, was the head of the Tashkent clan and is the State Councilor for Human Resources. Other prominent Tashkent clan figures include the Minister of Internal Affairs, Zakir Almatov and the Minister of Defense, Kadyr Gulomov.<sup>121</sup> It is the struggle between the Tashkent and Samarkand clans that determines the political situation in Uzbekistan and, as Collins argues, limits Karimov's ability to consolidate his authoritarian regime.<sup>122</sup> This dichotomy between Karimov and the clan structure is evidenced most clearly in the legislature. Though Karimov sought to decrease clan representation in the parliament by creating five pro-government parties, he failed to achieve his goal. In the 1999 parliamentary elections, these five parties altogether garnered only 49 percent of the seats; clan notables with no party affiliation won the rest. Furthermore, the three major clan networks continually vie for control of a greater share of the country's natural resources: gold, oil and gas, and cotton. In essence, the relationship between Karimov and Uzbekistan's clan structure is symbiotic. While the clans are dependent on his patronage for access to resources and wealth, Karimov is dependent on the clans for support. The interests of the clans and Karimov coincide with the need to maintain this dichotomy, which essentially rules out any demand for political reform. There is, however, growing evidence that Karimov is slowly beginning to weaken the clans' hold.

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<sup>120</sup> Mikhail Degtiar, "Cotton, Clans and Currency", *Transitions Online* (Oct 2, 2000), <http://www.tol.cz/look/TOLrus/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=15&NrSection=1&NrArticle=307> (Sep 2006).

<sup>121</sup> Eurasian Home Analytical Resource, "Uzbekistan Country Profile", <http://www.eurasianhome.org/xml/t/databases.xml?lang=en&nic=databases&country=191&pid=103> (Sep 2006).

<sup>122</sup> Collins (2004), 251.

He weakened his own Samarkand clan in 2004 by dismissing Ismail Dzhurabekov (leader of the Samarkand clan) as his presidential advisor under criminal allegations. In his post as presidential advisor, Dzhurabekov “hired and fired regional leaders and orchestrated promotions and resignations of ministers of the cabinet and heads of security structures. It was noticed that it was representatives of the Tashkent clan that were usually fired and replaced with men from Samarkand.”<sup>123</sup> Dzhurabekov’s loss was a serious blow to Samarkand power. At the same time, however, Karimov weakened the powerful Tashkent clan by dismissing a onetime leader of the clan, Timur Alimov, as a presidential advisor. He then forced the resignation of another Tashkent clan leader, Defense Minister Qodir Gulomov, in November 2005 under charges of corruption and abuse of office. As former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, noted: “There are a lot of people who used to be in the oligarchy....There were a couple of hundred very wealthy families who really benefited from the system. That circle has got smaller and smaller and smaller as Karimov narrows it down toward his immediate family.”<sup>124</sup>

***b. The Influence of Corruption***

Clan politics and corruption are virtually inseparable in Uzbekistan. Corruption refers to abusing public office for private gain. Despite evidence that Karimov is consolidating power, clan structures continue to dominate the governmental structure in the country. Gorbachev’s attempt in the late 1980s to break the hold of the clans in the wake of massive corruption schemes is telling. Over 200 Uzbek officials were implicated in these massive bribery schemes related to the country’s cotton industry. The case involved huge sums of money and gold, countless offshore accounts and multiple assassinations. After independence, the new government in Uzbekistan released all of those officials previously convicted of corruption in the cotton corruption

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<sup>123</sup> Arkady Dubnov, “Preparations for the Power Changes Begin in Uzbekistan”, *Ferghana.ru Information Agency* (Feb 17, 2005), <http://enews.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=820> (Sep 2006).

<sup>124</sup> “Uzbekistan: Karimov Appears to Have Political Clans Firmly in Hand” *Radio Free Europe Newswire*, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/08/970cdfca-adb7-4c9c-856b-526cef00273b.html> (Sep 2006).

scheme. Moreover, the majority of them eventually received high-level government posts after gaining their freedom.<sup>125</sup>

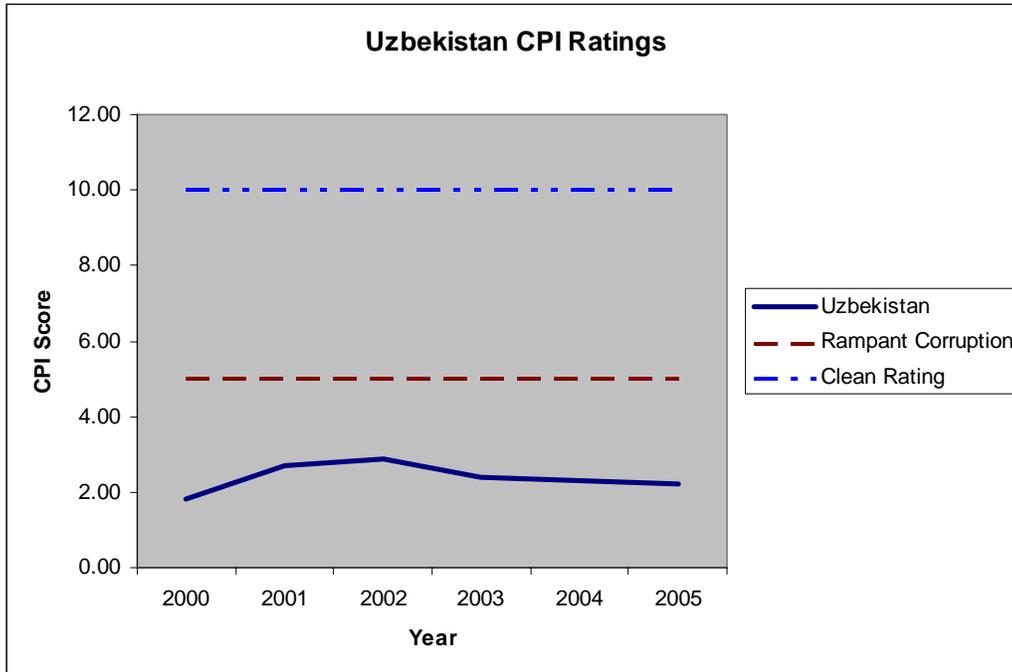
Because of the close link between clan structures and corruption, it is difficult to isolate the impact of the latter on Karimov's decisions to repress political opposition. There is ample evidence of the pervasiveness of corruption in the country. In a public opinion survey conducted in 2001 among young people in Uzbekistan, 100 percent of the respondents cited "extortion on the part of customs officials" as a problem obstructing the development of transboundary businesses.<sup>126</sup> Again, data from Transparency International highlights this point (refer to Table 4). While a CPI score of less than 3 represents rampant corruption, Uzbekistan scored a 2005 rating of 2.2, ranking the country 143<sup>rd</sup> of the 159 countries surveyed; only Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were more corrupt in the region.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, the country's historical ratings indicate that Karimov is fighting a losing battle against corruption, if indeed he is fighting one. As illustrated in Figure 11 below, the level of corruption in Uzbekistan continues to worsen.

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<sup>125</sup> Degtiar (2000)

<sup>126</sup> Survey cited in Abdullaev (2005), 271.

<sup>127</sup> Transparency International, [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2006](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2006) (Nov 2006).



**Figure 11. Historical CPI Ratings for Uzbekistan.**<sup>128</sup>

There is considerable evidence, however, that as Karimov works to consolidate power he is also securing access to the country’s resources for himself and his family. Karimov tries to shield his personal life from public view. However, details of the divorce of his daughter, Gulnara Karimova, from the U.S.-Uzbek Mansur Maqsudi underscore the family’s wealth. Karimova reportedly received, as part of the asset division from a New Jersey court, over \$11 million in cash and foreign investments as well as business holdings valued at \$60 million.<sup>129</sup> In early 2003, “the government’s monopoly Internet service provider, UzPAK, blocked several Russia-based news Web sites after they posted articles by an anonymous analyst about government corruption in Karimov’s inner circle.”<sup>130</sup> Essentially, Karimov cloaks many of his political maneuvers with an anti-corruption stance. The dismissals of prominent clan members mentioned above were accompanied by allegations or criminal charges of corruption and abuse of

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> “Islam Karimov – Worldbeaters Column”, *New Internationalist* (Sep 2004), Issue 371.

<sup>130</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, “Attacks on the Press – 2003”, <http://www.cpj.org/attacks03/europe03/uzbek.html> (Sep 2006).

office. Karimov pays considerable lip service to his anti-corruption stance and his rhetoric sounds convincing: “at a political level corruption implies an explicit resistance to the ongoing reforms and objectively combines the interests of the obsolete administrative-command system...”<sup>131</sup> There is little evidence, however, that this rhetoric is much more than simply a disguise for political power plays against powerful clan interests that represent rivals to his own power. As Abdullaev notes, “from the onset of this decade, a corruption pyramid has taken on its final form.”<sup>132</sup> The base of this pyramid is comprised of small and medium-sized business owners who make payments to government representatives. The pinnacle of the pyramid, of course, is increasingly dominated by members of Karimov’s inner circle.

*c. Political Islam and Uzbekistan Politics*

It is almost impossible to discuss democratic reform in Uzbekistan without considering the role of political Islam in the country. Just as he consistently speaks out against rampant corruption and its debilitating effect on the country’s progress, Karimov has always been consistent in targeting radical Islam as a threat to Uzbekistan’s security. As he wrote in 1998, “modern history has accumulated many facts to testify that these extremely radical manifestations give rise to serious conflicts and contradictions, and threaten stability and security.”<sup>133</sup> At the same time, however, Karimov has also been consistent in displaying public reverence for Islam and identifying his regime with the Islamic heritage of Uzbekistan. On the eve of the presidential elections of 1991, for instance, Karimov declared in an interview that “Islam is the conscience, the essence of life, the very life of our countrymen.”<sup>134</sup> Still, Karimov’s continued repression of independent, political Islam and his overarching fear of Islamic fundamentalism raises important questions about Islam’s impact on Uzbekistan politics. Did the threat of Islamic fundamentalism cause Karimov to concentrate power out of a need to maintain security? Or is it the other way around: did Karimov’s repression of political opposition

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<sup>131</sup> Karimov (1998), 53.

<sup>132</sup> Abdullaev (2005), 271.

<sup>133</sup> Karimov (1998), 19-20.

<sup>134</sup> Akbarzadeh (2005), 18.

cause an increase in Islamic fundamentalism in the country? This section will address these questions by examining the nature of political Islam at the beginning of Uzbekistan independence and then analyzing the impact of Karimov's policies in light of different theories on the emergence of radical Islam.

Uzbekistan is about 88 percent Muslim and approximately 9 percent Russian Orthodox.<sup>135</sup> As in most of Central Asia, Uzbekistan's Muslim population is predominantly Sunni, adhering to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, the largest of the four schools of Islam and generally the most moderate and open to new ideas. More importantly, the liberal tradition of the Hanafi school allowed for the incorporation of many of the pre-Islamic traditions of Central Asia.<sup>136</sup> Some norms of tribal and customary law in Central Asian culture, for instance, were recognized as legal and in accordance with Islamic rules. Of all the Central Asian states, however, Uzbekistan is the most uniformly religious. The densely populated Ferghana Valley, particularly the cities of Namangan and Andijon, has traditionally been a stronghold of Islamic activism and various religious trends, to include Wahhabism. Additionally, the Karakalpak region in the northern part of the country has been one of the main centers of Sufi activism.<sup>137</sup> As a result, despite the legacy of Tsarist and Soviet repression of Islam in Central Asia, and particularly Uzbekistan, it has remained an integral part of Uzbek society and culture.

In tracing the roots of fundamentalist Islamic thought in Uzbekistan, it is important to first characterize the meaning of the term. Fundamentalism refers to the tendencies in Islam that advocate a return to the origins of the religion and the purging of extraneous features. The term *Salafi* is often used to identify these fundamentalists. Within Salifism, there are militant jihadist (like Bin Laden) and nonjihadist divisions. Pro-Salafi ideas first came to Uzbekistan by way of immigrants from the Middle East prior to World War II. The first Salafi teachers appeared in the region between 1950 and 1970 but they were relatively isolated and had little influence on the population. The

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<sup>135</sup> CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/uz.html> (Sep 2006).

<sup>136</sup> Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam & Politics in Central Asia* (New York:: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 80.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

period stretching into the late 1980s, however, witnessed relatively less repressive Soviet rule and the Salafis were able to attract more recruits and teach them in underground madrasas. At this time, however, they did not call for direct struggle against the Soviet regime. At the close of the 1980s, the Salafis began to promote a more puritanical and conservative form of Islam. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Salafis began to organize in the Ferghana Valley, calling for adoption of the Shari'a and the creation of an Islamic state. "They continued, however, to advocate dialogue with the authorities, and in general they eschewed violence during this period."<sup>138</sup>

Despite efforts by the Uzbek authorities to keep a tight lid on opposition political activity, the formation of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Uzbekistan (IRPU) in January 1991 marked the first political platform based on Islamic foundations. However, the organization failed to put forward a cohesive political platform and continually advocated ambiguous and sometimes even contradictory goals. While the IRPU called for social justice and the formation of an Islamic state, it was considerably less clear about how this state would operate and how far it would extend.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, in February 1991 the Uzbek regime adopted a new law that banned religiously-inspired political parties. In the end, the IRPU maintained a nationalist trajectory and worked with the secular Birlik party to challenge Karimov's election in 1991, hoping to overturn the ban on religious parties after the country gained independence. The IRPU failed to gain a substantial foothold among the populace and never mounted a serious challenge to Karimov's authority.<sup>140</sup>

The year 1992 marked the real turning point for the nature of political Islam in Uzbekistan. In December 1991, fundamentalist Muslims and members of other Islamic groups such as the IRPU, Towba and Andolat participated in a demonstration in the Ferghana Valley city of Namangan, capturing a communist party building with the intention of establishing an Islamic center. While Karimov was still trying to consolidate

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<sup>138</sup> Vitaly Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia – Between Pen and Rifle* (New York: Roman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005) 27-28.

<sup>139</sup> Akbarzadeh (2005) 26.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

his hold on the country, radical Islamists in the Ferghana Valley managed to mobilize popular support. They replaced traditional imams who remained loyal to the government and the cities of Namangan, Margelan and Andijon became strongholds for militant Islamic support. Muslim clerics, like Imam Abdul Ahad in Namangan, began to call for the rule of Shari'a law as a solution to the inequality, despotism and general disorder related to the Karimov regime.<sup>141</sup> The protest in Namangan rapidly transformed into a Muslim self-government movement. Adolat, for instance, was comprised mostly of young men organized into neighborhood militias, which started providing security in the streets and controlling prices at the markets. After taking over the building in Namangan, however, the protestors demanded that the government proclaim the establishment of an Islamic state and implement the Shari'a as the country's sole legal system. In February 1992, Adolat, the IRPU and the two major secular opposition parties (Erk and Birlik) asked Karimov to initiate negotiations with the fundamentalists in Namangan. With the help of loyal law enforcement agencies, he instead cracked down on the Islamists. All foreign missionaries were expelled from the country and leaders of the Islamic and secular opposition were arrested. Since this crackdown, Islamic fundamentalism in the country has remained underground. The government has arrested thousands because of their religious beliefs and deadly bombings in February 1999 and March 2004 were attributed to militant Islamic groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which claims a non-violent philosophy, also remains active in Uzbekistan despite constant government persecution. Members publish and disseminated dozens of books, circulate leaflets and publish a journal.<sup>142</sup>

There is considerable evidence, however, that political Islam was relatively moderate in Uzbekistan when the country gained independence. A 1994 public opinion study showed a rapidly growing interest in Islam in the country, but also indicated that Uzbeks had limited personal understanding of the religion's main precepts. Furthermore, it suggested that Islamic belief was weakest among the younger generations

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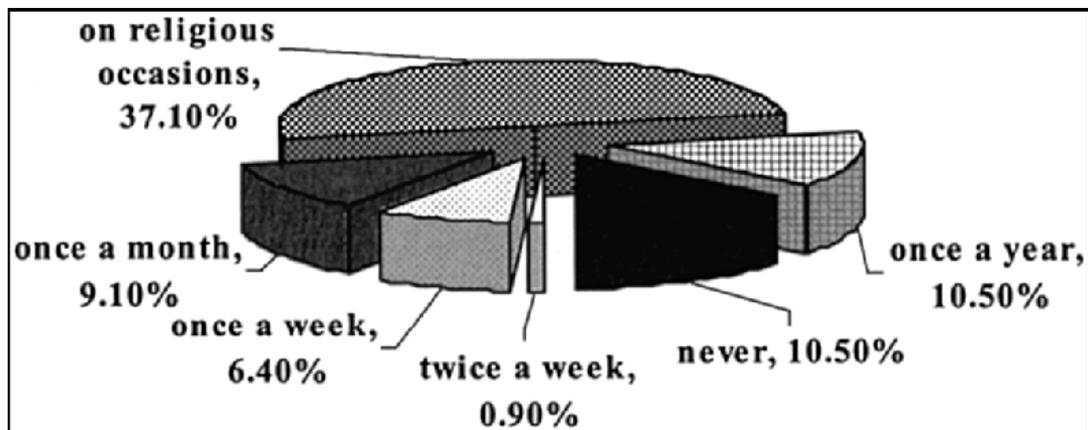
<sup>141</sup> Naumkin (2005) 58.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 153-7.

and few respondents favored a form of Islam that would be politically active.<sup>143</sup>

Dadabaev's 2003 study of Uzbekistan underscored the fact that secularism still has a firm hold on the country (Figure 12). Equally telling is the fact that studies and policy papers on Uzbekistan in the early 1990s reflected this general, moderate perception of Islam in the country. Graham Fuller's report for the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, written after the 1992 crackdown, underscores the point:

There is no doubt that Islam has grown in Uzbekistan... Yet there is no reason to assume that fundamentalism is about to take over: increased Islamic activism is not synonymous with fundamentalism. Islam could greatly increase its clout in Uzbekistan and elsewhere, however, if economic conditions should sharply deteriorate, if government policies are generally unpopular and repressive... [and] if "official Islam" in the republic will not be allowed to enjoy a status somewhat independent of the government and its policies."<sup>144</sup>



**Figure 12. Attendance of Religious Institutions in Uzbekistan - 2003.**<sup>145</sup>

The bottom line is that Islamic fundamentalism became a security threat in Uzbekistan because of the repressive measures taken by Karimov. Naumkin cites numerous theoretical approaches to explain the emergence of militant Islam.<sup>146</sup> Among

<sup>143</sup> *Library of Congress Country Study – Uzbekistan* (March 1996), <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/uztoc.html> (Sep 2006).

<sup>144</sup> Graham Fuller, *Central Asia – The New Geopolitics* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1992) 25.

<sup>145</sup> Dadabaev (2004), 150.

<sup>146</sup> Naumkin (2005), 21-9.

these approaches, those that stress socioeconomic conditions and those stressing political deprivation are certainly applicable to Uzbekistan. While it is a fact that Salifism and Wahhabism were exported to Central Asia, it is also true that conditions in Uzbekistan have presented a fertile breeding ground. In many respects, Karimov consistently sees Islamic extremism behind all political opposition in Uzbekistan precisely because he has forced any opposition to use Islam and its underground structure (dating to Soviet-era religious policies) to express dissatisfaction with the regime. Furthermore, the socioeconomic conditions in the country accentuate the problem, providing despair and legitimate grievances against the government. Interestingly, Karimov's recent acknowledgement that the May 2005 Andijon uprising was related to economic turmoil and not simply Muslim extremists is a curious change.<sup>147</sup> It remains to be seen, however, whether this translates into more progress on economic reform.

### **3. Summary**

A transitology analysis of Uzbekistan's transition from communist rule, by necessity, focuses almost exclusively on Islam Karimov. More specifically, it focuses on the factors that influenced his decisions to concentrate power in the presidency. Following the initial voter referendum that brought Karimov to power in 1991, he aggressively repressed all political opposition and has continued to consolidate power. Furthermore, Karimov's regime successfully resisted external pressure, particularly from the United States, to implement political reform. The fact of the matter is that there has never been an elite support base for political reform in Uzbekistan since Karimov disbanded legitimate opposition parties. As a result, the amount of leverage the United States could bring to bear has been limited because Uzbekistan lacked the capacity to absorb large increases in U.S. foreign assistance that was designed specifically for political reform.<sup>148</sup>

The causal forces that explain Karimov's drive toward dictatorship are exclusively related to domestic political factors. Chief among these are clan politics and

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<sup>147</sup> Andolat Najimova and Daniel Kimmage, "Uzbekistan: Karimov Reappraises Andijon", *Radio Free Europe Newline*, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/10/6592DE25-D67C-45D3-88DE-A61F1B0CDDDB4.html> (Sep 2006).

<sup>148</sup> Olcott (2005) 149.

rampant, pervasive corruption. The influence of political Islam is somewhat complicated, but this analysis indicates that, initially, Islam was not a causal factor in Karimov's repression of political opposition. Religious-oriented political parties were banned by the country's constitution before the uprising at Namanga in late 1991. Moreover, the Islamic movement up to that point had been relatively moderate in its aims and was willing to work with the government to meet its objectives. It was after this uprising, however, that Karimov banned all political opposition parties. Militant political Islam was more the result of Karimov's repression than the other way around.

Of course, to date there seems to have been little public demand for political reform in the country, though there is evidence that this is starting to change. Uzbeks are becoming increasingly vocal about political and economic themes. As Olcott points out, "All this suggests that the citizens of Uzbekistan will continue to press for political change, even if force is used by the state to try to control them."<sup>149</sup> This brings to the forefront, however, the issue of Uzbekistan's structural foundation for democracy. Is this foundation sufficient to support democratic reform? As questions swirl regarding succession issues surrounding Karimov, the question remains as to whether the country has progressed enough, structurally, to support democratic reform. The following section will address this side of the debate.

#### **D. ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURAL FACTORS**

This section will analyze the structural variables that are often referred to as the foundation for democracy. Integral to this analysis is a closer look at Uzbekistan's economic development as well as its progress toward a market economy. Additionally, education levels, urbanization and income distribution are important because they relate directly to class structure and the development of a middle class. Finally, civic institutions are essential in terms of generating support for the eventual emergence of opposition parties and democracy.

##### **1. Economic Development Factors**

As mentioned earlier, there is a complex interconnection between politics and economics and, in general, it is impossible to liberalize the economy without liberalizing

public life as well. Therefore, it is necessary to examine Uzbekistan’s economic development as well as its reform process. This subsection will examine the overall state of Uzbekistan’s economic development as well as its progress toward liberal reform.

Economic indicators for Uzbekistan (2005), with comparisons to other states in the region, are presented in Table 12 below. While GDP, unemployment and poverty figures relate directly to economic development, the GINI Index, based on a comparison between actual and uniform income distribution, quantifies the disparity between the upper and lower classes in society. Taken together, these figures present a relatively dismal view of the country’s economy. Though economic growth seems respectable, the reliability of this data is suspect. The U.S. Department of State explicitly rejects Uzbekistan’s figures on economic growth. For instance, Uzbekistan reported a growth rate of 4.2 percent in 2003; the U.S. Department of State claimed that the increase was only 0.3 percent.<sup>150</sup> The country also has high underemployment, almost a third of the population lives below the poverty line (even that figure is subject to debate), and inflation remains problematic at over 20 percent.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, the GINI index points to an income distribution level that is roughly equal to that of neighboring Kyrgyzstan.

Country	GDP Growth	Per Capita GDP	Unemployment	GINI Index	Population Below Poverty
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>\$1,800</b>	<b>0.7%*</b>	<b>26.8</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	2%	\$2,100	18%	29	40%
<b>Tajikistan</b>	8.0%	\$1,200	12%	34.7	64%
<b>Mongolia</b>	6.2%	\$1,900	6.7%	44	36.1%

\* Note: Official statistic, but underemployment is reportedly 20%.

**Table 12. Uzbekistan Economic Indicators.**<sup>152</sup>

Human development indicators are presented in Table 13 and represent a broad view of the country’s standard of living in comparison with other states in the region.

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<sup>149</sup> Olcott (2005) 149.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>151</sup> IMF Database, [www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org) (Sep 2006).

<sup>152</sup> CIA World Factbook, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/> (Sep 2006).

The Human Development index is a composite index that combines measurements in life expectancy, education indicators, and standard of living figures. The education index measures a country's relative achievement in adult literacy as well as enrollment in primary, secondary and tertiary education. In general, though the overall Human Development Index is higher than other states in the region, there is a slight disparity with respect to Uzbek access to higher education. Like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan is categorized as medium level of development by the Human Development Report. However, the country's state of economic development is only part of a broader picture related to how the country's is transitioning from the command economy of the Soviet era toward a more liberal, market-oriented one.

The initial period of independence brought unprecedented economic losses for all of the Soviet-bloc countries. Uzbekistan, however, experienced the smallest contraction in GDP among the group. By 1997, the country's output was about 85 percent of its 1991 level, significantly better than the 60 percent average for Russia, the Baltics, and other former Soviet states.<sup>153</sup> The major reasons for this trend were the country's low degree of initial industrialization, its reliance on cotton production, and its self-sufficiency in energy.<sup>154</sup> Other factors included the country's closed economy, which enabled it to sustain production even in non-competitive enterprises, as well as its institutional stability.<sup>155</sup> Many of the Soviet-era institutions were preserved and only slightly modified. After the initial downturn phase of the transition period, however, these institutions served to limit economic development. Though Uzbekistan avoided much of the initial pain of rapid transformation, by 2003 it had fallen behind all of the other CIS countries with respect to economic growth (See Figure 13).

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<sup>153</sup> Jeromin Zettelmeyer, "The Uzbek Growth Puzzle", *IMF Staff Papers*, 46, no. 3 (1999) 274.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 287-8.

<sup>155</sup> Eshref Trushin and Eskender Trushin, "Institutional Barriers to Economic Development in Uzbekistan", in *Central Asia at the End of Transition*, ed. Boris Rumer (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 340.

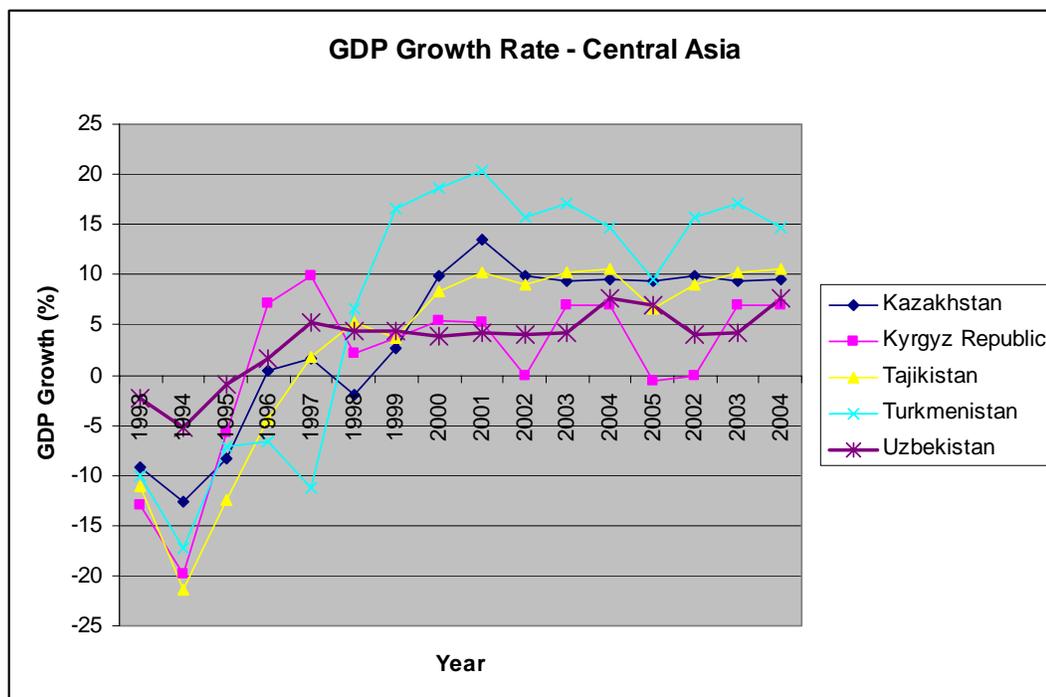


Figure 13. Central Asia GDP Growth Rates After Independence.<sup>156</sup>

Country	2005 Human Development Index	Combined Gross Enrollment Tertiary, Secondary and Primary	Education Index	Urbanization
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	<b>0.709</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>0.91</b>	<b>36.8%</b>
United States	0.939	92%	0.97	79.8%
Russia	0.795	88%	0.95	73.3%
Tajikistan	0.652	73%	0.91	25%
Kyrgyzstan	<b>0.702</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>34.0%</b>
Mongolia	0.679	74%	0.90	46.1%

Table 13. Uzbekistan Living Standards Indicators.<sup>157</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Uzbekistan resisted serious economic reform following independence. Initially, the newly independent states all attempted to prevent sharp

<sup>156</sup> World Bank database, [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org) (Sep 2006).

<sup>157</sup> Human Development Report, *Human Development Report 2005*, 219-35.

declines in GDP, fight inflation, stabilize recently introduced national currencies and control political and social tensions. These initial economic reforms were, by necessity, aimed at stabilizing macroeconomic indicators.<sup>158</sup> In Uzbekistan, structural policies were aimed primarily at public investments targeted at substituting energy and industrial imports, coupled with an extensive system of transfers to the state-controlled industrial sector. The country continues to maintain communist-era state purchase and price control systems in its agricultural sector. Uzbek farmers, operating mainly on collective or communal farms, continue to work toward established production targets and receive deflated purchase prices from the state, which controls the export market. The end result is that Uzbekistan has one of the lowest ratings for its development and implementation of market reforms. Tables 14 and 15 below illustrate the country’s lack of commitment to the first and second state economic policy reforms, respectively. Scores in these tables are based on ratings from one to five, with five representing the most advanced level of reform. In almost all categories, only Turkmenistan ranks below Uzbekistan among Central Asian states.

Country	Trade Liberalization	Small Scale Privatization	Large Scale Privatization	Price Liberalization
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.7</b>
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	5.0	4.0	3.7	5.0
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	3.3	4.0	3.0	4.0
<b>Tajikistan</b>	3.3	4.0	2.3	3.7
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.7

**Table 14. First Stage Economic Reform Ratings – Central Asia 2005.**<sup>159</sup>

<sup>158</sup> Alma Raissova and Aluya Sartbayeva-Peleo, “From Rio to Johannesburg: Comparing Sustainable Development in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and The Kyrgyz Republic” in *In the Tracks of Tamerlane – Central Asia’s Path to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Daniel Burghart and Theresa Sabonis-Helf (Washington D.C., National Defense University, 2004) 247.

<sup>159</sup> Ron Sprout and Robyn Murphy, “Monitoring Country Progress in Eastern Europe and Eurasia”, *US AID Working Paper Series on the Transition Countries* (2006), No. 4, 19.

Country	Enterprise Governance	Competition Policy	Bank Reform	Capital Market Reform	Infrastructure Reform
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	1.7	1.7	1.7	2.0	1.7
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	2.0	2.0	2.3	2.0	1.7
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	2.0	2.0	3.0	2.3	2.3
<b>Tajikistan</b>	1.7	1.7	2.0	1.0	1.3
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

**Table 15. Second Stage Economic Reform Ratings – Central Asia 2005.**<sup>160</sup>

Several factors help explain the country's hesitancy to implement economic reforms, despite several agreements with the IMF and the World Bank. First and foremost among these is resistance from the country's elite. Olcott underscores this line of thinking, linking decisions on the pace of privatization and other reforms to the personal interests of Karimov, his inner circle and a small group of regional elite. Her point is well taken; the small group of elites that controls the country's export trade and benefit from the state's partial purchase of cotton and grain (at less than world market prices), continue to make vast fortunes on the transactions. Not surprisingly, they would have little interest in privatization or lifting price controls.<sup>161</sup> Moreover, state officials continue to think in terms of Soviet-era paradigms, linking economic development to increases in production. Additionally, there is real fear among the elite that reforming the Uzbek economy and privatizing key sectors will result in social instability and dramatic increases in unemployment. These fears are not necessarily unfounded, the EBRD estimates that implementation of a unified exchange rate could result in the loss of up to 250,000 jobs.<sup>162</sup> Another important factor is the role of the clan structure in the country's economic system. Clans, as an economic institution in Uzbekistan, "are inclined to engage in state capture and to distort state policy in order to create rents. These therefore

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<sup>160</sup> Ron Sprout and Robyn Murphy, "Monitoring Country Progress in Eastern Europe and Eurasia", *US AID Working Paper Series on the Transition Countries* (2006), No. 4, 20.

<sup>161</sup> Olcott (2005) 120.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

constitute important anti-reform forces.”<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, the country’s policies continue to hamper the development of small and medium-scale enterprises.

The bottom line is that Uzbekistan’s government continues to delay implementing real economic reform, mainly out of fear of causing social unrest. The reforms that have been initiated, moreover, are proving problematic in terms of actual implementation. On October 15, 2003 the country introduced the convertibility of the national currency (sum). On the surface, these are promising signs of transition to a market-based economy. However, the convertibility of the national currency was accompanied by raising trade barriers and tightening control of wholesale trading, which nullified many of the benefits of reforming the currency. Worse still, the level of corruption and state-sponsored entry barriers to the market (in the forms of bribery for permits and licenses) continues to stifle the growth of small and medium-sized businesses. According to a 2003 study, for instance, 43 percent of these enterprises reported that they recently handed out bribes to government officials.<sup>164</sup>

In general, the country’s economic development path presents a puzzle. The regime has taken very small steps toward liberalization, but still maintains much of the Soviet-era control of the economy. What remains more important, however, is the population’s perception of the country’s economic system. This, in general, impacts the willingness and ability of the society to demand reform. The state continues to protect living standards by providing services to meet society’s basic needs (water, gas and electricity, etc.). Also, the overwhelming majority of Uzbekistan’s citizens live in private homes or privately-owned apartments; only about three percent of Uzbeks rent their apartment.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, there is increasing evidence that Uzbeks are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their economic outlook and their living conditions. Olcott notes that increasing public restiveness is linked to deteriorating economic conditions. Karimov’s recent admission that poor economic conditions contributed to the May 2005 Andijon uprising reinforces this point. Overall, limited numbers of Uzbekistan’s

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<sup>163</sup> Trushin et al. (2005) 360.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>165</sup> Dadabaev (2004) 152-3.

population classify their living standards as high. In the 20 to 29 year group, only 3.6 percent consider their living standard as high. The vast majority rate their standard of living as average.<sup>166</sup> More importantly, public criticism centers on the central government's failed economic policies; 46.5 percent completely distrust and 32.8 percent distrust the government on this issue.<sup>167</sup>

Though this economic data is complex and somewhat puzzling, the bottom line is that it is a mere backdrop to the Karimov regime's conscious decisions to centralize power. Economic indicators such as per capita GDP, poverty and inflation rates clearly point to a distressed economy, and the combination of corruption as well as the elite and clan power structure serve to limit the extent of economic reform. However, a closer look at the nature of civil society in the country will shed additional light on the prospects for democratic reform.

## **2. Societal Attitudes and the Development of Civil Society**

Along with economic performance, prospects for democratic reform are closely linked to societal attitudes and the emergence of civil society. Societal attitudes toward democratic ideals as well as the prevailing attitudes about the government are central to the prospects for reform. Civil Society refers to the set of institutions and organizations located between the state, the business community, and the family structure. It includes voluntary and non-profit organizations as well as political movements and other forms of societal engagement. This analysis will focus on the status of Uzbekistan's development of civil society, in spite of the government's active policies to prevent its emergence.

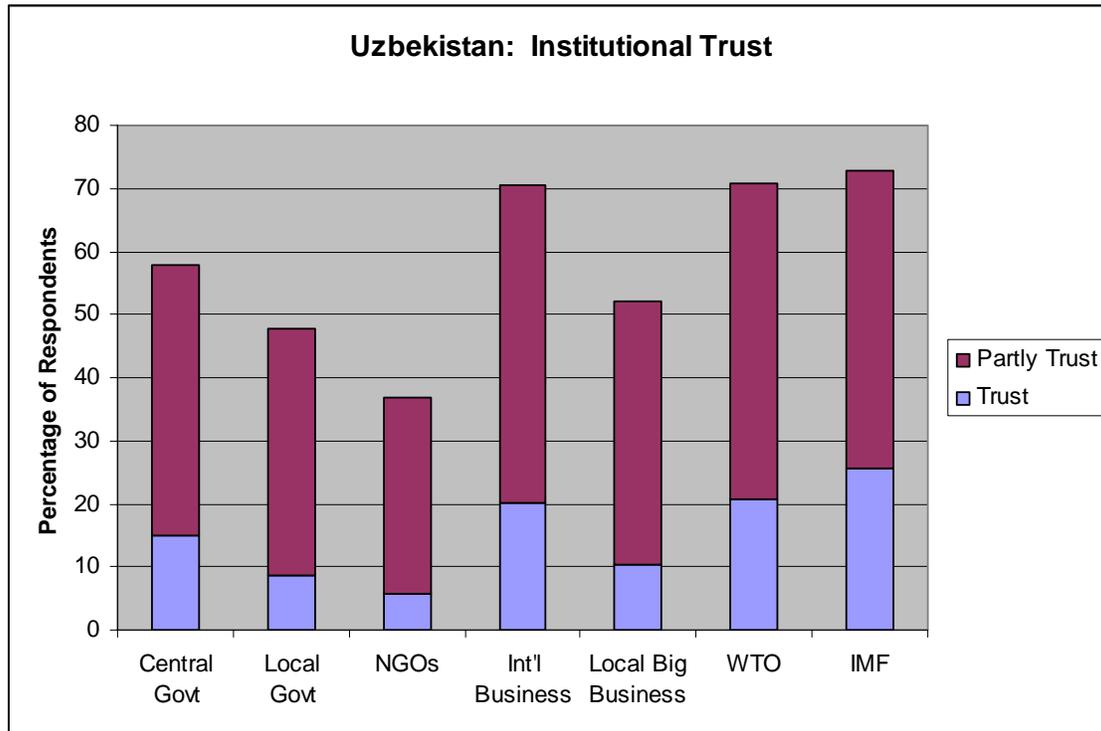
There are several indications that Uzbek society is reaching a crossroads. Growing dissatisfaction with the Karimov regime and its economic policies and frustration with the pervasiveness of corruption are fanning this dissatisfaction. In terms of the public's trust in institutions, the central government instills more trust than NGOs and local government, but falls behind international business and international institutions like the WTO and the IMF (see Figure 13). Considering the extent to which

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<sup>166</sup> Dadabaev (2004), 153.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 162.

Karimov has sought to limit the influence of international actors, these figures are striking.



**Figure 14. Uzbek Society and Institutional Trust.**<sup>168</sup>

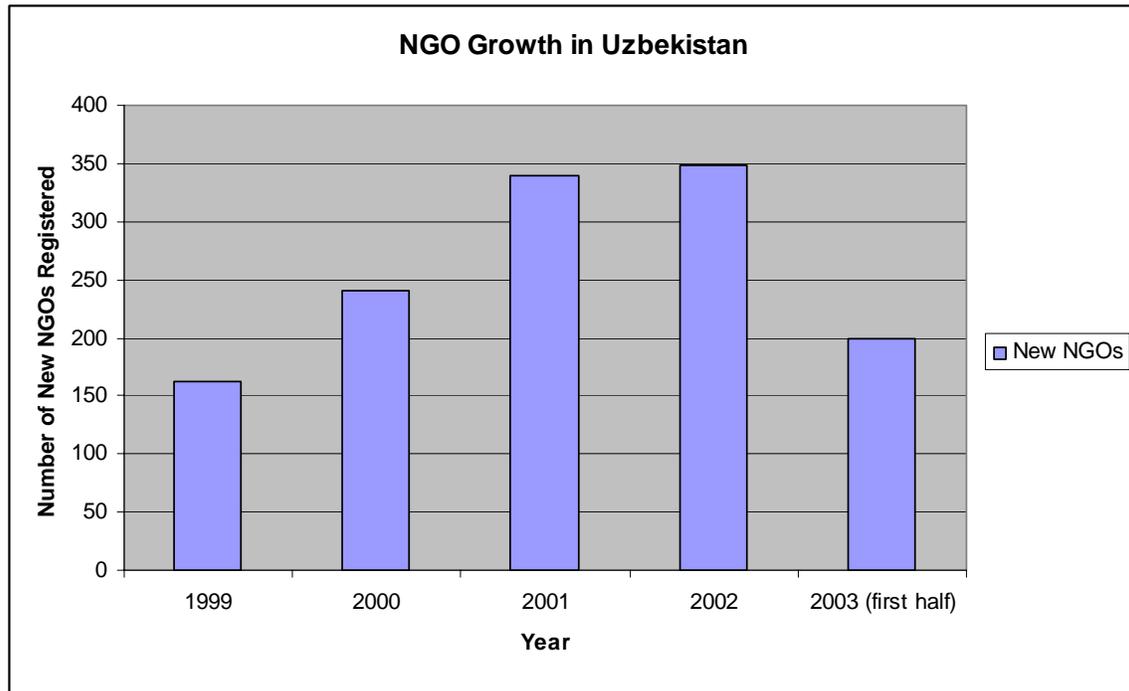
It is also evident that Uzbeks are inclined to support more in the way of democratic reforms. A 2002 Pew Research Center survey indicated that 85 percent of Uzbeks held a favorable view of the United States.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, Dadabaev’s study confirms the belief in democratic governance among the Uzbek society. Among various political systems, a government in which one leader rules without interference by parliament and without elections (similar to the situation in Uzbekistan today) was rejected by 66.9 percent of the populace. The majority of Uzbeks believe that a democratic system of governance is “very suitable” (43.9 percent) or “rather preferable” (40.1 percent) for the country.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>168</sup> Dadabaev (2004) 147.

<sup>169</sup> Pew Research Center, *What the World Thinks in 2002* (Washington D.C., Pew Research Center for the People and Press, 2002) 4.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

Analyzing the status of civil society in Uzbekistan presents an initial view that was fairly optimistic, but then certain external events alarmed the Karimov regime and the tide turned against NGOs and the emergent civil society. Throughout the 1990s the growth of Western NGOs in Uzbekistan served as a significant boost to the prospects for liberalization (see Figure 15).



**Figure 15. Growth of Newly Registered NGOs in Uzbekistan.<sup>171</sup>**

Despite these efforts, however, the country still lacked significant progress on a number of different fronts directly linked to civil society. These included freedom of information and respect for human rights. For these reasons, Polat noted in 1999 that “the basis for creating civil society does not yet exist in Uzbekistan”.<sup>172</sup> In fact, he criticized the West for creating too many internationally funded organizations which have weak roots in the Uzbek society and, in reality, are “government-organized NGOs.”<sup>173</sup> Of course, these points became secondary at the end of 2003 and in early 2004. In 2003, Uzbekistan

<sup>171</sup> Abdullaev (2005), 290.

<sup>172</sup> Abdumannob Polat, “Can Uzbekistan Build Democracy and Civil Society”, in *Civil Society in Central Asia*, ed. M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel Waugh (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1999) 135.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

failed to receive the expected level of assistance funding from the EBRD and the United States due to problems associated with human rights. Furthermore, Karimov's regime became increasingly alarmed by the events of the Rose Revolution in Tbilisi in late 2003, which culminated in the resignation of Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze. Since many in the regime saw a clear link between American organizations and the protests in Tbilisi, the Uzbek government set out to limit the influence of these organizations.<sup>174</sup> By January 1, 2004, all mass media in the country were forced to register with the government; this included bulletins published by NGOs. The government also announced a re-registration of all international organizations, with a deadline of March 1, 2004. This requirement was repeated in June 2006. The end effect of these measures has been a drastic reduction in the number independent NGOs operating in the country. Over 200 domestic, non-profit organizations have been forced to close in 2006 and numerous international NGOs have been forced to leave.<sup>175</sup>

## **E. CONCLUSION**

This analysis of the obstacles to democracy in Uzbekistan, by necessity, clearly centers on Islam Karimov and the motivating factors that have influenced his decisions to concentrate power. Since his election in December 1991, Karimov has consistently and methodically repressed any political opposition in the country and basically established a dictatorship thinly veiled as a democracy. Additionally, he has resisted external pressures to implement both economic as well as political reform. Despite increasing amounts of U.S. aid to Uzbekistan in the early 2000's, along with formal pledges and agreements to implement democratic reforms, the Karimov regime refused to take meaningful steps toward opening its political system or implementing market-oriented reforms.

Furthermore, though it is possible to argue that the United States could have boosted its commitment to try to secure more progress on reforms, this analysis indicates that domestic factors have most profoundly influenced Karimov's decisions. Specifically, clan politics and corruption form a complex marriage that permeates the

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<sup>174</sup> Evgeniy Abdullaev, "Uzbekistan: Between Traditionalism and Westernization", in *Central Asia at the End of Transition*, ed. Boris Rumer (New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2005) 291.

<sup>175</sup> Nikola Krastev, "Uzbekistan: Freedom House Becomes Latest NGO Casualty", *Eurasianet.org Civil Society*, February 13, 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/civilsociety/articles/pp021306.shtml> (Oct 2006).

political dynamics of the country and have been the driving force for Karimov's moves to concentrate power and stifle political opposition. Karimov's ascendancy to power was made possible by his perceived role as a power broker among the rival clans in the country. Moreover, he continues to skillfully manipulate the power balance between the powerful Tashkent and Samarkand clans to maintain their patronage. While the dominant role of clan politics and corruption may not be surprising, the impact on other factors is certainly intriguing. Political Islam, for instance, seems to be caught in the middle of this interplay. The cellular, underground structure of political Islam, a legacy of seventy years of repression under Soviet rule, lends itself perfectly to underground political dissent. While Karimov uses political Islam as a scapegoat for his repression of any and all opposition, the reasons for that opposition often go unanswered. Growing discontent with the country's economic situation, the pervasiveness of rampant corruption and ineffectiveness in the government are pushing dissidents toward the only outlet available for voicing and organizing opposition – political Islam.

Analysis of the structural foundations in Uzbekistan provides a complicated set of results. They underscore the fact that the country still has considerable structural obstacles to democratic reform. Though the country has made very little progress toward implementing a market-driven economy, its economy remains relatively stable, especially compared to other countries in the region. GDP growth remains somewhat respectable, but underemployment and unemployment continue to be problematic. Also, the government's continued reliance on Soviet-era economic institutions and economic philosophies is stifling economic growth. It is also clear that the culture of government corruption, which extends from the executive branch all the way down to the local officials, is taking its toll on the economy in Uzbekistan and on the citizens' level of discontent. Furthermore, because the government has effectively repressed civil society in the country, these citizens are left with very few avenues to express their dissatisfaction. The end result of this rising frustration is inevitably public demonstration such as the Andijon uprising in May 2005, where public dissatisfaction culminated in resistance and, subsequently, a violent crack-down by the government.

Does this analysis point to any realistic options for U.S. foreign policy and the Bush doctrine's stated goal of promoting democracy? As stated previously, promoting democracy requires patience, a long-term commitment and a multi-dimensional approach. Moreover, it is abundantly clear that democratic reform in Uzbekistan is not possible as long as Karimov is the country's president. Increased U.S. aid fails to deliver influence and firm commitments from this regime are clearly not trustworthy. At present, the only avenue available for the United States is to continue to press for an increased presence of international NGOs in the country in the hopes of trying to build-up Uzbekistan's embryonic civil society and increase freedom of information. To do so, must be ready to engage future leaders of Uzbekistan and encourage economic and political reform.

## V. CONCLUSION

This thesis combined transitology and structural analyses to examine the obstacles to democracy in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. On the structural side, economic underdevelopment has stifled the emergence of a larger middle class segment in both countries and serves as a catalyst for societal dissatisfaction. Moreover, transitology analysis of domestic factors indicates that the complex interplay of corruption and clan politics is central to democracy's plight in both countries. The countries' trajectories diverge, however, with respect to economic reform and civil society. Kyrgyzstan's advanced progress in implementing market reforms set the stage for the growth of a relatively vibrant civil society. On the other hand, Uzbekistan's resistance to such reforms is tied to the dominant role of clan politics, elite control of state resources, corruption, and the government's fear of social unrest, all of which culminate in the repression of civil society and political opposition. Finally, the role of external factors, such as U.S. aid and influence, varied considerably between the two countries. U.S. influence in Kyrgyzstan was enhanced by the presence of NGOs, political opposition parties, a growing civil society and a commitment to market-oriented reform. This enabled the U.S. to maintain significant levels of development aid, though there is substantial evidence that the United States should have done more to tie this aid more concretely to political reform. In Uzbekistan, on the other hand, the United States found it increasingly difficult to generate any momentum with respect to influencing the Karimov regime. The regime simply refused to implement meaningful economic and political reforms despite massive amounts of U.S. aid and diplomatic pressure.

The overall goal of this analysis, however, is to illuminate possible policy options or considerations for the United States with respect to promoting democracy in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Even though President Bush is in his last term in office, it is unlikely that the U.S. foreign policy emphasis on promoting democracy is going to change anytime soon. Monten, for instance, effectively points out that this is not a new idea in U.S. foreign policy and, more importantly, it is linked to the interplay of power and nationalism. The evolution of a more aggressive foreign policy of democracy

promotion is intimately linked to the emergent role of the United States as the sole superpower along with a foreign policy nationalism that views the United States as an instrument for democratic change (either by exemplarism or vindicationism).<sup>176</sup> With this in mind, it is necessary for U.S. policy options to strike a balance between available resources and realistic expectations for political change.

The bottom line from analyses of these two countries is that, while there are certainly parallels in terms of obstacles to democracy, such as the interplay of clan politics and corruption, the key difference centers on economic reform. Continuous U.S. economic aid and the emergence of civil society in Kyrgyzstan, largely resulting from NGO activity and the country's progress on economic reforms, are serving as a potential counterbalance to the forces of clan politics and corruption. The absence of economic reform in Uzbekistan, coupled with increased repression of civil society, has resulted in the forces of clan politics and corruption running unchecked and crushing democratic as well as economic reforms. In fact, the issue of economic reform routinely serves as the catalyst for prolonged political struggle between rival factions in post-communist states. It is this prolonged struggle that Rustow defines as central to the preparatory phase as a nation transitions to democracy.<sup>177</sup> For Kyrgyzstan, the issues of economic reform and, currently, that of constitutional reform, are providing the prolonged political struggle that, hopefully, will lead to a breakthrough and more democratic governance. In Uzbekistan, however, the only rival factions are based on clan loyalties and the only issue of contention is who gets to control the country's resources. The United States must focus its democracy promotion activities in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to take these factors into consideration.

The relative openness of society in Kyrgyzstan and the rise of political opposition mean that the United States can afford to invest its resources in securing more procedural democratic reforms. At the same time, U.S. policy must continue to assist Kyrgyzstan to ensure that it completes its economic reform agenda as well as structure its constitutional reforms to prevent the future concentration of power in the executive branch. As

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<sup>176</sup> Jonathen Monten, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine", *International Security*, 29, no. 4 (2005), 155-6.

<sup>177</sup> Rustow (1970), 352.

Bakiyev works with opposition parties to hammer out a new constitutional framework, the United States should offer clear support for the process, and link substantial amounts of aid to a successful and fair outcome that preserves the principles of power separation.

In Uzbekistan, the focus and priority must be on economic reform incentives and, furthermore, these must continue to be tied to concrete milestones. In looking at the framework of U.S. policy initiatives on the subject, much of this seems to be in place. The Omnibus Appropriations for fiscal year 2003, for instance, forbade Freedom Support Act assistance to Uzbekistan unless the Secretary of State reported that the country was making progress in meeting its pledges to democratize and honor human rights. By late 2003, the administration decided that Uzbekistan no longer met these conditions. The conditions were retained in subsequent FSA legislation and in mid-2004 the State Department announced that up to \$18 million in aid to Uzbekistan would be withheld due to “lack of progress on democratic reform and restrictions put on U.S. assistance partners on the ground.”<sup>178</sup> The Foreign Operations Appropriations for fiscal year 2006 was signed into law in November 2005 and called for \$20 million in Freedom Support Aid to Uzbekistan. More importantly, it continued language that conditions aid on progress in democratization and respect for human rights; it also recommends that the Uzbek government allow an international investigation into the May 2005 events at Andijon.<sup>179</sup>

It is essential that the United States orient its policy with respect to promoting democracy in Uzbekistan toward the prospect of Karimov’s succession. This event is looming on the not-too-distant horizon; he is 68 years old with numerous health problems and life expectancy in Central Asia is typically around 60 years. Furthermore, the pattern of clan politics in Central Asia dictates that political transition in Uzbekistan is likely to be non-transparent and decided by a handful of powerbrokers and clan elites. Moreover, given Karimov’s hold on power, it seems unlikely that he will initiate an orderly succession while he is still firmly in control. The key consideration with respect to this transition is the need to maintain stability in the country. The United States must maintain the ability to engage the next generation of leaders in Uzbekistan, in business,

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<sup>178</sup>Ibid., ii.

<sup>179</sup> Jim Nichol, “Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests”, *CRS Issue Brief for Congress*, IB93108 (May 12, 2006).

government, military and other areas. As Rumer stated, “Such an effort, combined with a carefully targeted program of economic assistance, are the best options U.S. policy has at its disposal for influencing the long-term trends in Central Asia and helping it achieve long-term stability and security.”<sup>180</sup>

Democracy in Central Asia is central to the long-term objectives of the Global War on Terror. Countering the rise of militant Islam in this region will require economic development and a general opening of society to allow for political dissent and opposition. Uzbekistan is a case in point. The longer Uzbekistan forestalls economic reform, stifling economic growth, the more disenfranchised the society will become. Since the Karimov regime continues to repress any and all opposition, it forces those disenfranchised citizens to seek out militant Islam, with its cellular and clandestine structure, as a means of voicing opposition. President Bush described this very scenario:

Imagine what it's like to be a young person living in a country that is not moving toward reform. You're 21 years old, and while your peers in other parts of the world are casting their ballots for the first time, you are powerless to change the course of your government.

While your peers in other parts of the world have received educations that prepare them for the opportunities of a global economy, you have been fed propaganda and conspiracy theories that blame others for your country's shortcomings.

And everywhere you turn, you hear extremists who tell you that you can escape your misery and regain your dignity through violence and terror and martyrdom.”<sup>181</sup>

This is happening in countries like Uzbekistan today. To counter this trend, the United States must continue to actively promote democracy in Central Asia. This has to begin with pushing Kyrgyzstan toward its democratic destiny and preparing the ground for democratic changes in Uzbekistan in the aftermath of Karimov's reign. The soil on the steppes of Central Asia may not be the most hospitable for democracy, but patient and skillful cultivation and irrigation can still produce high yields.

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<sup>180</sup> Eugene Rumer, “Central Asian Leadership Succession: When, Not If”, *Strategic Forum*, 203 (2003), 6.

<sup>181</sup> President George W. Bush, Transcript of Speech to the United Nations, September 19, 2006. <http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/09/19/bush.transcript/index.html> (Nov 2006).

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