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**Party Institutionalization in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan:
Between Political Uncertainty
and the Logic of Electoral Mobilization**

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A PhD thesis submitted to the School of Politics and International Relations
in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Chapter 2. Literature review and theoretical framework	16
2.1. Cleavage structures and party system formation	19
2.2. Electoral institutions and party systems	32
2.3. Socio-historical and institutional legacies	43
2.4. Conceptualizing party institutionalization and political uncertainty	48
2.5. Theorizing the nexus between uncertainty and party elite behavior	57
Chapter 3. Research methodology and design	66
3.1. Research philosophy	66
3.2. Case study research design	70
3.3. Kyrgyzstan as a case study	73
3.4. Measuring uncertainty and party institutionalization	77
3.5. Methods of data collection	95
3.6. Method of causal analysis	102
Chapter 4. Uncertain context of party formation and development in Kyrgyzstan	108
4.1. Early period of party formation and Akayev's presidency	110
4.2. Heightened period of political struggle and Akayev's demise	125
4.3. '2005 March uprising'	132
4.4. Bakiyev's presidency and his demise	137
4.5. '2010 April uprising' – present	145
Chapter 5. Uncertainty and party organization in Kyrgyzstan	155
5.1. Legal regulation of party organization	159
5.2. Intra-party democracy and decision-making structures	171
5.3. Uncertainty and party organization	193
Chapter 6. Uncertainty and party mobilization in Kyrgyzstan	203
6.1. Theoretical perspectives on political clientelism	207

6.2. The evolution of informal practices in Kyrgyzstan	211
6.3. Clientelistic practices and voter mobilization in Kyrgyzstan	219
6.4. Clientelistic practices and voter mobilization since 2010	229
6.5. The misuse of administrative resources for election campaigns	238
6.6. Media visibility and party mobilization	244
Chapter 7. Uncertainty and frequent party switching and defection in Kyrgyzstan	253
7.1. Theoretical perspectives on party switching	254
7.2. Party defection and office-seeking incentives	262
7.3. Party defection, ambition and ideological differences	270
7.4. Party defection and vote-maximizing incentives	275
Chapter 8. Discussion and analysis	298
Conclusion	313

Abbreviations

CEC- Central Election Commission

DMK – Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan

JK – Jogorku Kenesh (Kyrgyz Parliament)

SMD – Single-Member District

SDPK – Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan

OSCE/ODIHR – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

PR – Proportional Representation

PSI –Party System Institutionalization

PCK – Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan

List of tables

Table 1. Dimensions and indicators of party institutionalization	95
Table 2. List of registered parties as of 1995	113
Table 3. List of parties elected to parliament in 1995	116
Table 4. List of constitutional referenda (1991-present)	123
Table 5. List of politico-electoral blocs (2004-2005)	134
Table 6. Official results of 2007 early parliamentary election	143
Table 7. List of parties elected to parliament in 2010	150

List of figures

Figure 1. Political stability index: Kyrgyzstan	84
Figure 2. Party organogram	164
Figure 3. Argumentative framework	308

Chapter 1. Introduction.

It is broadly presumed that political parties are crucial for the meaningful functioning of democratic polities, providing stable linkages between state and society and ensuring political representation. In effect, parties fulfill the assigned normative functions by recruiting candidates for public offices, articulating and aggregating divergent interests to mobilize voter support and forming governments to implement policies outlined in broad party platforms. This presupposes the notion that parties need to be reified in the public mind¹ as critical institutional components of political competition, based on solid organizational structures and programmatic appeals to mobilize electoral support and maintain party-society linkages. In the meantime, and given the cruciality of party politics for democratic governance, it is conceivable that the observed variation in democratic performance across both established and developing democracies could be attributed to the patterns and varying levels of party development.

Premised on the this assumption and consistent with scholars underscoring the enduring primacy of political parties as democratic institutions, albeit maintained in an adaptive manner and in view of growing concerns over the ‘party decline’ in established democracies, this study intends to investigate the broad set of causal factors affecting the variation in party institutionalization that has been notably pronounced across emerging democracies. To this end, the empirical analysis will aim to utilize the concept of ‘institutionalization’, which, as a dimension of comparison, has been growingly invoked in contemporary party research to examine substantive parameters of party systems across different democratic settings². As Mainwaring explained, the dimension of ‘institutionalization’ has exposed substantial differences in party system properties between long-

¹ Kenneth Janda, ‘Toward A Performance Theory of Change in Political Parties’, (paper presented at the 12th World Congress of the International Sociological Association, Madrid, Spain, July 9-13, 1990).

² Scott Mainwaring, ‘Party in the third wave’, *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 3 (1998): 67-81.

established Western European democracies and so-called 'third-wave' democracies elsewhere, which tended to be obscured when compared conventionally along the number of parties and ideological dimensions³. By defining 'institutionalization' as a '...process by which a practice or organization becomes well established and widely known, if not universally accepted'⁴, Mainwaring observed that party systems in selected Latin American and post-communist cases diverged markedly from advanced democracies in terms of 'rootedness of parties in society'⁵, electoral volatility and party organizational strength.

Though subsequent research on party politics has considerably refined the concept of 'party institutionalization' by incorporating complementary dimensions and attributes, the general consensus at this stage holds that it constitutes the process by which the patterns of inter-party competition, voter mobilization and internal organization become consistent over time⁶. The adoption of such a conceptual and analytic perspective would entail uncovering a considerable variation in party institutionalization in supposedly new democracies, including post-Soviet countries, which, nonetheless, and relative to post-communist counterparts in East Central Europe, took mainly authoritarian political trajectories (e.g. Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Central Asian countries) or at best remained as competitive authoritarian regimes or fragile democracies (e.g. Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan). Given the crucial democratic implications of party institutions, and a moderate variation across post-Soviet party systems, exhibiting fairly analogous patterns associated with high levels of electoral volatility, weak party-voter linkages, fluid internal organizations and personalistic appeals, it is plausible to presume that an empirical inquiry into both

³ Scott Mainwaring, 'Party in the third wave', *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 3 (1998): 67-81.

⁴ *Ibid*, 69.

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ Fernando Casal Bertoa, 'Source of party institutionalization in new democracies: lessons from East Central Europe' (European University Institute, EUI Working Papers 8, 2011).

‘distal’ and ‘proximate’ causes of weak party institutionalization would also shed light on crucial factors that continue to impede the broader process of democratization in the region.

With this premise in mind, the present study aims to examine the causal factors affecting low levels of party institutionalization in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, which saw continued momentum for democratization and party development and, as a consequence, diverged in political trajectories from its Central Asian authoritarian neighbors. Combined with public discontent over profound socio-economic hardships and rampant corruption, the intense character of intra-elite competition for power has particularly prompted the outbreak of two popular, or democratic, uprisings, leading to the forcible resignation of incumbent authoritarian presidents, Akayev in 2005 and Bakiyev in 2010 accordingly, and enhancing the prospects for renewed democratization. In the latter case, and under political and popular pressure to curb presidential powers and authoritarian tendencies, the post-uprising period has been accompanied by substantive discussions and ensuing changes in formal institutional rules that envisaged fostering ‘parliamentarism’ and party-building. This momentum has been further underpinned by an outcome of parliamentary election held following the latter ‘April’ uprising in 2010 that set a strong precedence for promoting a meaningful multi-party competition by bringing five disparate parties to the parliament.

Notwithstanding political and institutional precursors for party development, and as observed during subsequent elections to the local councils held between 2012 and 2014, there has not been made a reasonable progress in terms of elite commitments and investments toward building permanent local party branches and internal organizational structures permitting parties to expand own support base, establish stable party-voter linkages and maximize electoral gains. In substantive terms, a successful party-building would have further implied an ability to mobilize on programmatic appeals or so-called ‘valence’ issues, resonating with the targeted electorate, and

promote, at a reasonable and pragmatic level, the norms of 'intra-party democracy' in order to sustain the broader party 'selectorate' and intra-party unity. Contrary to initial assumptions, however, parties in Kyrgyzstan remained effectively un-institutionalized featuring amorphous and loose organizational structures, whereby the major decision-making powers tend to be vested with senior party leaders, and voter mobilization strategies based on a varying combination of media marketing campaigns, diverse clientelistic practices, political patronage and provisions of infrastructure development services. There has been also a concurrent trend in frequent party switching and *en masse* defections in the legislature, attesting to the enduring salience of personalism in party politics that, on top of dominant party strategies of internal organization and voter mobilization, has not been conducive to strengthening party institutionalization.

The bulk of the research literature on party politics conventionally invokes *sociological* and *institutional* paradigms to explain the varying degrees of party institutionalization and parameters of party systems. Drawing on an original 'cleavage model', famously introduced by Lipset and Rokkan, sociological explanations commonly stress long-standing socio-historical divisions in societies as ideological bases for party competition and mobilization⁷. The overall contention holds that the number and relative strength of modern party systems of the democratic polities tends to be determined by the salience and sequencing of cleavages, which broadly structured political competition and electoral behavior⁸. In a similar vein and emphasizing social structural determinants of party systems, Bertoa established more recently, based on a comparative analysis of four cases across post-communist East Central Europe, that the degree of party system institutionalization was contingent on the structure of cleavages, not the number, strength or sequencing, with 'cumulative'

⁷ Martin Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-national Perspectives* (Toronto: The Free Press, 1967).

⁸ *Ibid.*

patterns of cleavage structuration associated with stronger party systems and 'cross-cutting' cleavages producing weakly institutionalized party systems⁹.

Beyond broader criticism of sociological explanations emphasizing a declining trend in traditional class-based voting and right vs left party politics¹⁰, it has been concurrently observed that the divergent patterns of party system dynamics are shaped crucially by party strategies, which either mediate the presumed automatic translation of social cleavages into political action or are identified as determinative factors. Sitter argued, whilst treating the application of cleavage-based sociological models to new democracies as fairly problematic, that social cleavage structures that conditioned political competition in established democracies proved inconspicuous in the context of post-communist East Central Europe due to the weakness of party roots in society and the absence of extra-parliamentary organizations, such as churches and trade unions¹¹. It was further established that post-communist parties diverged from older party systems, based on 'mass' party organizations, in terms of developing loose organizational structures, growing professionalization of election campaigns and emphasizing media marketing strategies¹². Sitter contended rather that the patterns of party system formation and development in the post-communist region tended to be shaped by party strategies adopted in relation to selected cleavages and the incumbent regime¹³. The latter strategy was underlined as a critical factor determining the strength of broader party systems with strong opposition party blocs coalescing against the initial incumbent governments

⁹ Fernando Casal Bertoa, 'Party Systems and Cleavage Structures Revisited: A Sociological Explanation of Party System Institutionalization in East Central Europe', *Party Politics* 20, no. 1 (2014).

¹⁰ Ronald Inglehart and Scott C. Flanagan, 'Value Change in Industrial Societies', *The American Political Science Review* 81, no. 4 (1987).

¹¹ Nick Sitter, 'Cleavage, Party Strategy and Party System Change in Europe, East and West', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 3, no. 3 (2002).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 441.

contributing subsequently to the formation of more stable and organizationally institutionalized party systems¹⁴.

Whilst providing a convincing rationale for the centrality of party strategies, the 'strategic coordination model' proposed by Sitter, nonetheless, proves inadequate for explaining post-Soviet party systems. In effect, the model presupposes the existence of multiple cleavages along social, cultural and political dimensions that provide an ideological and electoral space for inter-party competition and form the basis for party strategies to maximize electoral support. However, in the post-Soviet region political competition has not been fundamentally structured along cleavage-based ideological dimensions, which was arguably due to the enhanced effect of 'communist legacies' associated with the obscurity of social and ideological underpinnings of political divisions and low levels of political efficacy and civic engagement. In effect, this necessitates a more nuanced examination of party strategies for internal organization and voter mobilization, focusing on concomitant effects of regime dynamics, intra-elite competition and political incentive structures underpinning the behavior and strategic choices of party elites.

The latter assertion implies in similar ways the implausibility of linking, in a straightforward manner, electoral institutions to party systems in the post-Soviet context. Contrary to the original propositions regarding the crucial implication of electoral systems for both the nature and configuration of party systems in mature democracies, the presumed causal relationship between electoral and party systems in the post-Soviet context has been frequently invalidated owing to the pre-eminence of strategic interests and calculations of political actors. In his comparative analysis of post-communist party systems, Moser established notably that the introduction of plurality and

¹⁴ Nick Sitter, 'Cleavage, Party Strategy and Party System Change in Europe, East and West', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 3, no. 3 (2002).

majoritarian systems in post-Soviet Ukraine and Russia has not expectedly prompted a two-candidate competition at district level, hence the formation of a two-party system, whereas shifting to a proportional representation system at a later stage has conversely constrained the number of legislative parties due to electoral thresholds and restrictive electoral laws¹⁵. Relatedly, and in the absence of issue or ideology-based voter mobilization and political competition, it has become a common practice amongst mainly authoritarian incumbents in the post-Soviet region to shape the structure of party systems by resorting to a selective application of electoral and party laws and institutionalizing dominant 'parties of power' for the purposes of regime legitimation and consolidation. As Isaacs posited, in Kazakhstan the formation of a president-backed 'Nur-Otan' party within broader institutional framework has been instrumental in legitimizing informal patronage-based power relations, which underpinned hitherto the personalistic authoritarian regime of president Nazarbayev¹⁶.

A similar strategy of formalizing and consolidating the authoritarian grip on power was pursued in Kyrgyzstan by ousted president Bakiyev and his regime during a peak period of political repression, which, however, proved ineffective as an opposition party managed to obtain a minimum number of legislative seats and continued to voice criticism of the regime. The latter has laid a moderate political basis for the outbreak of popular uprising in April 2010 that led to the downfall of president Bakiyev's regime and consequent dismantlement of the ruling party, further generating renewed prospects for democratization and party development. In the meantime, this 'political opening' has been accompanied by a 'post-revolutionary' period of heightened uncertainty

¹⁵ Robert G Moser, 'Electoral Systems and the Number of Parties in Postcommunist States', *World Politics* 51, no. 3 (1999).

¹⁶ Rico Isaacs, 'Between Informal and Formal Politics: Neopatrimonialism and Party Development in post-Soviet Kazakhstan' (a PhD dissertation submitted to the School of Social Sciences and Law at Oxford Brookes University, 2009).

over the future configuration of political power and institutional frameworks, reinforced by past experiences. In particular, and despite cautious optimism, there remained a likelihood that new 'post-revolutionary' forces would move toward consolidating power, amidst enduring political fragility, as it formerly occurred with political forces that took over power in the wake of popular uprising in 2005, and altering institutional frameworks to extend formal powers and contain political dissent.

Considering the unpredictable character of political competition in Kyrgyzstan, and based on the presumption that strategies, incentives and behavior of political actors, overlooked in sociological and institutional accounts, are critical in determining political outcomes in new democracies, this study employs the model of *political and institutional uncertainty*, put forward by Lupu and Riedl¹⁷, as an overarching theoretical basis for exploring the actor-centered factors and motivations conditioning low levels of party institutionalization. In a broad sense, the model postulates that contextual uncertainty inherent to developing democracies crucially affects the strategic decisions made by party elites, shaping subsequently the patterns of party organization, mobilization, competition and coherency¹⁸. In effect, and as a way of coping efficiently with surrounding political and institutional uncertainty, rational party actors would be compelled to opt for building flexible organizations, and consequently avoid rigid party structures and sophisticated mechanisms of intra-party coordination, that contrasts with the *organizational complexity* dimension of party institutionalization underlined by Panebianco¹⁹.

In addition, the uncertainty over political and electoral institutions would also inform the fluid and unstable character of party-voter linkages by weakening the ability to make credible policy

¹⁷ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 11 (2013).

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 1339.

¹⁹ Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

commitments and prompting parties to pursue a combination of both programmatic and clientelistic strategies of electoral mobilization²⁰. As a general rule, maintaining strong party-voter linkages and undertaking party mobilization efforts based on *programmatic* and *ideological content* would be indicative of higher level of party institutionalization. Defined in terms of the enhanced likelihood of regime reversal, the uncertain context would finally compel broad party actors, including rank-and-file members, to prioritize short-term gains associated with holding political office at the expense of pursuing longer-term vote or policy-seeking incentives²¹. In this instance, political and electoral competition would be viewed as ‘a one-shot interaction’, resulting in frequent party switching or ‘bandwagoning’ and causing, as a consequence, fundamental difficulties in ensuring the coherency and organizational stability of parties²².

1.1. Methodological issues

Despite the theoretical cogency and compelling rationale of an uncertainty model, ensuring the empirical observability and controllability of the underlying concept of ‘political uncertainty’, however, proved a difficult endeavor. It was, therefore, presumed that, in addition to a broader feature of political uncertainty embedded structurally in emerging democratic polities, its degree could also vary depending on the state of incumbent regimes with enhanced regime capacity and consolidation reducing the perceived level of uncertainty and its dismantlement increasing the state of political and institutional uncertainty. Prior to a popular uprising in 2010, there was little expectation that the autocratic regime of former president Bakiyev would fall during its peak, a perception that has contributed to the weakening of broad opposition forces, but has, nonetheless,

²⁰ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, ‘Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies’, *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 11 (2013): 1352.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

forced the main opposition groups to mobilize and strengthen political and organizational resources, including along party institutions, to remain viable.

In the meantime, the downfall of Bakiyev's regime following spontaneous and un-coordinated mass protests in April 2010 has re-generated a continual state of heightened political uncertainty, which was similarly observed in the early post-independence period (i.e. in 1990s) and in the aftermath of analogous mass protests in 2005 that prompted the ouster of the first president Askar Akayev. For the purposes of this study, the high level of contextual uncertainty thus connoted a period (2010-2015) of vibrant political competition and institutional re-arrangements that followed after the dismantlement of Bakiyev's regime. The first stage (2013-2014) of the empirical field research was, therefore, devoted to preparing and conducting interviews with local experts and public commentators and observing local elections (held 2012-2014) for preliminary data collection. The initial expert interviews served mainly to develop a contextual framework that would serve as a strong basis for both empirical and theoretical components of this research and focused substantively on discussing post-independent processes of party formation and development in Kyrgyzstan and the potential factors shaping the parameters of party institutionalization. In general, the comments proved both detailed and perceptive in terms of explaining the dynamics of ongoing political competition, though, at the same time, somewhat generic in that common responses relating to a broad set of structural and 'proximate' obstacles in building institutionalized parties tended to be confined to rather descriptive assessments of parties as electoral vehicles serving the particularistic interests of politicians and dependent on the financial base for survival.

In the meantime, the main substantive part of the empirical research consisted of conducting a field trip to four provincial capitals, including Karakol, Naryn, Jalal-Abad and Osh, three weeks prior to 2015 parliamentary election, held October, following the pre-visit interviews with

party coordinators and, typically, deputy leaders based in central offices. As it has been informed, and with few exceptions, most parties planning on contesting the parliamentary election sought to open regional and local offices and finalize the list of regional and local party coordinators in the weeks leading up to the beginning of an election campaign period. The core objective of this field research trip was to collect an extensive and varying set of empirical material that was to be utilized in subsequent analysis of party organizational structures and voter mobilization strategies, by conducting intensive semi-structured interviews with regional (oblast) and local (city) party coordinators, local politicians and civic activists. It was generally evident that parties on the whole are not inclined to invest in building extensive and permanent local party offices on the ground to maintain stable linkages with the constituencies based on rigid organizational structures and internal communication and coordination mechanisms. For the most part, local party offices are established on a temporary basis to coordinate centrally-controlled election campaign activities on the ground, with regional and local party staff exerting no meaningful influence on party-related strategic decisions relating to candidate selection and coalition formation at the national level. As a result, there ensued a justifiably limited explanation of inner workings of party organizations, whereby crucial party decisions are normally made by senior party leaders, rendering formal organizational and decision-making structures a mere formality.

The shortage of an empirical data on internal organizational aspects of party life due to the near absence of much activism at all party levels, however, has been compensated with an intensive analysis of campaign strategies and materials, in which parties have invested more heavily. This involved meeting with the campaign managers of leading parties in Bishkek, attending campaign rallies and observing the media and political debates. The bulk of the empirical material was additionally obtained from the secondary sources of information, including newspapers, news websites, and statistical electoral data produced by the Central Election Commission and the

OSCE/ODIHR's Election Observation Mission reports. Finally, the inadequacy of systematic and analytic material examining the causal determinants of party institutionalization in Kyrgyzstan implied an extensive usage of scholarly research on similar cases, expert interview responses and personal observations of both current and past electoral and political processes in the country.

1.2. Empirical research findings

In a slight contrast to hypothesized propositions, the comprehensive analysis of empirical research findings demonstrates that the purported effect of 'political uncertainty' on the observed patterns of party organization, mobilization and coherence in new democracies tends to be insignificant or at best moderate. In effect, the perceived reduction in the level of political uncertainty, associated with an incremental consolidation of former president Atambayev's regime and concomitant trends in institutional stabilization, has not incentivized party elites to invest in extra-parliamentary organizations and internal democratic structures conducive to strong party institutionalization. As formerly noted, the proclivity amongst party elites to maintain flexible party organizations, based on obscure and inadequate mechanisms of intra-party communication and coordination and centralized authority structures, rendering the party 'selectorate' and grassroots members incapable of yielding a meaningful influence on party decision-making, remained fairly constant.

This dominant organizational strategy commonly prioritized amongst party elites rather reflects both the institutional nature of party formation and the logic of electoral mobilization. In general, parties in Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere in new democracies, tend to be formed mainly by extant elite groups for the purposes of preserving the 'party in public office' or seeking political office. In older democratic polities, grassroots organization-building preceded party-based political competition and remained an important task for parties in terms of sustaining party-society linkages and maximizing electoral gains. In addition, the logic of voter mobilization, conditioned by both

exogenous and endogenous factors, dictates that parties manage to secure electoral support and its survival by avoiding extensive membership-based organizations and employing efficiently modern campaign strategies, such as the recruitment of campaign professionals and an extensive usage of media marketing tactics to enhance party visibility. The latter trends, observed similarly across established democracies, further induce party leaders to recruit prominent figures, including former public servants and business persons, as party-fielded candidates to share campaign-related expenditures. Such a strategic necessity to recruit ambitious and resourceful candidates, however, tends to result in post-electoral internal party tensions as party leaders develop the tendency to maintain centralized authority and decision-making structures for both electoral and political purposes, including to retain organizational powers over the issues of coalition formation and political positioning toward the incumbent power.

In a similar vein, the related proposition stressing the contextual effect of political uncertainty on the increased propensity amongst parties to resort to both programmatic and clientelistic strategies of electoral mobilization and linkage-building has proven moderately implausible. As growingly observed in election campaigns, illustrating a nuanced and multi-faceted character of voter mobilization patterns in new democracies, party mobilization strategies in Kyrgyzstan typically tend to entail, beyond media marketing campaign tactics, the deployment of loosely organized, transient and unstable clientelistic networks and the employment of divergent practices of electoral clientelism, including political patronage, direct vote-buying and sponsoring infrastructure development projects.

Having said that, and despite the perceived reduction of political uncertainty surrounding electoral competition, there have not been observed significant and observable changes in the prevailing patterns of clientelistic behavior, nor has it contributed to the combined employment of

both programmatic and clientelistic strategies of voter mobilization. The inability to make credible policy commitments based on programmatic content and issue-based campaigns was further seen as a reflection of broader structural complications in creating an ideological and policy space that would underpin party competition. In addition to varying clientelistic practices, which extent and forms have observably increased due to the shift to a proportional representation system, the traditional control of state administrative resources has enabled the ruling party to sustain an electoral advantage over political opponents and other leading parties.

Beyond electorally-driven behavior of party elites underpinning party strategies for internal organization and voter mobilization, the study finally revealed that the underlying causes of frequent party switching amongst broader party actors, observed during tumultuous period of political and institutional perturbations (2011-2013), extend beyond the contextual effect of political or electoral uncertainty and tend to vary depending on the extent of political ambition and the nature of political incentive structures. As the model of political uncertainty predicted, the incidences of party switching and defection by sitting legislators indeed occur due to the prioritization of short-term gains and benefits associated with seeking and holding political office, in the context of heightened political and regime uncertainty.

It was further observed, however, that frequent party switching could be concurrently affected by longer-term re-election and vote-maximizing incentives prompting ambitious politicians to defect to new legislative groups and form new parties and assume leadership positions with significant organizational and decision-making powers. The rationale for switching party affiliation was also related to an array of particularistic considerations amongst less ambitious politicians with pronounced tendencies to offer political loyalty to the ruling regime, made in order to evade political persecution or further business interests. Overall, it was evident that the causal factors

affecting the observable patterns of party organization, mobilization and switching, associated with low levels of party institutionalization are multi-faceted and complex, warranting further refinement of the uncertainty model and an additional examination of both 'distal', beyond contextual uncertainty, as well as 'proximate' factors.

1.3. Organization of the thesis

The thesis is organized into six substantive chapters, including the given introduction. The subsequent chapter 2 will provide a critical overview of theoretical explanations of party system parameters, focusing mainly on propositions developed as part of broader sociological and institutional paradigms. The second half of the chapter will propose a theoretical framework based substantively on the main propositions and assumptions underpinning the model of political and institutional uncertainty. Chapter 3 will provide contextual insights into political and institutional frameworks that influenced party formation and development in post-independent Kyrgyzstan and set the context for a heightened political uncertainty following the regime change in 2010 in order to observe potential changes in the behavior of party elites in relation to party organization-building and voter mobilization strategies. Chapter 4 will present a substantive analysis of empirical findings related to the organizational structures of parties and internal decision-making mechanisms and evaluate the cogency of theoretical propositions stressing the contextual effect of political and institutional uncertainty on party elite investments in organizational development. Chapter 5 will provide a detailed discussion of the observable trends in election campaigns in Kyrgyzstan and potential factors affecting the prevalence of clientelistic strategies of electoral mobilization. Chapter 6 will explore the underlying causes of frequent party switching and offer complementary explanations. The last section will end with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications of empirical research findings and identify potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 2. Literature review and theoretical framework.

Introduction

Despite considerable progress in operationalizing the theoretical concept of party institutionalization for both analytic and methodological purposes, scholarly debates over the potential causal factors convincingly explaining the observed variation in emerging party systems across new democracies remain persistent. In addition to conceptual nuances potentially leading to competing multi-causal explanations, the difficulties in identifying the complex causal mechanisms uncovering the nature and extent of party institutionalization in new democracies are also attributed to the enduring prevalence of theoretical paradigms emphasizing the saliency of cleavage structures, electoral institutions or socio-historical legacies on party system parameters in older democracies. In effect, invoking so-called cleavage-based sociological or electoral-institutional accounts of party systems in new democracies proved valuable in unveiling isolated dimensions of party system formation, stability and structures, whilst overlooking the broader set of mainly 'proximal' factors at play underlining the criticality of organizational dynamics and strategic considerations of party elites in examining the strength and extent of party institutionalization. In a sense, the latter assumption also reflects the growing interest and usage of the concept of party institutionalization to explain the observed variation in the patterns of party system dynamics across developing democracies.

The main assumption underpinning this study holds that in the context 'third-wave' post-communist democracies, in which largely unstable institutional frameworks are accompanied by less pronounced social cleavages, the role and significance of political incentives shaping the party elite behavior, manifested in strategies for party organization and mobilization, need to come to the fore in contemporary party research. In the meantime, party elites, whilst driven by a range of interest-based motivations and figuring as decisive actors in determining the strategic future of own parties,

interact with an external environment by mediating the broader effect of social or institutional factors on party institutionalization in an attempt to pursue political and electoral objectives. This implies that the strategic choices and calculations made by party elites in relation to internal organizational structures and voter mobilizational strategies, shaping the broader state of party institutionalization, need to be investigated in the context of specific political and electoral incentive structures.

Given the implausibility of social and institutional explanations to generate a cogent and complete theoretical account of party institutionalization in new democracies, characterized by continued uncertainty, and also premised on rationality and incentive-based assumptions, this study builds on the model of political and institutional uncertainty put forward by Lupu and Riedl²³ as an underlying theoretical basis for examining the causal determinants of low level of party institutionalization. In general, and based on observed and distinctive patterns of party systems in new democracies, associated with high levels of electoral volatility, low levels of organizational institutionalization and 'non-programmatic' mobilizational appeals, the model argues that the inherent uncertainty of new democracies affects '...the strategic decision making of party elites...'²⁴. At a fundamental level, it is posited that the inability to make predictions on the '...structure of political interactions'²⁵ and under the heightened possibility of regime reversal, party elites will be induced to prioritize short-term goals leading to the formation of flexible party organizations and centralized authority structures as coping mechanisms²⁶.

²³Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 11 (2013).

²⁴ Ibid, 1339.

²⁵ Ibid, 1345.

²⁶ Ibid. 1349.

Beyond organizational implications, high institutional uncertainty, reinforced by unclear party reputations, acute credible commitment problems and weak party-voter linkages, would prompt parties to make both programmatic and clientelistic appeals to maximize electoral support²⁷. Finally, the propensity of political actors to pursue short-term gains as a strategic priority to cope with regime and political uncertainty would also imply that political office-seeking and holding incentives and acquiring resources ‘in the present moment’²⁸ would take precedence over ‘longer term preferences for maximizing votes’²⁹, further causing the tendency amongst both party elites and ‘partisan public figures’³⁰ to switch party allegiances.

This chapter will provide a critical survey of theoretical explanations of party systems, with a particular emphasis on theoretical propositions emphasizing the centrality of social cleavage structures, electoral institutions and politico-institutional legacies in shaping party system formation, stability, mobilization and competition. To this end, it will attempt to demonstrate that given inherent problems with establishing a causal relationship between social or institutional factors and the resultant pattern of party institutionalization and the fact that said theoretical models cannot provide a compelling explanation involving the integration of both ‘distal’ and ‘proximal’ factors, a more elaborate and profound theoretical framework would need to be developed to unravel the causal effects of hypothesized factors on the low levels of party institutionalization. The second half of the chapter will subsequently propose a theoretical framework that will be broadly based on theoretical propositions and assumptions underpinning the model of political and institutional uncertainty, with additional conceptual and analytic

²⁷ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, ‘Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies’, *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 11 (2013): 1350.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1352.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

specifications ensuring an empirical observability of an uncertainty concept and coherency of an argumentative framework.

2.1. Cleavage structures and party system formation

Lipset and Rokkan's seminal 'cleavage model'³¹ remains as yet an integral part of sociological accounts of party system formation and stability in both old and new democracies. The model posited that the resultant party systems across Western European democratic polities of 1960s corresponded to a set of four socio-historical cleavages hitherto formed in the wake of national and industrial revolutions³². Two of these cleavages – center vs periphery and nation-state vs church – emerged in the midst of growing importance of the centralized state and bureaucracy and the pressure over the process of state and nation-building from both 'ethnically, linguistically, or religiously distinct *subject populations* in the...peripheries' and the *church*³³. The other two cleavages – landed interests vs industrial entrepreneurs and capitalists and workers – were referred to as the 'products of the Industrial Revolution' and connoted class-based conflicts associated with the growth of manufacturing and industrial cities³⁴. Lipset and Rokkan suggested that the cleavage structures continued to shape both the number and relative strength of modern party systems of the democratic polities depending on the salience and sequencing of cleavages, further underlining the continued effect of class-based ideological divisions in structuring political and party competition and voter behavior³⁵.

³¹ Martin Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-national Perspectives* (Toronto: The Free Press, 1967).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

In the meantime, critics of the 'cleavage model' as expounded by Lipset and Rokkan and concurrent explanations of party system formation, and change in particular, commonly emphasized the rigid character of cleavage models and demonstrated the diminishing importance of social cleavages in party mobilization and electoral support³⁶, the growing salience of post-materialist values³⁷, professionalization of parties³⁸, and the significance of interests and actors in party politics³⁹. Kirchheimer argued particularly that observable social changes such as secularization and expansion of the middle-class across Western democratic polities induced 'increasing diffusion of political institutions and practices...de-ideologization and...a decline in political competition'⁴⁰. Against the backdrop of fundamental societal changes, parties, incapable of eliciting voter support and mobilization along traditional class-based and religious cleavages, and in part for electoral strategic reasons, had to appeal to a wider segment of the population prompting the formation of so-called 'catch-all' parties⁴¹. Consequently, and as a result of de-politicization, continually declining mass membership and detachment from individual party grassroots activists, party leadership would assume a disproportionately concentrated power potentially hindering routinization of internally democratic procedures⁴². In a broader context, Kirchheimer expected that the observed trends in party and electoral politics would fundamentally erode parliamentary, or representative, democracy and subvert genuine political contestation⁴³.

³⁶ Otto Kirchheimer, 'The Transformation of Western European Party System', in *Political Parties and Political Development*, ed. J. La Palombara and M. Weiner (Princeton: Sociologia del partiti politici, Bologna, 1996).

³⁷ Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*, (Princeton University Press, 1977).

³⁸ Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (Translated by March Silber, New York: Cambridge University Press 1988).

³⁹ Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. 'Mass Mobilization', in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁰ Andre Krouwel, 'Otto Kirchheimer and the catch-all party', *West European Politics* 26 (2003).

⁴¹ Ibid, 23.

⁴² Ibid, 27.

⁴³ Ibid, 24.

A decade later, Inglehart⁴⁴ in his analysis of six Western European societies similarly noted the declining trend in class-based voting and traditional right vs left politics and claimed further that intergenerational changes observable across industrial societies since 1960's would entail far-reaching consequences for political participation and party system configurations. Building on survey results, it was asserted in essence that younger generation increasingly embraced 'post-materialist' values, such as individual self-expression, autonomy and the quality of life, more than traditional 'materialist' values emphasizing the issues of survival and economic security, held predominantly by older generation⁴⁵. Contrary to Kirchheimer's pessimism about the prospects of representative democracy, he nonetheless believed that fundamental changes in political values, stressing diversity, tolerance and greater participation in public decision-making processes, and issue preferences would bring about new modes of political participation, such as social movements and unconventional forms of collective action, and 'new types of political parties'⁴⁶. Focusing substantively on changing patterns of political culture and participation, core concepts in this value-change hypothesis, Inglehart further envisaged the formation of issue-based parties (for example, parties promoting environmental issues or equal rights), but without delving much into detailed explanations of how changing political values and the formation of new parties would shape the configuration of contemporary European party systems⁴⁷.

In the meantime, though there has been a wave or a cycle of notable socio-cultural changes in the last decades with potential implications for party and electoral politics, the established patterns and configurations of Western European party systems nonetheless remained largely

⁴⁴ Ronald Inglehart, 'Changing values among western publics from 1970 to 2006', *West European Politics* 31 no.1-2 (2008):142.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 131.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

stable. In an ‘amended interest-based theory of party systems’, Boix and Stokes argued that sociological explanations of party formation imply an automatic translation of pre-existing social and ideological preferences of the electorate into political action, which in effect tends to be profoundly mediated by interest-driven political actors⁴⁸. Based on the assumption that both voters and political actors act rationally, the argument posited notably that voters ‘care about multiple issues’⁴⁹ and could in effect vote in favor of the most preferred set of policy commitments, potentially diverging from those originally implied given the social and economic background of voters. Similarly, parties, given the intrinsic vote-maximizing incentives of party elites and the presumed ‘multidimensionality’ of an electoral and policy space, would be inclined to opt for ‘the construction of broader policy bundles’ that could be applied to a large group of voters with varying backgrounds⁵⁰. It means that the patterns of electoral competition and voting behavior would be crucially contingent upon electoral mobilization strategies and policy platforms adopted by party elites and to which voters still need to ‘...sense some (material or ideational) affinity’⁵¹.

Whilst Boix’ variant of sociological models sheds some light on both spatial and institutional factors conditioning the strategic behavior of political actors (the latter are meanwhile determined and reinforced by political actors), convincingly noted as crucial in determining party organizations and broader dynamics of party system formation and consolidation, the integration of complementary and contextual factors into the analysis of strategic calculations of party elites nonetheless looks inadequate. Given the presumed saliency of incentive structures facing party elites, it would be further appropriate to investigate the patterns of political elite behavior in the

⁴⁸ Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. ‘Mass Mobilization’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (Oxford University Press, 2007): 504.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

context of power-opposition competition, election campaign dynamics and potential 'critical junctures' associated with significant political and institutional changes, particularly in newer democracies. In effect, understanding the rationale for selecting a specific set of 'policy bundles' and developing a campaign strategy would entail examining the implications of an incumbent performance and the ability of opposition forces to capitalize on possible public discontent by 'politicizing' salient issues and evaluating the effect of potentially candidate-centered mobilization appeals on electoral outcomes. In the context of new democracies or competitive authoritarian regimes, characterized by considerably less pronounced ideological differences and issue-based voting and inter-party competition and broader state of regime and institutional uncertainty, the dynamics of power-opposition struggle and election campaigns stressing candidate personality, marketing and campaign resources, evidently proves critical in determining the elite-led party organizational and mobilizational strategies, influencing the broader state of party (system) institutionalization.

By making the rationality assumption that voting decisions are based on the calculated evaluation of policy positions presented by candidates, Boix' variant of sociological accounts furthermore tends to downplay the saliency of concurrent factors affecting the electoral behavior in both old and developing democracies. On a theoretical level, it has been reflected in an insufficient consideration of the underlying theoretical propositions advanced as part of 'classic' sociological accounts of party formation, and that tend to be consistent with sociological models of voting in stressing social and political predispositions of voters. Building on original findings made by Lazarsfeld et al, a bulk of subsequent empirical data on voting behavior in developed democracies indicated that social and group identities are still significant determinants of voting choices and that issue-based voting choice, which has certainly risen in significance over the past few decades, needs

to be viewed in relation to broader ideological positions held by candidates and parties⁵². This implies that voting decisions on policy bundles would be fundamentally informed by own social background and ideological convictions, though additional factors affecting voting behavior, including issue-driven, could be at play.

In addition to linking issue-based voting choices to associated ideological spaces, a theoretical analysis of electoral behavior in the context of developed democracies could be further complemented with theoretical propositions emphasizing psycho-social or partisan attachments of voters, strategic voting⁵³, personal attachments to candidates and campaign effects⁵⁴. It is presumed, at a fundamental level, that votes are not always cast based on rational and deliberate calculations of the expected benefits from policy bundles given the inherent unavailability of complete information on policy issues and the prospects of implementability of policy commitments⁵⁵. In effect, the presumed 'rationalization' of voting choices would be significantly influenced, depending on the social background and preferences of voters, by traditional party allegiances, strategic considerations of party's electoral prospects and the predisposition to eschew 'wasted votes', as well as the personality factors that could potentially overshadow issue-based election campaigning, particularly for presidential elections.

Extrapolating the theoretical assumptions and propositions, made as part of Boix' 'amended theory', to new democracies based on unstable institutional environments and heightened political competition proves equally problematic despite justifiably underscoring the significance of party elite incentives in developing party organizational and mobilizational strategies. The obscurity of

⁵² Paul Lazarsfeld et al, *A study of opinion formation in a presidential campaign* (The University of Chicago Press, 1954).

⁵³ Rui Antunes, 'Theoretical models of voting behavior', <https://is.vsfs.cz/publication/3355?lang=en>.

⁵⁴ Sunshine Hilygus, 'Campaign Effects on Vote Choice', in *The Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*, ed. Jan E. Leighley (Oxford Handbook Online, 2010).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

both social and ideological dimensions of political action, especially in former Soviet republics, implies that voting choices and electoral strategies are not determined by rational selection and appropriation of policy bundles, but that in the absence of multi-dimensional ideological and policy spaces, party mobilization and competition in new democracies need to be investigated in connection with distinctive contextual and institutional factors. In actuality, the strategic decisions made by party elites regarding organizational and mobilizational models will be informed by exogenous factors, including the uncertain context of purported 'transition', informality of politics, power-opposition dynamics, electoral volatility and broader context of weak party system institutionalization. Lastly, and assuming the pre-existence of a multidimensional policy space, based on which candidates would select a bundle of policies to ensure electoral success, Boix' model, however, proves somewhat inadequate in exploring the dimensions of party institutionalization and its variance, typically emphasizing the significance of organizational and mobilizational strategies, and uncovering the incentive structures guiding the behavior of political actors.

A systematic analysis of social determinants of party system institutionalization (PSI) in East Central Europe, presented by Bertoa, meanwhile, suggests that the degree of PSI is 'determined by the way cleavages are structured', not the number, nor the strength of cleavages, as posited in the original cleavage hypothesis⁵⁶. The empirical findings, based specifically on the investigation of emerging party systems in four 'Visegrád' countries, contrasted the propositions made by Kitschelt et al⁵⁷ regarding the causal association of economic-distributive cleavage types with higher degrees of PSI, mediated by inter-party competition along programmatic lines, as opposed to 'historical-regime' cleavages conducive to the formation of clientelistic parties and weak structuration of party

⁵⁶ Fernando Casal Bertoa, 'Party systems and cleavage structures revisited: A sociological explanation of party system institutionalization in East Central Europe', *Party Politics* 20, no. 1 (2014).

⁵⁷ Herbert Kitschelt et al, *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation and Inter-Party Competition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

systems⁵⁸. It was revealed instead that the degree of party system institutionalization, defined as ‘the process by which the patterns of interaction among political parties become routine, predictable and stable over time’⁵⁹, tends to be causally affected by the ‘cumulative’ pattern of cleavage structures prompting parties to interact over multiple issue positions identified in a one-dimensional cleavage spectrum and that ‘cross-cutting’ cleavages conversely produced weakly institutionalized party systems⁶⁰.

Following Kitschelt’s propositions linking the configurations of party systems in East Central Europe to economic policy positions held by parties, Sitter claimed along the same lines that emerging party systems, beyond economic dimensions, reflected political, cultural and ethnic interests, whilst further emphasizing the centrality of party strategies ‘...as the key variable in explaining patterns of party system stability and change’⁶¹. In contrast to sociological models, including Bertoa’s variant emphasizing cleavage structures, it was substantively argued that the post-communist context of party formation has differed markedly from older West European party systems, that the original ‘cleavage theory’ was modelled on, in terms of structural parameters that conditioned the translation of social and political cleavages into political action⁶². Sitter noted that in the original ‘cleavage model’ strong party-voters linkages are presumed to precede the politicization of social structural cleavages, which do not seemingly hold in East Central Europe, ‘because the very existence of pluralist civil society has been retarded’⁶³.

⁵⁸Herbert Kitschelt et al, *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation and Inter-Party Competition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁵⁹Fernando Casal Bertoa, ‘Party systems and cleavage structures revisited: A sociological explanation of party system institutionalization in East Central Europe’, *Party Politics* 20, no. 1 (2014): 17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 27.

⁶¹Nick Sitter, ‘Cleavage, party strategy and party system change in Europe, east and west’, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 3, no. 3 (2002): 425.

⁶² *Ibid*, 432.

⁶³ *Ibid*.

The initial weakness of party roots in society, also intensified by the absence of extra-parliamentary organizations 'in the form of the Church and trade unions' and aggregated interests, further caused difficulties in establishing the relationship between party-voter linkage patterns and emergent models of voting behavior and inter-party competition⁶⁴. As further noted, party organizations in post-communist East Central Europe also diverged widely from the ideal types of 'mass' party organizations, characteristic of older party systems based latterly on growing professionalization and emphasis on election marketing strategies, by exhibiting leadership-dominated and fluid structures, reflecting the evolutionary nature of most post-communist parties as formed originally out of anti-communist opposition movements, former communist platform and interest-based political groups⁶⁵. Whilst treating the issue of applicability of the 'cleavage' theory to the post-communist context of East Central Europe as highly problematic, Sitter argued alternatively that the patterns of party system development and stabilization in the region tended to be shaped by party strategies for mobilizing voters around selected cleavages and adopting a stance toward the extant 'system'⁶⁶. A combined equilibrium of party strategies associated with establishing enduring patterns of competition and coalition-building, especially following the successful moves by opposition blocs to coalesce against the initial incumbent governments, typically prompted the formation of more stable and organizationally institutionalized party systems in Hungary and Czech Republic, as opposed to less stable party systems to Poland and Slovakia⁶⁷.

The substantive arguments set forth by Sitter and underpinned by plausible assumptions provide a general theoretical direction for explaining the observed variation in the strength and

⁶⁴ Nick Sitter, 'Cleavage, party strategy and party system change in Europe, east and west', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 3, no. 3 (2002): 434.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

institutionalization of party systems extending beyond post-communist East Central Europe to include post-Soviet countries formerly sharing similar 'communist' legacies and social and institutional features. Affecting perhaps more severely than post-communist East Central Europe, the communist ideology has fundamentally weakened the ideological space and pre-Soviet class-based social cleavages contributing to the formation of new 'post-independent' parties lacking strong social and ideological bases of support. The relative insignificance of policy and ideological dimensions of party formation and competition in the post-Soviet region was also accompanied by low levels of political efficacy and political participation, which in the context of growing political cynicism further impeded the establishment of sustained constituency links based on policy and ideological commitments. In the meantime, and reflecting the unsolidified character of party-voters linkages and unstable party roots in society, party organizations correspondingly emerged as poorly routinized based on hierarchical and centralized authority structures and limited organizational presence at both regional and local level, viewed heuristically by extant elite groups as 'electoral-professional machines'.

Despite developing an original assumption about the enhanced explanatory power of party strategies, and hence party actors, in evaluating both the strength and stability of emergent party systems in East Central Europe, and stressing the contextual and social conditions as implicit factors rendering the original 'cleavage theory' inapplicable to the post-communist context, Sitter's strategic coordination model, however, appears to be incomplete for explaining post-Soviet party systems due similarly to nuanced contextual particularities. In particular, the existence of political, cultural and ethnic cleavages was still implicit in Sitter's model, though their effect on party system stability and competition was largely mediated by party strategies, a pattern, which has been hardly noticed in the post-Soviet context, whereby party formation, mobilization and competition tend to be determined mainly by non-ideological considerations. Stressing the saliency of political actors in

affecting party formation and competition in the post-Soviet region, Turovsky noted that parties as political institutions 'are created by groups of ruling elites and/or business groups to serve as a tool of ...elite re-structuring and consolidation'⁶⁸, in which the resultant '...elite competition overshadows public participation and ideological or societal cleavages'⁶⁹.

It was argued particularly that in the absence of issue or ideology-based political competition, there has been an increasing tendency amongst semi-authoritarian incumbents in most post-Soviet countries to 'manage' parties and shape the structure of party systems based on the selective application of the electoral and party laws, including the proportional representation voting system, as part of broader strategies to 'create majority in parliament, to decrease societal polarization and increase elite consolidation'⁷⁰. Along the same lines, and emphasizing the instrumentality of parties as formal institutions ensuring the consolidation of authoritarian regimes, Isaacs claimed that in the context of Kazakhstan, parties and formal institutional rules enabled the incumbent authoritarian regime to legitimize 'informal political behavior and relations, providing elite cohesion and formal vehicles for high level elites to protect and extend their political and economic interests'⁷¹. It was further maintained that informal political relations, high level of personalism in politics and political patronage constrained the 'democratizing effect' of a potentially viable party system as the 'party of power' ('Nur-Otan') and closely related pro-presidential parties typically served to buttress the personalistic regime of president Nazarbayev⁷².

⁶⁸ Rostislav Turovsky, 'Party systems in post-Soviet states: the shaping of political competition', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 12, no. 2 (2011): 198.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 203.

⁷¹ Rico Isaacs, 'Between Informal and Formal Politics: Neopatrimonialism and Party Development in post-Soviet Kazakhstan' (a PhD dissertation submitted to the School of Social Sciences and Law at Oxford Brookes University, 2009).

⁷² Ibid.

A similar pattern of building a 'party of power', viewed lately as a distinctive party type in the post-Soviet context, also manifested across Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan as the authoritarian incumbents sought to utilize the formal party channels to maintain a centralized control of power⁷³ by cultivating patron-client relationships⁷⁴, dominating both national and local elections and controlling '...the legislative agenda of the executive administration'⁷⁵. In the meantime, the breakdown of authoritarian regimes in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, formerly attempting in a similar fashion to sustain political control by favoring the regime-affiliated dominant parties, has not brought about a profound transformation of party systems as would be otherwise evident in both the growing significance of social and ideological dimensions structuring party competition and increased incentives for party elites to invest in party-building. As in the past, though facing heightened political uncertainty, high levels of electoral volatility and greater political freedom, parties in both Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, retained centralized and personalized features of internal governance and the old patterns of electoral mobilization based on non-ideological appeals and weak local party organizations. Whilst the absence of social cleavages clearly contributed as a 'distal' and background factor to the fragility of party-voter linkages and non-ideological character of party competition and mobilization in the post-Soviet region, a more nuanced analysis of observed patterns of party systems, notably low level of party institutionalization, thus would entail examining the underlying strategic incentives facing party elites and political actors and broader dynamics of political competition and electoral mobilization.

⁷³ Vladimir Gel'man, 'From 'feckless pluralism' to 'dominant power politics'? The transformation of Russia's party system', *Democratization* 13, no.4 (2006).

⁷⁴ Rico Isaacs, 'Between Informal and Formal Politics: Neopatrimonialism and Party Development in post-Soviet Kazakhstan' (a PhD dissertation submitted to the School of Social Sciences and Law at Oxford Brookes University, 2009).

⁷⁵ Nicklaus Laverty, 'The 'party of power' as a type', *East European Politics* 31, no. 1 (2015).

As formerly noted, Lipset and Rokkan's 'cleavage model', stressing long-standing social and ideological divisions in societies as bases for party competition, provided fundamental theoretical insights and directions for the study of enduring party systems in Western European democratic polities and beyond. It posited essentially that socio-historical cleavages that emerged in the wake of national and industrial revolutions in the nineteenth century formed the ideological bases of party politics and electoral mobilization and influenced the enduring patterns of stability and strength of Western European party systems⁷⁶. In the context of 'third-wave' post-communist democracies, the applicability of the cleavage model was maintained by integrating nuanced explanations, such as that the emerging party systems are determined 'by the ways cleavages are structured'⁷⁷, instead of an automatic translation of pre-existing socio and economic cleavages, and highlighting the critical role of political actors in mediating the contextual effect of cleavages on post-communist party systems⁷⁸.

In the latter case, and based on the assumption of rationality of political actors and voters, both Boix and Sitter admitted, despite stressing the centrality of party strategies against the backdrop of weak party-voter linkages and low organizational capabilities characterizing post-communist parties, that there exists a multi-dimensional ideological and electoral space within which party actors, including opposition blocks, select the best policy bundles to maximize electoral support⁷⁹. However, given the low saliency of cleavage-based ideological dimensions of political competition in most post-Soviet countries, including Kyrgyzstan, which could arguably be traced to

⁷⁶ Martin Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-national Perspectives* (Toronto: The Free Press, 1967).

⁷⁷ Fernando Casal Bertoa, 'Party systems and cleavage structures revisited: A sociological explanation of party system institutionalization in East Central Europe', *Party Politics* 20, no. 1 (2014): 16.

⁷⁸ Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. 'Mass Mobilization', in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷⁹ Nick Sitter, 'Cleavage, party strategy and party system change in Europe, east and west', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 3, no.3 (2002).

communist legacies associated with the weakening of social bases of political divisions and low levels of political efficacy and participation, the application of the cleavage model and its variants would not thus suffice for generating a compelling theoretical account of the degree and strength of party institutionalization in the region. This implies that concurrent theoretical and analytic frameworks need to consider the potential effects of (authoritarian) regime dynamics, elite competition and political incentive structures governing the behavior of political actors and notably the strategic choices of party elites with regard to internal party organization and electoral mobilization.

2.2. Electoral institutions and party systems

Beyond sociological models, a voluminous body of literature on party systems in Western European polities also observed the crucial effect of electoral institutions on the number of parties, holding in turn important implications for the nature and configuration of party systems and strategic incentives of party elites. The surge of scholarly interest in exploring the broader relationship between electoral institutions and party systems has emerged noticeably⁸⁰ following and drawing on Duverger's seminal work on party systems⁸¹. Reflecting the logic of two main propositions known as Duverger's law, it was postulated that single-member district plurality system produces a two-party system and that proportional representation favors multipartyism⁸². In substantive terms, the rationale behind this law lied in an assertion that the 'interplay of mechanical and psychological effects' of electoral rules constrains the number of parties⁸³. Owing to the zero-sum process

⁸⁰Gary W Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁸¹ Maurice Duverger, *Les Parties Politiques* (Paris: Librairie, 1951).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Kenneth Benoit, "Duverger's Law and the Study of Electoral Systems", *French Politics* 4 (2006): 73.

inherent in a single-member plurality system, the conversion of votes into seats would bring about an 'over-representation' of the largest parties at the expense of smaller parties⁸⁴.

In the meantime, the overall effect of the voting system tends to be reinforced congruently by the psychological expectations of both party elites and voters regarding the operation of the original mechanical effect⁸⁵. In particular, 'under electoral rule arrangements that give small or even third-place parties little chances of winning seats', party and political elites would be strategically inclined to refrain from entering the electoral arena and forming coalitions consisting of a host of smaller parties, whereas voters would similarly 'eschew' supporting third-party candidates with diminished electoral prospects to avoid wasting votes⁸⁶. Building on empirical inferences made by Cox, Benoit, however, admitted that in countries introducing frequent changes to the electoral laws or undergoing the process of new party system formation, the psychological effect could be substantially moderated, which given the 'endogeneity' assumption holding that the mechanical effect is conditioned by psychological anticipations, would pose significant challenges for empirical inquiry⁸⁷.

Whilst noting the empirical exceptions to Duverger's law and putting into question its deterministic connotation, Benoit further proposed to challenge the conventional view of electoral institutions as exogenous factors affecting the configuration of party systems and concentrate on investigating the influences, including political actors, on the precursors of institutional changes⁸⁸. It was presumed that political actors frame own strategies based on extant institutional settings and concurrently shape political and electoral institutions in order to strategically adapt to a political

⁸⁴ Kenneth Benoit, "Duverger's Law and the Study of Electoral Systems", *French Politics* 4 (2006): 73.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 75.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 78.

reality and maximize power⁸⁹. Drawing on a similar line of reasoning corroborated by empirical analysis, Colomer argued that ‘...it is the number of parties that can explain the choice of electoral systems, rather than the other way around’, with political actors choosing electoral systems for own interests⁹⁰. By reversing the direction of causality determined in Duverger’s propositions, Colomer particularly noted that ‘electoral systems will crystallize, consolidate and reinforce the previously existing political party configurations, rather than (by themselves) generate new party systems’⁹¹. In effect, political configurations based on few parties would prompt dominant parties to opt for majoritarian electoral systems disincentivizing the strategic entry of new smaller parties, and multi-party systems conversely lead to the adoption of proportional electoral systems allowing multiple small and medium-sized parties to retain both the electoral viability and political influence⁹².

Based on an in-depth investigation of the formation of a new and evolving party system in Spain during late 1970s, Gunther similarly showed that ‘the perceptions, calculations, strategies, and behavior of party elites play a crucial intervening role between the electoral law and the overall shape of the party system’⁹³. Whilst acknowledging the ‘distal effect’ of the electoral law operating in combination with partisan preferences reflecting pre-existing social structural cleavages, the integrated analysis of ‘causal assertions’ made as part of institutional explanations and country context revealed that, in effect, the predicted political consequences of electoral laws occur in a ‘complex and multi-faceted’ manner with party strategies emphasized as crucial for the dynamics of broader political competition⁹⁴. In theory, the operation of both mechanical and psychological

⁸⁹ Kenneth Benoit, “Duverger’s Law and the Study of Electoral Systems”, *French Politics* 4 (2006): 78.

⁹⁰ Joseph M Colomer, ‘It’s Parties That Choose Electoral Systems (or, Duverger’s Laws Upside Down)’, *Political Studies* 53, no. 1 (2005): 1.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹³ Richard Gunther, ‘Electoral Laws, Party Systems, and Elites: The Case of Spain’, *The American Political Science Review* 83, no.3 (1989):835.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 854.

effects of plurality voting systems on party system configurations pre-supposes that party elites possess accurate and complete information on own and coalition partners' electoral support base and the incentive structures of electoral laws, and prioritize rationality-driven political goals to maximize the party's parliamentary representation, which in practice could prove highly implausible as demonstrated in the formation of party mergers and electoral coalitions⁹⁵. In the absence of assumptive conditions underpinning the direct and deterministic effect of electoral laws, the behavior of party elites in terms of targeting electoral support base and forming coalitions, tend to produce a 'distorted' pattern of political competition in the form of 'a tumultuous and destabilizing' electoral crisis in 1980s, considerably diverging from initial theoretical predictions⁹⁶. Whilst examining the implications of often unpredictable and irrational behavior of party elites for the initial instability of an evolving party system in Spain, Gunther's model nonetheless fell short of explaining the consequences of party elites strategies for the emerging party system configuration, especially after undergoing an initial period of tumultuous political instability caused by the absence of prior knowledge of electoral support bases and incentives structures inherent in electoral laws.

The latter in a way reflects the inadequacy of institutional accounts, even in the case of rough prediction of the number of parties, in explaining the broader patterns of party system formation and structures of competition and mobilization. Commenting on the limitations of institutional explanations of party systems, Boix noted that 'the type of rules cannot be employed to predict the spatial location, ideological commitments, and nature of electoral support of the parties that will compete in the electoral arena'⁹⁷. In other words, electoral laws viewed as exerting a 'distal' effect

⁹⁵Richard Gunther, 'Electoral Laws, Party Systems, and Elites: The Case of Spain', *The American Political Science Review* 83, no. 3 (1989): 854.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. 'Mass Mobilization', in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (Oxford University Press, 2007):506.

could broadly shape the configuration of party systems, i.e. two-party or multi-party systems, but the examination of ideological dimensions of party systems and the degree and strength of party system institutionalization, including in terms of organizational development, would necessitate invoking complementary explanations establishing the complex chain of interaction between party elite strategies and the incentives structures embedded in both institutional and social arrangements. In the meantime, and contrasting Colomer's propositions regarding the strategic incentives of party elites to reproduce old party system configurations, Boix further admitted the possibility of exogenous origins of new party actors, in charge of choosing electoral systems, whose strategies could potentially lead to profound transformations of institutional settings of party systems⁹⁸.

A comparative analysis of five post-communist party systems, undertaken by Moser, meanwhile, showed that the hypothesized effect of electoral systems on party system configurations in new democracies tends to be different than in established democracies⁹⁹. Building on the strategic model of voter and party 'adaptation' to the incentives of electoral laws, set forth by Cox, it was empirically established that the mechanical effect of plurality and majoritarian systems in Russia and Ukraine has not expectedly induced 'two-candidate contests at the district level'¹⁰⁰ and broader consolidation of parties into larger blocs, as occurred in post-communist counterparts, including Lithuania and Hungary¹⁰¹. In the former cases, the 'failure of strategic behavior' of political actors under plurality and majoritarian systems was closely associated with high levels of party fractionalization entailing the surge of a dominant party and a host of

⁹⁸ Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. 'Mass Mobilization', in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (Oxford University Press, 2007):507.

⁹⁹ Robert G Moser, 'Electoral Systems and the Number of Parties in Postcommunist States', *World Politics* 51, no. 3 (1999): 383.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

independent candidates in single-member district elections, holding nominal memberships with smaller parties¹⁰². Conversely, the proportional representation has produced a disproportionately higher number of parties across post-communist democracies in the early stages of party formation, with Poland and Hungary following ‘...the standard pattern of party consolidation over time in reaction to incentives of electoral systems’¹⁰³, and Russia and Ukraine contrastingly constraining the number of parties due mainly to legal thresholds¹⁰⁴. Echoing Cox’ propositions regarding the structural pre-conditions underpinning the strategic behavior of party actors, Moser argued that the effect of legal thresholds in inducing the strategic behavior and ‘learning’ conforming to institutional incentives was contingent upon the degree of party institutionalization identified as an intervening variable mediating the relationship between electoral and party systems i.e. institutionalized party systems leading to a greater propensity for strategic behavior¹⁰⁵.

In his analysis of five post-Soviet party systems, Meleshevich similarly showed that in Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania, contrasting the expected consequences in terms of the ‘proliferation of parliamentary political parties’¹⁰⁶, the introduction of proportional representation system has been accompanied by the formation of a small number of parties that secured parliamentary representation despite initially generating high rates of electoral contestation between parties and other political organizations¹⁰⁷. The analysis of this empirical pattern demonstrates that the election of a reduced or disproportionately small number of parliamentary parties under proportional representation system was largely due to the use of ‘a relatively high electoral threshold’¹⁰⁸, which,

¹⁰²Robert G Moser, ‘Electoral Systems and the Number of Parties in Postcommunist States’, *World Politics* 51,no. 3 (1999):376.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 360.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 383.

¹⁰⁶ Andrey A. Meleshevich, *Party Systems in Post-Soviet Countries: A Comparative Study of Political Institutionalization in the Baltic States, Russian and Ukraine* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007):191.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

however, in combination with similar formal regulations conducive to containing and strengthening parties could be decisive '...in advancing political institutionalization [defined as featuring *autonomy* and *stability* dimensions] in post-Soviet nations'¹⁰⁹. By underscoring the significance of electoral laws and regulations, including legal thresholds, as critically mediating the effect of electoral formulae on hypothesized configurations of party systems and higher levels of party or political institutionalization, the institutional and structural explanations offered by both Meleshevich and Moser, however, neglected essentially the critical role played by post-Soviet ruling elites in both changing electoral laws for political purposes and shaping broader state of party system formation and competition.

Based on a meticulous analysis of growing authoritarian trends in Russia in late 2000s, Gel'man explained particularly that in the light of 'unprecedented economic growth'¹¹⁰ and increasing monopolization of economic assets, a party-based strategy of 'soft authoritarian dominance'¹¹¹ was conceived of as more preferable in the long-run, to high-risk repressive political strategies, given the strategic regime incentives to monopolize power by cultivating patronage and eliciting political loyalty and 'maintain elite consolidation and recruitment through mutually reinforcing bureaucratic and political mechanisms of control'¹¹². In effect, the so-called 'party of power', formally known as 'United Russia' party, has turned into a dominant party, albeit governed externally by Putin's administration and designated 'a secondary role in policy making'¹¹³, rendering electoral competition over ideological or issue-based considerations meaningless.

¹⁰⁹ Andrey A. Meleshevich, *Party Systems in Post-Soviet Countries: A Comparative Study of Political Institutionalization in the Baltic States, Russian and Ukraine* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007):191.

¹¹⁰ Vladimir Gel'man, 'From 'feckless pluralism' to 'dominant power politics'? The transformation of Russia's party system, *Democratization* 13, no.4 (2006):918.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 922.

The formation and consolidation of 'United Russia' party, diverging from conventional party types (programmatic vs clientelistic) in terms of genesis, organization and ideological bases, was meanwhile accompanied by adoption of a series of institutional changes, including an increase in the electoral threshold for parliamentary representation from 5% to 7%, party and electoral regulations toughening 'organizational and membership requirements'¹¹⁴ and constraining the legal ways to form electoral blocs, measures that collectively laid an institutional groundwork for setting high entry barriers for new parties and subsequent dissolution of a large number of smaller parties¹¹⁵. In addition to 'United Russia', the Kremlin-affiliated elites also allegedly engaged in building loyal or 'fake' alternative parties for the purposes of sharing the incumbent votes and concurrently siphoning votes from opposition parties¹¹⁶.

In the meantime, the gradual consolidation of the party-based authoritarian regime has been accompanied by a decreasing influence in policy-making and declining electoral support amongst formerly viable opposition parties, including notably KPRF (The Communist Party of Russia). Affecting opposition liberal parties, such as 'Yabloko' (Apple), more severely, the tendency was clearly indicative of political consequences of institutional changes relating to an internal governance and organization of parties, and political 'attacks' and pressures on high-level executive officials and local politicians, formerly affiliated with opposition parties, prompting subsequent shifts in party and political loyalties toward Kremlin-backed UR party or exclusions from both the political and electoral arena¹¹⁷. In a sense, by eliciting political loyalty from few remaining opposition parties with diminishing electoral and institutional support bases, and significantly altering political

¹¹⁴ Vladimir Gel'man, 'From 'feckless pluralism' to 'dominant power politics'? The transformation of Russia's party system, *Democratization* 13, no. 4 (2006):919.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 922.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 925.

and institutional frameworks, the regime managed to create a rather idiosyncratic political system, conforming to the conceptual model of 'managed democracy', according to which formal multi-party system and electoral institutions serve to maintain a 'democratic façade' in the context of soft authoritarian practices and personalistic rule of the sitting president.

A similar strategy of regime consolidation was evident to varying degrees in post-Soviet Central Asia, including notably in Kazakhstan, where, as contended by Isaacs (2009, p.286), formal institutions such as a leadership-created dominant party 'proved [an] effective tool [] for regime stability'¹¹⁸. It was noted crucially that the predicted effect of institutional changes pertaining to political parties and electoral institutions tends to be minimal given the tendency for 'selective application and interpretation' of formal rules to legitimize the 'informal political behavior' and formalize 'informal elite competition' based on clientelistic and personalistic linkages¹¹⁹. In essence, the adoption of formal rules altering the institutional configuration of an emergent political system, and that was formally propagating democratic norms, also constituted an attempt, as in Russia, to contain political opposition by imposing formal hurdles under new institutional settings¹²⁰. The shift to full proportional representation system in 2007, viewed as a significant move in fostering party development and competition, was thus followed by setting the nationwide electoral threshold at 7 per cent that on top of continued political persecution and exploitation of state administrative resources for political and electoral goals proved insurmountable for dwindling opposition parties¹²¹. This suggests that particular formal laws and regulations could act as critical intervening variables distorting the hypothesized causal nexus between electoral systems and party system configurations

¹¹⁸ Rico Isaacs, 'Between Informal and Formal Politics: Neopatrimonialism and Party Development in post-Soviet Kazakhstan' (a PhD dissertation submitted to the School of Social Sciences and Law at Oxford Brookes University, 2009):286.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 288.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid, 168.

(i.e. proportional representation system creating a dominant party system alongside fragmented non-parliamentary parties) and broadly undermining the prospects for party system institutionalization. It was further conceivable that in the context of authoritarianism-building processes, formal institutional (party) platforms could be potentially utilized to their own detriment to sustain and reinforce enduring informal institutions based on clientelistic and personalistic features in order to consolidate the elite and regime.

A set of theoretical arguments developed by Isaacs following the empirical analysis of party system formation in Kazakhstan provide a cogent framework for assessing the implications of elite behavior and authoritarian regime consolidation for determining party systems across non-Western European polities. In the context of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, sharing institutional, historical and cultural similarities with Kazakhstan, the incumbent regimes initially sought to constrain the formation of institutionalized parties by imposing restrictive laws and regulations pertaining to parties and electoral institutions, and then legitimize the growing authoritarian and personalistic grip on power based on the establishment of 'parties of power'. As Koldys noted in his analysis of 'institutional influences involved in the emergence and formation of a party system in Kyrgyzstan during the initial period of the transition from a single-party system to a multiparty system'¹²², formal political institutions exerted a deleterious effect on the formation of a stable party system¹²³. In particular, the 'Law on public associations', which also governed party activities in the past, underwent considerable changes under the presidency of Akayev in late 1990s extending the right of nomination of candidates to the parliament to public associations, consequently diminishing the centrality of political parties for democratic governance¹²⁴. As noted, the political rationale for

¹²² Gregory Koldys, 'Constraining Democratic Development: Institutions and Party System Formation in Kyrgyzstan', *Demokratizatsiya* 5, no.3 (1997):352.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 356.

making changes to the electoral and party laws, that, beyond nomination rules, also involved tightening up of formal rules governing the registration of parties, candidate registration and election campaign activities, was to dilute the votes 'due to the high number of [individual opposition] candidates per seat' and inhibit the consolidation of opposition groups along party lines¹²⁵. In addition, the majority system that remained in effect at the time as the main method of choosing a bi-cameral legislature (with only 15 seats of the 105-seat parliament filled by party-nominated candidates), further impeded the formation of viable parties¹²⁶.

In the meantime, by expressing caution about the direct and deterministic effect of proportional representation system on multipartyism and its prospects for strengthening democratic governance, Koldys, similarly to Isaacs, established in a convincing way that the electoral and party laws could in effect be modified and manipulated by incumbent rulers in order to consolidate political power, and in a way that fundamentally distorts the presumed causal effect of electoral formulae on the strength and configuration of party systems. This theoretical perspective, however, implies the presence of an incumbent ruler, possessing reasonably sufficient political power enabling to make institutional changes to strengthen authoritarian rule based on otherwise fragile political system (as in Kyrgyzstan in 1990s and early 2000s) or formalize a solidly repressive authoritarian regime (as in Kazakhstan in late 2000s and onwards). In the context of renewed prospects of democracy, enhanced perceptibly following the democratic uprising toppling authoritarian incumbents (i.e. so-called 'Kyrgyz revolutions' of 2005 and 2010), and followed by public demands and some institutional reforms toward strengthening parliamentarism and multipartyism, an empirical investigation of the dynamics of party system development and change

¹²⁵Gregory Koldys, 'Constraining Democratic Development: Institutions and Party System Formation in Kyrgyzstan', *Demokratizatsiya* 5, no.3 (1997):369.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

would thus necessitate developing an extended theoretical framework for analyzing the incentive structures and strategic behavior of 'new' party actors under changing political and institutional conditions.

More specifically, the alternative theoretical perspective needs to consider, beyond (and notwithstanding) institutional incentives, the relevance of strategic factors and immediate political context in affecting the incentives of party elites to invest in building institutionalized party organizations and shaping party mobilization strategies. Relatedly, it would be crucial to define, in both systematic and observable ways, the notion of 'party institutionalization'¹²⁷ that following the publication on Latin American party systems by Mainwaring and Scully has been growingly invoked in contemporary party research to investigate the structural parameters of party systems across established and developing democracies. The emphasis on this notion, in turn, implies adopting a more holistic approach to tracing the complex causal mechanisms linking a wide range of concomitant factors to the level of party (system) institutionalization, which would potentially compensate for a theoretical inadequacy of both sociological and institutional models emphasizing separate ideological or configurative dimensions of party systems. Besides limited capacity to explain the variation in the degree of multi-dimensional process of party institutionalization, shaped chiefly by patterns of electoral mobilization and internal organization, examining the hypothesized effects of sociological or institutions factors on party systems in new democracies, as formerly discussed, proves problematic due to the obscurity of social cleavages for political action and the ability of political elite groups to alter the institutional settings for political ends.

2.3. Socio-historical and institutional legacies and party systems

¹²⁷ Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully, *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin American* (Stanford University Press, 1995).

Closely related to broader social structural determinants of party systems in developing democracies is a conditional set of theoretical propositions highlighting the enduring impact of socio-historical and institutional legacies on the structural characteristics of emergent party systems. Contrasting the *tabula rasa* assumption, the underlying argument posits that ‘the dimensions of party competition are not random...but fairly well structured and predictable’¹²⁸. In a seminal book presenting a comparative typology framework for emergent party systems in post-communist East Central Europe, Kitschelt et al argued particularly party-voter linkage patterns and the structure of party competition in the region varied ‘...according to complex historical legacies embracing both pre-communist and communist periods, as modified by institutional and economic choices made after transition’¹²⁹. In substantive terms, it was held that the type of communist rule, conditioned in turn by pre-modern economic and political developments, in combination with the modes of transition, which it influenced, determined the formation of divergent post-communist party systems¹³⁰.

A combination of ‘national-accommodative’ regimes and ‘broad regime-opposition consensus’ over transition thus affected the patterns of inter-party competition based on ‘cross-cutting cleavages’ and ‘value’-based issues creating a three-dimensional electoral space competed by liberals, ex-communists and nationalists in Hungary and Poland¹³¹. Conversely, in Bulgaria a ‘patrimonial communist’ regime has produced a ‘loosely structured’ two-party system underpinned mainly by political cleavages over the regime followed by market orientations, whilst the dismantlement of a ‘bureaucratic-authoritarian’ communist regime in the wake of transition led to

¹²⁸Jeffrey Kopstein, ‘Review: Postcommunist Democracy: Legacies and Outcomes’, *Comparative Politics* 35, no. 2 (2003):239.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

the formation of 'classic' patterns of partisan competition along the left-right ideological spectrum¹³². By characterizing this framework as exceedingly deterministic, though recognizing the saliency of historical-structural legacies, Hanley, however, emphasized the significant influence of 'reflexive actors' in determining institutional choices and economic strategies shaping the structure and dynamics of party systems¹³³. It was additionally noted, based on the assumption of incremental transformability of long-standing social structures, that the type of past communist regimes and the resultant structures of post-communist party system competition could be conditioned in important ways by the dynamics of interest-based politics¹³⁴.

In the meantime, the applicability of this framework for party system typology to similarly new democracies 'transitioning' from dictatorships, but exhibiting divergent patterns of dictatorship and pre-modern forms of economic and political governance, combined with idiosyncratically colonial and institutional legacies, could present theoretical and empirical challenges, though socio-historical legacies, as Hanley noted, remain a fairly noteworthy background factor broadly influencing the strategic choices of new political actors and hence institutional frameworks¹³⁵. Despite sharing the communist past, the absence of discernible social cleavage dimensions of political competition during the transition period and historical pre-conditions associated with economic and political modernity, could create additional difficulties in extrapolating the model to the post-Soviet context. As formerly mentioned, the immaturity of political and electoral institutions and near absence of ideological cleavages implied a growing significance of party organization and

¹³²Jeffrey Kopstein, 'Review: Postcommunist Democracy: Legacies and Outcomes', *Comparative Politics* 35, no. 2 (2003):239.

¹³³ S. Hanley, Review of *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation and Inter-Party Cooperation*, by Herbert Kitschelt et al, *Party Politics* 6, no.2 (2000):242.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 243.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 242.

mobilization-related strategies chosen by party actors for both the character and quality of party systems.

In addition to the 'ideological void', and despite the implausibility of determining a direct relationship between socio-historical legacies and party system characteristics in the post-Soviet region, the communist, or 'Leninist', legacies in the form of public distrust of political institutions, including especially political parties, and low levels of political efficacy and engagement, influenced the early stages of political competition and formation of party systems in the region. Comparing to post-communist counterparts in East Central Europe that embraced more inclusive proportional representation or mixed electoral systems, there was a characteristic tendency across authoritarian post-Soviet countries to opt for a majority single-member district system, practiced during the Soviet period, reflecting political predispositions to 'constrain the political process'¹³⁶ and the wider Soviet legacy-driven context of civic apathy, systemic weakness of civil society and fluid party-society linkages.

Beyond post-communist context, the 'legacy' paradigm has been similarly extended to examine the institutional legacies of past dictatorial rules for party politics in emerging democracies elsewhere. Following the analysis of regional variation in party system institutionalization in Asia, Hicken and Kuhonta concluded notably, consistent with Smith' arguments, that democracy-enhancing institutionalized parties in the regions are 'rooted in authoritarianism'¹³⁷, either as 'semi-democratic or authoritarian parties'¹³⁸ that under previous authoritarian regimes emphasized party institution-building in order to reduce the viability of political opposition. In normative terms, the

¹³⁶Jack Bielasiak, 'Regime Diversity and Electoral Systems in Post-Communism', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 22, no. 4 (2006):407.

¹³⁷ Alan Hicken and Erik Martinez Kuhonta, 'Shadows From the Past: Party System Institutionalization in Asia', *Comparative Political Studies* 44, no. 5 (2011):588.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

findings imply, contrary to conventional perceptions, that the concept of ‘party institutionalization’ need to be detached from the ‘category of democracy’, as institutional legacies of authoritarianism could equally lead to the institutionalization of party systems following the outbreak of democratization¹³⁹.

Whilst revealing in similar ways the enduring consequences of authoritarian regime configurations, Kavasoglu showed, however, reflecting the broad scholarly consensus, that high levels of institutionalization of new party systems across 35 ‘third-wave’ democracies tend to be positively associated’ with authoritarian regimes formerly based on multipartyism¹⁴⁰. The general line of argumentation is based on the convictions that multiparty authoritarian regimes are presumed to provide limited political opportunities for opposition parties ‘...to establish linkages with their constituents and invest in organizational capacity’¹⁴¹, which, by building reified ‘party brands’ and strengthening partisan attachments and institutional and organizational bases, would favorably contribute to the stabilization of inter-party competition in the early post-authoritarian period¹⁴². In contrast with this line of reasoning, the empirical patterns of post-authoritarian transition following so-called ‘democratic uprisings’ in post-Soviet countries, notably in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, demonstrate that dismantling former authoritarian regimes could lead to the proliferation of nascent parties and the breaking down of former dominant regime-affiliated parties (e.g. ‘parties of power’) into smaller, un-institutionalized and particularistic parties.

¹³⁹ Alan Hicken and Erik Martinez Kuhonta, ‘Shadows From the Past: Party System Institutionalization in Asia’, *Comparative Political Studies* 44, no. 5 (2011):588.

¹⁴⁰ Yaman Berker Kavasoglu, ‘The origins of party and party system institutionalization in third-wave democracies’, (an MA dissertation submitted to the Department of Political Science at the Central European University, 2017):i.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁴² *Ibid*.

At the same, and despite some organizational capacities hitherto solidified due to anti-incumbency sentiments and political confrontations, former opposition parties that emerged as favorites in the wake of 'transition' elections similarly displayed a reduced propensity for consolidation into larger political and electoral blocs and expanding organizational and institutional bases for political and electoral purposes. In the post-Soviet context of weak party-society linkages, wherein the sustainability of political and electoral institutions, including that of incumbent parties and electoral laws, is contingent upon the authoritarian regime's capacity, the presumed effect of institutional and organizational legacies, therefore, proves an inadequate basis for institutionalizing formerly incumbent or opposition parties and inducing robust multi-party competition. The implication here is that explaining the patterns of political elite behavior in new democracies relating to party-building requires a distinct explanatory approach for unraveling the 'uncertain' nature and context of regime transition and examining the dynamic effects of immediate political competition on the changing structures of elite incentives. In the context of this research, the proposed alternative approach would entail integrating both exogenous and endogenous factors as generating shared dis-incentives for party elites to party-building and providing a conceptual framework defining the core notions of 'party institutionalization' and 'uncertainty', the latter reflecting the hypothesized causal variable, to ensure a meaningful degree of empirical controllability and observability.

2.4. Conceptualizing party institutionalization and political uncertainty

Underpinning the conceptual framework of this study is a premise that in the context of democratic transition and 'third-wave' democracies, the concepts of party and party system institutionalization are principally interchangeable with individual parties taken as a basic unit of analysis for both theoretical and methodological purposes. At a fundamental level, this contrasts competing claims

made by Randall and Svasand regarding the necessity of making a clear-cut conceptual distinction between party and party system institutionalization along the continuum of *competition*:

‘To the extent that the process of party system institutionalization is seen as contributing to democratic consolidation, the implication is that the type of party system must entail a certain level of competition.’¹⁴³

The underlying dimension for a party system is, therefore, a dynamic competition amongst individual parties or inter-party competition, which typically exemplifies party systems excluding one-party dominance. Sartori noted similarly that single parties are not to be normally associated with pluralistic party systems ‘in which the parties are “parts and the whole” is the output of an interplay between more than part...’¹⁴⁴. In the meantime, and beyond competition, party systems by definition also exhibit established patterns of interaction, reflecting the dynamics of inter-party competition. Central to this claim is an assumption that in competitive party systems the patterns of interaction within a ‘system’ also determine how constituent parties interact with external politics¹⁴⁵.

Building on Sartori’s model of party systems, Mainwaring and Torcal, nonetheless, argue that a dichotomous demarcation between party and party system institutionalization is conceptually unsound¹⁴⁶. The definition of party ‘system’ can be well extended to all cases, including so-called ‘non-systems’, insofar as ‘there is some pattern in inter-party competition and some continuity in

¹⁴³ Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand, ‘Party Institutionalization in New Democracies’, *Party Politics* 8, no.1 (2002):7.

¹⁴⁴ Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (CUP Archive, 1976):35.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Scott Mainwaring and Mariano Torcal, ‘Party System Institutionalization and Party System Theory After the Third Wave of Democratization’, in *Handbook of Party Politics*, ed. by Richard S. Katz and William Crotty (Kellogg Institute, 2005):205.

the main parties of the system'¹⁴⁷. As underlined, Sartori's dichotomous approach fundamentally 'ignore[s] important variance within each of those categories [i.e. systems versus non-systems]'¹⁴⁸. An alternative perspective implies that party systems need to be interpreted and measured along the continuum with *institutionalization* identified as a central dimension. In his comparative study of post-Soviet party systems, Meleshevich admitted analogously that the party system is itself a reflection of separate parties with varying degrees of institutionalization¹⁴⁹. It is further presumed that the higher degree of institutionalization of individual parties in terms of both external and internal structural dimensions, influenced significantly by interaction patterns with the external environment providing conducive conditions for party-level institutionalization, would indicate the potentiality of institutionalization of party systems as a whole. Conversely, as evidenced by post-Soviet regime breakdowns following popular uprisings, the overall weakness of party system institutionalization, despite the presumed institutionalization and organizational capacities of 'parties of power', serves as an indication of the low prospects for individual party institutionalization in the absence of broad structural pre-conditions fostering meaningful partisan competition.

Notwithstanding scholarly disagreements over the relationship between two concepts, the general consensus holds that party institutionalization constitutes an integral part of party system institutionalization and that individual parties, taken as a unit of analysis, can be assessed and compared based on the degree of *institutionalization*. Drawing on Huntington's definition of political institutionalization as the '...process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and

¹⁴⁷Scott Mainwaring and Mariano Torcal, 'Party System Institutionalization and Party System Theory After the Third Wave of Democratization', in *Handbook of Party Politics*, ed. by Richard S. Katz and William Crotty (Kellogg Institute, 2005):205.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Andrey A Meleshevich, *Party Systems in Post-Soviet Countries: A Comparative Study of Political Institutionalization in the Baltic States, Russian and Ukraine* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

stability¹⁵⁰, scholars converge growingly in establishing overlapping dimensions of party institutionalization, including, organizational *complexity*, *coherence* and *programmatic content*. In addition to emphasizing the attitudinal aspects reflecting the extent to which parties take an intrinsic value¹⁵¹ and are reified ‘...in the public imagination’¹⁵², the internal organizational dimensions are generally recognized as central elements of party institutionalization. Extending the notion of organizational *complexity*, identified by Panebianco as measuring ‘...the number of sub-units’, Randall and Svasand define it further in terms of organizational *systemness* connoting ‘...the increasing scope, density and regularity of the interactions that constitute the party as a structure’¹⁵³. This in effect entails a high degree of routinization and regularity of established patterns of internal organizational behavior and intra-party communication undergirded by formalized coordination structures, mass membership, extensive network of branch offices, ‘nationwide organizational presence’ and ‘activities beyond election campaigns’¹⁵⁴. Related to this organizational dimension of institutionalization is the growing notion of ‘intra-party democracy’, involving a ‘broad-based participation of party members and supporters in the party organizational decisions’¹⁵⁵, such as leadership selection, candidate nomination and coalition formation.

As Randall and Svasand note, however, in the context of ‘third-wave’ democracies, the assessment of the organizational ‘systemness’ criterion could be somewhat problematic given the genetic divergence of contextual factors and patterns of party-building that fundamentally

¹⁵⁰Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (Yale University Press, 2006):12.

¹⁵¹ Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (translated by March Silber, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁵² Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand, ‘Party Institutionalization in New democracies’, *Party Politics* 8, no.1 (2002):14.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁵⁴ Matthias Basedau and Alexander Stroh, ‘Measuring Party Institutionalization in Developing Countries: A New Research Instrument Applied to 28 African Political Parties’ (GIGA Research Program, 2008), p.12.

¹⁵⁵ Paul Chambers and Aurel Croissant, ‘Intra-Party Democracy in Thailand’ (unpublished manuscript, 2008):2.

contrasted the 'European experience'¹⁵⁶. It was argued that 'the genetic model' of party institutionalization developed by Panebianco 'pre-supposes a social constituency' and mass membership parties, which, in Western European polities based on '...class [and]...religious denomination, emerged with the expansion of suffrage'¹⁵⁷. The organizational penetration of party structures to the peripheries and 'diffusion from below' implied in this model as reflections of the gradual evolution of party organizations further proved implausible across new democracies, whereby party development was recurrently 'interrupted' and 'rapid electoral success' of former opposition parties reduced the strategic need for organizational consolidation¹⁵⁸. In the meantime, the observed significant variance in the level of party institutionalization and party organizational strength across 'third-wave' democracies and particularly post-communist region indicates that on top of similar structural and contextual conditions, party-building incentives and organizational models are influenced by a combined effect of incentive structures underpinning the behavior of political actors, related institutional settings and political competition.

Recognizing the variability and potential implications of organizational dimensions of party institutionalization, Tavits showed, based on the quantitative analysis of post-communist European party systems, that organizationally strong parties with professionalized central offices, extended territorial presence and large membership size tend to succeed electorally by providing 'information shortcuts' and circumventing credible commitment problems and uncertainty over party brands¹⁵⁹. Though there has been a growing scholarly conviction that modern campaigns trends, such as the recruitment of professional consultants and marketing specialists and deployment of nationwide

¹⁵⁶ Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand, 'Party Institutionalization in New Democracies', *Party Politics* 8, no.1 (2002):17.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁹ Margit Tavits, 'Organizing for Success: Party Organizational Strength and Electoral Performance in Postcommunist Europe', *The Journal of Politics* 74, no.1 (2012):84.

advertising campaign strategies, are reducing the strategic need for traditional mass-branch party organizations, internal organizational factors remain significant in affecting the electoral performance¹⁶⁰ and survivability¹⁶¹ and responding to environmental incentives¹⁶². As Rydgren demonstrated on the example of right-wing populist parties Sweden, a hierarchical and authoritarian model of party organization has assisted right-wing parties in achieving short-term electoral breakthroughs, but proved, combined with the absence of local party activists and enduring and extended party structures, ‘...detrimental to a party’s survival’¹⁶³.

In new and relatively poor democracies, similarly, the distribution of clientelistic benefits and resources to secure electoral support implied a certain degree of local party organization to maintain party-broker relationships and enforce clientelistic transactions¹⁶⁴. In a sense, the logic of developing an organizational base for party success and survival also applies to the normative notion of ‘intra-party democracy’, reflecting the actual modes of internal deliberation and decision-making beyond formal organizational structures and mass membership. Given its presumed implication for both internal democratic governance and broader democratic principles of inclusiveness, participation and accountability, the practice of intra-party democracy, or its lack thereof, generally serves as an important indication, alongside formal intra-party coordination and communication structures, of party organizational strength, and hence party institutionalization. In effect, the implied utility of incorporating the norms and mechanisms of intra-party democracy for long-term organizational sustainability tends to be bolstered by periodic party leadership changes

¹⁶⁰ Jens Rydgren, ‘How party organizations matter: understandings the ups and downs of radical right-wing populism in Sweden’ (Stockholm, University, The department of Sociology Working Paper Series, 17, 2009).

¹⁶¹ Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (translated by March Silber, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁶² Gijs Schumacher et al, ‘Why Do Parties Change Position: Party Organization and Environment Incentives’, *The Journal of Politics* 75, no.2 (2013).

¹⁶³ Jens Rydgren, ‘How party organizations matter’, 7.

¹⁶⁴ Herbert Kitschelt and Daniel M. Kselman, ‘Economic Development, Democratic Experience, and Political Parties’ Linkage Strategies’, *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013).

and engaging the broader party 'selectorate' in internal governance and decision-making. In the meantime, as with party organizational structures, the prevailing assumption holds that a meaningful application of internal democratic mechanisms would be indicative of Panebianco's organizational *complexity* and horizontal penetration of party structures, despite competing assertions that the practice merely reflects state regulations¹⁶⁵ or distorts in fundamental ways party's organizational efficiency and electoral performance.

Viewed similarly as a critical measure of party institutionalization, and stressed among other things for its empirical observability and operationalizability, is the dimension of *coherence* indicating that '...notwithstanding its organizational differentiation', a party '...can act as a unified organization'¹⁶⁶. As Randall and Svasand explained, *coherence* implies a '...degree of consensus within the organization on its functional boundaries and on procedures for resolving disputes that arise...'¹⁶⁷. In a way, the practical operation of this dimension pre-supposes the existence of fairly complex party structures fostering intra-party coordination, communication and decision-making, contributing cumulatively to managing and resolving intra-party conflicts and accommodating differing views and positions. The centrality of *coherence* dimension for party institutionalization, meanwhile, reflects the general absence of ambiguity over its implications for the viability of party institutions and its measurable attributes, including low rates of party switching, defections and legislative floor-crossing, and party expulsions due to intolerance of dissent and 'moderate relations between intraparty groupings'¹⁶⁸.

¹⁶⁵William P. Cross and Richard S. Katz, *The Challenges of Intra-Party Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

¹⁶⁶ Matthias Basedau and Alexander Stroh, 'Measuring Party Institutionalization in Developing Countries: A New Research Instrument Applied to 28 African Political Parties' (GIGA Research Program, 2008):14.

¹⁶⁷ Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand, 'Party Institutionalization in New democracies', *Party Politics* 8, no.1 (2002):10.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

The last dimension that, along with the patterns of ‘internal organization’, forms a constitutive element of the process of party institutionalization, as conceptually specified by Bertoa and Enyedi, relates to the various ways in which parties organize ‘mass mobilization’¹⁶⁹. At its core, it is contended that the degree of party institutionalization is determined in a crucial way by party strategies – programmatic vs clientelistic – of electoral mobilization. In general, the strategy of party-voter linkages based on programmatic appeals tends to correlate with ‘lower electoral volatility, lower party-system fragmentation and higher levels of party-system institutionalization’¹⁷⁰, with clientelistic strategies often holding negative implications for party cohesion, organizational autonomy and democratic accountability¹⁷¹. As maintained by Hellman, ‘to formulate coherent and credible policy packages, programmatic parties will have to invest in formal mechanisms for collective decision-making’¹⁷². In a normative sense, this implies that parties can be evaluated based on the extent of responsiveness to changing issue preferences of the electorate and party-voter linkage structuration based on the party ability and commitment to develop coherent policy positions along the ideological spectrum. In effect, making programmatic efforts and commitments toward voters necessitates the deployment of durable and complex organizational structures (hence *organizational complexity*), ensuring in combination that parties perform representative functions in an efficient and accountable manner.

That said, Randall and Svasand, however, note that ‘programme-making’ is constrained by clientelistic relationships, ‘...widely regarded as inimical to party institutionalization’¹⁷³, that remain

¹⁶⁹Fernando Casal Bertoa and Zsolt Enyedi, ‘Party system closure and openness: conceptualization, operationalization and validation’, *Party Politics* 22, no.3 (2016).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Alan Hicken, ‘Clientelism’, *Annual Review of Political Studies* 14 (2011):303.

¹⁷²Oli Hellman, ‘The Developmental State and Electoral Markets in East Asia: How Strategies of Industrialization Have Shaped Party Institutionalization’, *Asian Survey* 53, no.4 (2013):663.

¹⁷³ Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand, ‘Party Institutionalization in New democracies’, *Party Politics* 8, no.1 (2002):20.

prevalent in so-called 'Third World societies'¹⁷⁴. As applied to party-voter linkages, the contention held that clientelism, fostering patronage-based linkages, tends to undermine the integrity and relevance of internal party rules and structures¹⁷⁵, increasing the potential for intra-party conflicts and organizational dependency on notable 'patrons' distributing selective clientelistic benefits. In the meantime, by linking the pervasiveness of political clientelism to low levels of socio-economic development characteristic of most emerging democracies, and following the logic of contextual idiosyncrasy, Randall and Svasand further claimed that distinctive features, including clientelism, factionalism, personalism and financial insufficiency, combined with the absence of prior organizational and ideological underpinnings, can render party development and operationalization of attitudinal dimensions of party institutionalization new democracies highly problematic¹⁷⁶. The oft-invoked attributes of attitudinal dimensions of institutionalized party systems, including *value infusion* and *reification* – referring accordingly to the extent to which parties, beyond instrumental functions, gain an intrinsic value and public legitimacy, for example, pre-suppose the continued existence of a social base enabling to establish durable party-society linkages, whilst the insufficiency of funding and clientelism could lead to the 'dependency on external actors', constraining the party *autonomy* dimension¹⁷⁷.

Despite fundamental issues with operationalizing the core 'attitudinal' attributes of party institutionalization in the context of new democracies, the analysis of electoral strategies along the continuum ranging from extreme forms of clientelism, such as vote-buying, to strongly programmatic policy appeals, nonetheless, proves crucial in providing a strong indication of party

¹⁷⁴Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand, 'Party Institutionalization in New democracies', *Party Politics* 8, no.1 (2002):20.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 19.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 22.

institutionalization in terms of both organizational and voter mobilizational strength. In addition, and building on Kitschelt's theoretical model, Hellmann posited broadly that parties lacking access to state (public) resources tend to strategically follow a programmatic strategy for electoral mobilization and, as a result, institutionalize than parties controlling public resources and, therefore, capable of distributing clientelistic benefits¹⁷⁸. In a similar vein, and stressing '...the role that political elites play in determining the type of party-voter linkages'¹⁷⁹, Lucas demonstrated based on Latin American party systems that the prioritization of programmatic political competition and 'concerted [programmatic] efforts' by left-wing parties due to the shortage of financial resources has forged stable party-voter linkages based on programmatic orientations¹⁸⁰.

2.5. Theorizing the nexus between uncertainty and party elite behavior

In addition to contextual peculiarities, such as low levels of socio-economic development, relative insignificance of social cleavage structures and weakness of political institutions, inherent to 'third-wave' democracies, and affecting the difficulties with extrapolating leading theoretical and conceptual models of party systems, uncertainty over the nascent regime and institutional settings was further implied as a significant factor of 'democratic' transition¹⁸¹. Defining as the conditional boundary between authoritarian breakdown and democratic consolidation, scholars of democratization notably recognized institutional uncertainty over the establishment and sustenance

¹⁷⁸ Oli Hellman, 'The Developmental State and Electoral Markets in East Asia: How Strategies of Industrialization Have Shaped Party Institutionalization', *Asian Survey* 53, no.4 (2013):662-663.

¹⁷⁹ Edward Kevin Lucas, 'Programmatic Political Competition in Latin America: Recognizing the Role Played by Political Parties in Determining the Nature of Party-Voter Linkages' (a PhD dissertation to the Faculty of the University of Minnesota, 2015).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 5-6.

¹⁸¹ Guillermo O'Donnell et al, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (John Hopkins University Press, 1986); Andreas Schedler, *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty Riedl, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013).

of democratic rules as a defining feature of post-communist transition affecting ‘actor perceptions’ and ‘patterns of [elite] interaction’¹⁸². As stipulated by O’Donnell et al, the prevalence of uncertainty of the transition is conditioned by ‘the problem of “underdetermined social change”’¹⁸³ involving ‘large-scale transformations which occur when there are insufficient structural or behavioral parameters to guide and predict the outcome’¹⁸⁴. Whilst the trajectory and outcome of political transition remain a matter of continued scholarly debate, it is generally presumed that critical decisions influencing power configurations and institutional frameworks in transitional regimes are made by political actors under conditions of high ‘unpredictability’ and ‘inadequate information’, signifying the crucial role of actor perceptions of own interests and future elite interactions in determining political and regime outcomes¹⁸⁵.

Following the underlying logic of political uncertainty surrounding ‘third-wave’ democracies, Lupu and Riedl put forward ‘...a theoretical framework for understanding the effects of political uncertainty on party development and strategies of mobilization’¹⁸⁶. By attaching significance to uncertainty as a contextual factor influencing the strategic decision-making of party elites, the framework constitutes an attempt to explain a substantial and ‘puzzling’ variation across developed and new democracies in terms of party development and competition¹⁸⁷. It was noted that, contrary to initial expectations, party systems in the ‘third-wave’ democracies remain largely ‘volatile’, ‘less institutionalized’ and ‘less reliant on programmatic appeals’ and ‘salient social cleavages’,

¹⁸² Andreas Schedler, ‘Measuring Democratic Consolidation’, *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36, no.1 (2001); Valerie Bunce and Maria Csanadi, ‘Uncertainty in the Transition: Post-communism in Hungary’, *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures* 7, no.2 (1993).

¹⁸³Guillermo O’Donnell et al, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (John Hopkins University Press, 1986):3.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty Riedl, ‘Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies’, *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1339.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

necessitating balancing theoretical perspectives stressing, in an extreme manner, either the centrality of an historical context and ‘path-dependency’, maintained by scholars of democratization, or that of ‘contingent, often case-specific, short-term factors’¹⁸⁸. In effect, this implies determining uncertainty, inherent to developing democracies in the form of high ‘probability of institutional change’ (institutional) and ‘likelihood of authoritarian reversal’ (political), as the core contextual factor affecting political elite behavior, party organizational structures and observed patterns of party mobilization and competition¹⁸⁹.

Building on the conceptual understanding of uncertainty, commonly shared by scholars of democratic transition, Lupu and Riedl proposed to treat it in terms of degrees with ‘vastly greater levels of uncertainty’¹⁹⁰ seen as a defining characteristic of ‘...developing democracies that emerged in the third-wave’¹⁹¹. In the meantime, the notion of political uncertainty, beyond unpredictability of electoral outcomes, also applies to a situation epitomizing an enhanced likelihood that ‘...the structure of political interaction – including rules, players and power relations - will change...’¹⁹². In addition to political and institutional implications, high levels of contextual uncertainty could be in effect reinforced by exogenous factors, over which most political actors and party elites do not have control, and that could be manifested in regime breakdowns and economic crises¹⁹³. Following the latter logic, this study will conceive of uncertainty, beyond its relevance to broad post-authoritarian (or post-communist) context, in terms of concrete periods of *heightened* uncertainty associated with the breakdown of authoritarian regimes and political upheavals following popular (supposedly

¹⁸⁸Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty Riedl, ‘Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies’, *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1341.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1342.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1344.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 1345.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

democratic) uprisings and entailing systemic transformations of both political and institutional frameworks.

A particular emphasis will be temporally placed on a tumultuous period (2010-15) that ensued after the popular uprising and dismantlement of an authoritarian regime in Kyrgyzstan maintained by then president Bakiyev and widely associated with renewed prospects for democratization, parliamentarism and party development. Given the inherent difficulties of measuring and operationalizing empirically the concept of uncertainty, and as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapter 3, concentrating on post-revolutionary period of heightened political uncertainty (2010-15) and subsequent period of regime consolidation and subsiding uncertainty (in perception of trending political configurations), would permit to trace the potential variation in the degree and patterns of (party) elite investments and strategies in organizational development, mobilization, competition and party allegiances.

In substantive terms, the implied impact of political uncertainty on distinct patterns of party development in developing democracies manifests itself primarily in building *flexible* organizations emphasized by party elites as a way of coping with political uncertainty¹⁹⁴. In this instance, the notion of uncertainty, closely related to an increased level of institutional indeterminacy, describes a situation, whereby formal rules structuring electoral and political competition remain both subject to change and ambiguous in terms of defined patterns of interaction with still potent 'informal norms and networks'¹⁹⁵. In turn, organizational flexibility maintained by party elites as a strategy to adjust to changing political and institutional frameworks involves 'avoiding rigid organizational hierarchies and institutionalized structures of intraparty contestation'¹⁹⁶. In a way, the 'un-

¹⁹⁴Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty Riedl, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1349.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

institutionalized' and ambiguous characters of party organizational structures contrasts with the *organizational complexity* criterion, proposed by Panebianco, and that 'perpetuate – or even worsen – the lack of [party] institutionalization'¹⁹⁷. Assuming that maintaining flexible and fluid organizational structures does not in the long run correlate with strong party institutionalization, this study will propose the following hypothesis for analysis:

Hypothesis I: High level of political and institutional uncertainty in developing democracies conditions the strategic pursuance of organizational flexibility by party elites in the form of fluid and un-institutionalized structures inimical to meaningful intra-party coordination, decision-making and competition.

Premised on the assumption underlining the criticality of party actors and strategies for party development and survival, and analogous to party organizational strategies, Lupu and Riedl contend further that political and institutional uncertainty also affects the choice of strategies pursued by party elites as part of voter mobilization efforts¹⁹⁸. It was asserted chiefly that high levels of institutional and regime uncertainty, enhanced by weak party-voter alignments and low levels of party attachments and reputations, would induce parties to pursue a mix of both programmatic and clientelistic strategies of electoral mobilization and inter-party competition¹⁹⁹. In effect, the uncertain context of political and electoral institutions heavily influences the fluid and elusive character of emergent party-voter linkages, further weakening the party's capacity to make credible policy commitments and prompting the resurgence of clientelistic networks based on hierarchical and centralized informal structures. In the meantime, and whilst the concurrent propensity for programmatic competition was explained with reference to the reliance on (or compliance with)

¹⁹⁷Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty Riedl, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1349.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 1350.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*.

formal rules, no further substantive specification, however, ensued as to how programmatic strategies are pursued in election campaigns and combine with clientelistic practices to mobilize electoral support. To fill this void and for the purposes of hypothesis formulation and subsequent argumentation, this study will define programmatic strategies in terms of raising so-called 'valence' issues, i.e. pressing issues that all contending parties seek to resolve based on own competence and charisma, in a consistent manner, making concerted programmatic efforts toward offering a coherent bundle of ideologically-driven policy positions and maintaining consistency with clientelistic strategies. Based on the general supposition that the patterns of inter-party competition and stable party-voter linkages based on *programmatic* and ideological content serve as an indication of high level of party institutionalization, the second hypothesis will be thus stated in the following way:

Hypothesis II: High level of political and institutional uncertainty in developing democracies induces political parties to pursue a mix of both programmatic and clientelistic strategies of electoral mobilization.

In addition to predicting the behavior of party elites and concomitant strategies for internal organization and electoral mobilization, the model of political uncertainty further attempts to define the incentive structures underlying the behavioral patterns of party actors (including both party elites and rank and file members or 'partisan public figures'), holding important implications for the *coherence* dimension of party institutionalization. Building on Strom's model suggesting that parties usually compete to maximize '...some combination of votes, office, and policy'²⁰⁰, Lupu and Riedl argued that in the face of heightened uncertainty associated with the enhanced likelihood of an authoritarian regime reversal in developing democracies, formalizing 'party competition as a one-

²⁰⁰ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty Riedl, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1351.

shot interaction²⁰¹, party actors would be incentivized to seek political office-maximizing goals and gain political resources at the expense of longer-term vote or policy-seeking goals²⁰². Crucially, the strategic prioritization of ‘...short-term rewards from political office may lead to unexpected behaviors by party elites, such as bandwagoning or party switching’²⁰³, which in itself undermines the stability and coherency of party institutions, hence the last hypothesis below:

Hypothesis III: High level of political and regime uncertainty prompts party actors in developing democracies to prioritize office-maximizing incentives, and, as a consequence, causes frequent party switching.

Whilst the underlying behavioral assumptions will form the basis for empirical investigation, the *coherence* dimension in this study will be examined mainly through the prism of frequent party switching instances, defined in terms of pre-electoral shifts in party allegiances, group defections to new legislative groups and new parties or abandonment of legislative parties, that occurred *en masse* following the election of the first ‘post-revolutionary’ parliament facing high level of political and institutional uncertainty. In addition to enabling an examination of the cogency of theoretical propositions attributing the causes of frequent party switching and office-maximizing incentives to broad political (regime) uncertainty, this will further permit to potentially explore the dynamics of electoral mobilization and internal (party) organizational behavior. It should be noted that in aggregating the combined effect of selected dimensions, the patterns of internal organization and electoral mobilization will be considered critical for characterizing the state of party institutionalization, whilst the absence or infrequency of party switching will not automatically connote a high level of party coherency (though its frequency would certainly indicate fundamental

²⁰¹Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty Riedl, ‘Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies’, *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1351.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 1352.

²⁰³ *Ibid*.

issues with *coherence* criterion), also affected by continual intra-party disputes, party expulsions and reduced internal discipline.

Conclusion

The bulk of the literature and contemporary party research in established democracies falls broadly under two distinct theoretical paradigms stressing the importance of either *sociological* or *institutional* determinants of party systems. Despite the cogency of the ‘cleavage model’, articulated originally by Lipset and Rokkan, and constituting the main theoretical basis for sociological explanations of party competition structures and voting behavior in relation to historically grounded and class-based ideological cleavages, its practical application to the broader context of developing democracies proved to entail severe difficulties. It was established chiefly that on top of declining trends in traditional class-based voting and ideological inter-party competition, the model implied an automatic translation of social cleavages into political action and hence downgraded the crucial role of interest and rationality-driven political actors across both developed and new democracies in mediating the effect of pre-existing social preferences on partisan competition.

The same reasoning applied to institutional accounts stressing the political consequences of electoral institutions, which, whilst broadly accounting for the configuration of party systems in contemporary democracies, proved inadequate in acknowledging the significance of interests and incentives governing political elite behavior and explaining the patterns of party formation, strength, mobilization and competition. In the context of post-Soviet authoritarian regimes, based on an ideological void, communist legacies and fluid institutional frameworks, the predicted effect of electoral systems (SMD and PR) further tended to be minimal, with the incumbent authoritarian elites designing and exploiting electoral and party institutions in a selective manner to consolidate power.

Given the presumed centrality of political and party actors in developing democracies for party formation and survival, and its emphasis on an uncertain context informing the elite behavior, this study adopted the theoretical model of political uncertainty, put forward by Lupu and Riedl, as a basis for subsequent empirical investigation of observable dimensions of party institutionalization in Kyrgyzstan. The model posits that political and institutional uncertainty, defined in terms of an inadequate information and increased likelihood of 'game-changing' transformation of power configurations and institutional frameworks, will inform the strategic behavior of party elites manifested in building flexible party organizational structures and employing a combination of clientelistic and programmatic strategies of electoral mobilization. Finally, political uncertainty conditioning the enhanced possibility of authoritarian regime reversal would affect the tendency amongst party actors, including rank and file members, to pursue office-maximizing incentives, as opposed to long-term vote or policy-seeking goals, and switch party allegiances, further undermining both coherency and institutionalization of parties.

Chapter 3. Research methodology and design.

Introduction

This chapter is designed to provide philosophical foundations underpinning the rationale of research methodologies and strategies for data collection and causal analysis. It first discusses the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions of critical realism, heretofore adopted as an overriding philosophical paradigm, and further provides a justification for using case study methodology in the examination and analysis of distinctive patterns of party institutionalization associated with organizational structures, dominant electoral strategies and internal party dynamics. It is presumed that owing to the philosophical tenets of critical realism and the embedded logic of the case study research, the potential paucity of the empirical evidence could be compensated by generating nuanced causal explanations and tracing broader causal mechanisms and processes. The subsequent discussion of the rationale for selecting Kyrgyzstan as a crucial case conducive for evaluating the validity and plausibility of the theoretical model of political and institutional uncertainty will be followed by an overview of methodological approaches employed to operationalize and measure the core concepts of political uncertainty and party institutionalization. The chapter will end with a description of the main methods of data collection and causal analysis and discussion of the methodological complications in undertaking empirical research.

3.1. Research philosophy

Critical realism (CR), originally expounded by Bhaskar, is a relatively new research paradigm, based on a holistic approach to exploring and understanding the complexity of political and social phenomena and evaluating knowledge claims about reality²⁰⁴. CR acknowledges the foundationalist ontology of positivism that ‘the world exists independently of our knowledge of it’²⁰⁵ and postulates

²⁰⁴ Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Leeds: Leeds Books, 1975).

²⁰⁵ Andrew Sayer, *Method in Social Science: a Realist Approach* (London: Routledge, 1992):5.

that the production of scientific knowledge is a continuous process, in which, as interpretivist traditions hold, the construction of political and social reality tends to be shaped by a varying combination of contextual factors, theory refinement, empirical evidence and subjective research perspectives²⁰⁶.

Aside from its reconciliatory epistemological position, Wynn and Williams suggest that CR relative to positivism and interpretivism places a particular emphasis on the concept of causality²⁰⁷. Whilst positivist approaches consider finding regularities, or as Hume put it 'constant conjunction of events'²⁰⁸, as a fundamental and conceivable objective of social scientific research, CR extends these purposes beyond generating causal statements to provide a more detailed account of causal mechanisms in political and social phenomena. Following the same logic, Easton posits that 'constant conjunction of elements or variables is not a causal explanation or indeed an explanation of any kind'²⁰⁹: above all, it involves a causal analysis of how causal powers, objects, entities and context interact structurally to produce an observed outcome²¹⁰.

In effect, CR's approach to scientific knowledge as integrating complex causal explanations emanates from its 'stratified' ontological representation of independent reality. The reality, as Bhaskar opines, consists of three disparate domains – 'the real, the actual, and the empirical'²¹¹. In the domain of the real, entities of both physical and social structures possess 'generative mechanisms'²¹² and powers, which may or may not cause an action in a particular context. The following domain of the actual includes events, or actions, occurring as a result of the interplay

²⁰⁶ Berth Danermark et al, *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

²⁰⁷ Donald Edward Wynn and Clay K. Williams, 'Principles for Conducting Critical Realist Case Study Research in Information Systems', *MIS Quarterly* 36, no.3 (2012):791.

²⁰⁸ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Hackett Classics, 1993).

²⁰⁹ Geoff Easton, 'Critical Realism in Case Study Research', *Industrial Marketing Management* 39 (2010):118.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Leeds: Leeds Books, 1975):13.

²¹² Ibid.

between varying mechanisms²¹³. Wynn and Williams further note that ‘the expected outcome of an enacted tendency may not result in an event in the actual domain’²¹⁴. Implicit in this reasoning is a suggestion that observed events initially conceived of as patterns will not necessarily share the same causal mechanisms and contextual conditions. The third domain of the empirical reality constitutes a set of events, which can be empirically observed, experienced and measured, whilst not all events in the domain of the actual are observable²¹⁵.

For CR, social scientific research therefore involves a systematic explanation of causal powers and mechanisms underlying the events. Similarly to events in the actual domain, entities of structures with ‘generative mechanisms’ are not always observable: however, a closer examination of the outcome, or an event, and a combination of analytic and empirical knowledge of observable entities would form the basis for research processes. In effect, any social scientific research would entail a continuous process of inference and theory refinement based on the synthesis of ever-growing empirical evidence. In the meantime, and given the complex and ‘stratified’ nature of reality, the likelihood for generating multiple explanations for a social phenomenon, would remain high and might be subject to so-called principle of ‘equifinality (dissimilar conditions and mechanisms leading to similar end results)’²¹⁶. CR accordingly underscores the need for a careful consideration and comparison of rival explanations and for developing as a consequence an empirically grounded and theoretically sound explanation.

Why critical realism?

The rationale for utilizing critical realism as an overarching philosophical underpinning of this research stems from both the relative reasonableness of its ontological and epistemological

²¹³ Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Leeds: Leeds Books, 1975):13.

²¹⁴ Donald Edward Wynn and Clay K. Williams, ‘Principles for Conducting Critical Realist Case Study Research in Information Systems’, *MIS Quarterly* 36, no.3 (2012):791.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 795.

presuppositions as well as the ensuing methodological implications. Building on a positivist ontological position on the independence of reality, CR recognizes however its complex and multi-dimensional nature, the examination of which hinges among other things on subjective experiences of interpretative researchers and those of subjects under investigation. This implies, in addition to the fundamental saliency of the 'interpretation of the meaning systems of...the subjects'²¹⁷, that researcher's own understanding and perceptive knowledge of the local context would be essential in producing cogent and detailed explanations of political and social phenomena.

In effect, ensuring an insightful and 'thick' description of the context allows researchers to uncover complex mechanisms that produce political and social phenomena under investigation as they interact with the given context and entail a dynamic interplay between structures and agency. In the meantime, the stratified or multi-layered nature of reality implies that not all mechanisms and structural entities within it can be observed or measured inducing researchers to make causal inferences based on the observed causal effects, prior experiences and 'intellectual...skills'²¹⁸. As the process of knowledge production is continuous and builds on ever-growing empirical evidence and understanding, any empirical and intellectual inquiry into the unravelling of mechanisms would be in effect informed by theory-driven approaches that would be subsequently subjected to substantive refinements.

Consistent with this approach, the notion of party institutionalization would be thus conceived of as a somewhat complex phenomenon, which, given the multiplicity of its constitutive dimensions, could warrant developing a more intricate causal mechanism. This, however, would be carried out in combination with the main research objectives associated with determining the

²¹⁷ Steven G. Rogelberg, *Handbook of Research Methods in Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004):105.

²¹⁸ Donald Edward Wynn and Clay K. Williams, 'Principles for Conducting Critical Realist Case Study Research in Information Systems', *MIS Quarterly* 36, no.3 (2012):794.

presumed effect of political uncertainty on the selected dimensions, i.e. party mobilization, organization and internal coherency, on the overall state of party institutionalization and tracing detailed causal mechanisms linking party actors to broader causal factors. Given the inherent feature of CR to seek robust theoretical explanations, complex causal structures and mechanisms and in the absence of clear-cut stands on specific methodological designs and strategies, a case study methodology was frequently identified amongst CR researchers ‘...as the best approach to explore the interaction of structure, events, actions, and context to identify and explicate causal mechanisms’²¹⁹.

3.2. Case study research design

Case study is arguably one of the most popular research designs in comparative politics, which exhibits a profound consistency with both philosophical and methodological assumptions undergirding CR. It entails an elaborate examination of a single case with the purpose of describing and explaining an observed outcome. Yin defines a case study method and analysis as ‘...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’²²⁰. Contextual conditions, as further contended, are viewed as crucial for understanding and analysing the phenomenon under investigation²²¹. Halperin and Heath suggest pertinently that a case study, or case studies, beyond contextual description involves an investigation of the phenomenon ‘in a comparative context’²²².

The latter implies that case-study based explanations in addition to elucidating the phenomenon, and being thus internally valid, are presumed to draw contingent generalizations to

²¹⁹ Donald Edward Wynn and Clay K. Williams, ‘Principles for Conducting Critical Realist Case Study Research in Information Systems’, *MIS Quarterly* 36, no.3 (2012):795.

²²⁰ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Sage Publications, 1994):13.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Sandra Halperin and Oliver Heath, *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills* (OUP Oxford, 2012):205.

ensure external validity and determine if resultant theoretical explanations can hold true for analogous cases. Relatedly, Yin emphasized the importance of addressing the issues of *reliability* and *replicability* of a case study research given its more flexible character in comparison with, for instance, statistical research²²³. It is presumed that contingent generalizations are possible only if a case study-based explanation can be potentially tested and extrapolated in other cases sharing analogous characteristics and conditions.

In the meantime, it was commonly noted that single-case study designs may serve different research purposes. Halperin and Heath notably 'distinguish between case studies that (1) provide descriptive contextualization; (2) apply existing theory to new contexts; (3) examine exceptions to the rule; and (4) generate new theory'²²⁴. In effect, most case studies involve, albeit not confined to, an in-depth description and contextualization of a phenomenon, which, as a rule, serves as a groundwork for any fully-fledged case study research. More commonly, however, case studies are invoked in 'testing a well-formulated theory'²²⁵, which tends to be subsequently confirmed, challenged or expanded²²⁶. Yin defines these as critical or crucial cases holding a high potential for knowledge construction and theory refinement²²⁷.

In addition, scholars identify a set of extreme or deviant cases, for which case study research can be uniquely appropriate. Halperin and Heath suggest that cases, which 'deviate from established generalizations'²²⁸ are well-suited for unravelling previously unidentified causal mechanisms and reviewing original theoretical propositions²²⁹. However, the likelihood of extreme or deviant cases to infirm an established theory remains an open question. As George and Bennet

²²³ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Sage Publications, 1994):36.

²²⁴ Sandra Halperin and Oliver Heath, *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills* (OUP Oxford, 2012):207.

²²⁵ Yin, *Case Study Research*, 36.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ Halperin and Heath, *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills*, 207.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

demonstrated, using Darwin's theory of evolution as an example, the deviant cases may lead to 'the specification of a new theory'²³⁰, suggesting in a more implicit manner the challenge of a previously dominant theory. Conversely, Halperin and Heath argue that no single case can infirm or disconfirm a theory, albeit acknowledging the importance of the case study to 'generate new theory and hypotheses in areas where no theory exists'.²³¹ In this regard, process-tracing is identified as a highly effective tool of qualitative analysis for studying causal mechanisms, drawing 'within-case inferences' and generating research hypotheses²³².

As a general rule, a case study methodology, irrespective of objectives, entails integrating multiple sources of evidence. Above all, this holds true for process-tracing, which in the search for causal inferences necessitates an examination of a wide range of both quantitative and qualitative data. Yin identified these as subsuming to any of the following six sources of evidence, including 'documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participation-observation, and physical artefacts'²³³. He also attributes the rationale for using multiple sources of evidence to 'the development of converging lines of inquiry'²³⁴, also known as the process of triangulation involving a cross-examination of multiple data sources with the purpose of finding patterns and regularities²³⁵. In brief, a case study methodology constitutes an intensive investigation of a single case aimed to uncover complex causal mechanisms establishing cause and effect chains. In addition to developing causal explanations, an objective, which coherently reflects the philosophical assumptions of CR, it further purports to build mid-level contingent generalizations. The latter objective, which remains a

²³⁰ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (MIT Press, 2005).

²³¹ Sandra Halperin and Oliver Heath, *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills* (OUP Oxford, 2012):208.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Sage Publications, 1994), p. 78.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

significant challenge, in particular for a single-case study design, is addressed by contributing to theory-building and using multiple sources of evidence.

3.3. Kyrgyzstan as a case study

Despite the cruciality of formal democratic institutions for democratic governance, political parties in Kyrgyzstan have not been hitherto investigated on the basis of a large scale, systematic and scientific inquiry and a case study research. The existing research materials²³⁶ on the whole, appear to be confined to providing largely descriptive overviews of party characteristics, including formal ideological stances and early history, or generic mid-level comparative inquiries involving a small number of explanatory variables and higher levels of abstraction²³⁷. In the light of this, the rationale for selecting Kyrgyzstan as a country case study was predicated on the belief that an in-depth investigation of party system formation, organization and competition across individual parties would shed light on crucial causal factors and contextual conditions affecting characteristically low levels of party institutionalization and arguably that of democracy. In effect, and in line with the critical realist view, undertaking a systematic empirical research on party institutionalization in its entirety would allow to uncover underlying mechanisms and structures that shape the incentives and behaviour of party actors associated with obstacles and disincentives to party-building.

In addition to examining critical causal factors inhibiting party institutionalization and hence democracy, Kyrgyzstan further featured as a country, which saw repeated momentum for strengthening 'parliamentarism' and party institutions. In a (Central Asian) region, characterized by highly repressive political regimes, the forcible toppling of two authoritarian incumbent presidents in 2005 and 2010 amidst mass protests and fierce political confrontations created rare possibilities

²³⁶ For example, works by Tamerlan Ibraimov, Asel Doolotkeldieva, Zainiddin Kurmanov, Gulnara Iskakova, Gregory Koldys and John Ishiyama.

²³⁷ John Ishiyama, 'Superpresidentialism and Political Party Development in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan', *Europe Asia Studies* 53, no.8 (2001).

for Kyrgyzstan to advance democratization and reaffirmed a prior image of the country as a regional 'outlier', notable for relatively vibrant political competition, modest repression and continued political perturbations. The likelihood of democratization has further emerged as real as elites, more noticeably during 2010 post-uprising transition period, pressed for democracy by undertaking institutional reform efforts to curb excessive presidential powers and strengthen parliamentarism. In this context, sustaining an efficient parliamentary system implied the need to pursue long-term party-building strategies amongst extant elites, a rhetoric that grew in importance as the election of five parties to the 'post-uprising' parliament in 2010 set a strong precedence for multi-party competition and genuine political pluralism.

Despite initial expectations and elite commitments toward creating and sustaining institutional arrangements for democracy, little has been observed in terms of elite investments in long-term party-building efforts between 2010 and 2015. This begs a rather puzzling question as to why given the centrality of political and party actors in new democracies and conducive institutional frameworks, parties in Kyrgyzstan, on the whole, remained un-institutionalized and continued to display patterns of mobilization, organization and intra-party politics that are normally associated with low levels of broader party system institutionalization? In the meantime, the continued absence of initial party-building efforts was observed at a critical juncture when 'post-uprising' political instability and volatility remained persistent contributing to a general sense of political uncertainty over the new regime and future configuration of political forces. In this regard, the model of political and institutional uncertainty proposed by Lupu and Riedl put forward the claim that high levels of uncertainty, defined both as an inherent characteristic of new democracies and in

terms of 'historical legacies of regime volatility'²³⁸, affect the strategic choices of party elites in mobilizing voters and managing party organizations²³⁹.

Considering the observed presence of conditions, such as political and regime volatility, and plausibility of assumptions as they relate to the inherent uncertainty and the critical role of party actors in new democracies, Kyrgyzstan could be effectively identified, in Gerring's terminology, as a 'crucial case', seen to fit theoretical predications made as parts of Lupu and Riedl's uncertainty model. As Gerring explained, the crucial cases must conform to all 'dimensions of theoretical interest'²⁴⁰ and recognize undergirding theoretical assumptions as valid in order for it to confirm a theory or disconfirm it when 'a predicted outcome' is not achieved²⁴¹. In effect, and provided that all said background conditions and criteria are met, the crucial case method could potentially serve as '...a most-difficult test for an argument, and hence provide [] what is perhaps the strongest sort of evidence possible in a nonexperimental, single-case setting'²⁴².

In the meantime, the extent and potential of the crucial case to confirm or disconfirm a theory would be contingent on the possibility of a given theory to make precise, elaborate, consistent and falsifiable predictions²⁴³. Whilst employing the crucial case method appears relatively appropriate for testing the cogency and extent of the uncertainty model to account for observable dimensions of weak party institutionalization in Kyrgyzstan, the potential paucity of the empirical evidence would be compensated, in line with the embedded logic of the case study methodology

²³⁸ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beaty Riedl, Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies, *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no.11 (2013):1344.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ John Gerring, 'What is a Case Study and What is it Good for?', *The American Political Science Review* 98, no. 2 (2004):352.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² John Gerring, 'Is There a (Viable) Crucial-Case Method?', *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no.3 (2007):232.

²⁴³ Ibid.

and that of critical realist paradigm, by generating nuanced causal explanations and tracing broader causal mechanisms and processes.

Beyond theoretical and explanatory considerations, Kyrgyzstan further appears to be a peculiarly interesting case with potential to complement an ongoing research on 'party system institutionalization' in the post-communist region. In particular, this applies to the different ways of operationalizing the burgeoning concept of 'party system institutionalization' and a growing body of knowledge on the sources and determinative factors variably shaping the nature and structure of party systems in the region²⁴⁴. In this regard, the analysis of party institutionalization and its attributive dimensions in Kyrgyzstan would involve an attempt to determine the explanatory power of the uncertainty model and compare, in a concurrent manner, some common features of weaker post-communist party systems associated with 'fluid social structures', 'unstructured inter-party competition', communist legacies and ineffectual 'mass political organizations'²⁴⁵. By concentrating specifically on the presumed contextual effect of political uncertainty, it would be thus feasible to reveal the extent to which said patterns of weak party institutionalization in the post-communist region could be attributed to the contextual influences of structural and idiosyncratic instances of uncertainties characteristic of developing democracies.

In a related vein, and owing to the appropriateness of a case study methodology, this study would allow to examine the nexus between uncertainty and party institutionalization in relation to complementary causal factors, such as economic development, ideological polarisation and public funding, frequently identified by scholars of post-communist party politics as producing contributing effects on the overall process of party institutionalization. In addition to these broader structural

²⁴⁴ Fernando Casal Bertoa, 'Sources of Party System Institutionalization in New Democracies: Lessons from East Central Europe' (European University Institute, SPS Working Papers, 2011).

²⁴⁵ Fernando Casal Bertoa and Zsolt Enyedi, 'Institutionalization and De-institutionalization in Post-Communist Party Systems', *East European Politics and Societies* 32, no.3 (2018):423-424.

factors, the case of Kyrgyzstan further provides an empirical groundwork for examining the interaction between elite actors and institutional and structural environments from the point of view of party-building and institutionalization and potentially revitalize the theoretical debate over agency versus structure in the context of democracy-building processes in the post-communist world. This part would be complemented with a sporadic discussion of the distinctive ways in which elite actors in Kyrgyzstan tend to respond to both formal and informal institutional incentives as parts of salient informal forms of governance and power distribution that hold an increased relevance in the Central Asian region.

3.4. Measuring uncertainty and party institutionalization

The notion of political uncertainty has long been associated with adverse financial and economic outcomes. It was presumed that political uncertainty, defined in terms of the enhanced likelihood of a 'government collapse', exerts a rather negative impact on economic growth and investments by perpetuating policy uncertainties and sustaining an environment incompatible with enacting long-term and sustainable economic strategies²⁴⁶. In a broader sense, and beyond the possibility of a 'government collapse', political uncertainty, or instability, was broadly conceived of as growing out of major political turbulences associated with the dynamics of pre-and post-electoral periods and deepening political polarization and contributing to the creation of a heightened sense of unpredictability over the future configuration of political forces and policy directions.

Despite significant conceptual overlaps, scholars have meanwhile applied a variety of methodological approaches to measuring political and policy uncertainty depending on both the nature of selected dimensions and specific research methodologies. For instance, political uncertainty as it related causally to economic outcomes, was calculated based on the utilization of

²⁴⁶ Alberto Alesina et al, 'Political Instability and Economic Growth', *Journal of Economic Growth* 1, no.2 (1996).

'political stability' indices and statistical models designed to investigate potentially dynamic relationships with economic variables²⁴⁷ or the use of survey research to understand perceptions of risks and political uncertainty amongst business firms²⁴⁸. In the former cases, the notion of political uncertainty defined in terms of political instability is variably measured based on the aggregate number of mass protests and demonstrations, 'government collapses', incidences of political violence and potential assassinations indicating perceived likelihoods of political regime breakdowns. This implies that the lack of direct observability of uncertainty tends to create methodological complications in attempting to construct proper operationalization and measurement models prompting scholars to rely extensively on own subjective perceptions of the political environment and indirect manifestations of political instability.

Whilst the subjective feature of methodological approaches to studying uncertainty has remained consistent over time, the notion itself, however, turned into a structurally embedded feature of formerly authoritarian regimes undergoing purported democratic transition and consolidation over the past few decades. It was posited, following the seminal work on regime transitions by O'Donnell and Schmitter, that uncertainty epitomizes the entire period of transition from authoritarian rule to 'something else' as 'unexpected events', 'insufficient information' and 'confusion about motives and interests' repeatedly prove 'decisive in determining the outcomes'²⁴⁹. Following the same line, Gel'man offers a more detailed conceptualization of uncertainty as indicating an intermediary stage between the 'breakdown of the ancient regime' and the 'installation of the new regime' and characterizing an 'uncertain position' of actors and

²⁴⁷ For example, calculations made by World Bank and Economist.

²⁴⁸ Thomas Kenyon and Megumi Naoi, 'Policy Uncertainty in Hybrid Regimes: Evidence from Firm-Level Surveys', *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no.4 (2010).

²⁴⁹ Guillermo O'Donnell and Phillippe C. Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (John Hopkins University Press, 1986):5.

institutions²⁵⁰. By positioning itself as an alternative to teleological theories of democratic transition, Gel'man's model demonstrates, based on the analysis of political transition scenarios in selected Russian provinces, that an uncertain stage of transition could be followed by an instalment of a new regime, representing either a 'democratic situation' or an 'authoritarian situation', or a full-fledged hybrid regime²⁵¹.

In line with Gel'man's regime outcome classifications, the subsequent literature on democratic transition has growingly identified a considerable number of countries 'in transition' that could not be qualified by basic standards as clearly democratic, nor authoritarian and steadily persisted instead as 'hybrid regimes' possessing both democratic and authoritarian elements. In the meantime, and despite being classified as a distinctive regime category oscillating between democracy and authoritarianism, hybrid regimes are frequently described as being 'constantly in flux' and producing systematic variation in electoral outcomes²⁵². As Mufti contends, some 'conceptual divergences among scholars' in terms of operationalizing hybrid regimes could be attributed to inherently fluid, ambiguous and uncertain characteristics that in concert produce highly unstable political regimes characterized by both the ambiguity of formal rules and institutions and an unstable character of power-sharing arrangements between extant political forces²⁵³. This implies that in addition to a structural uncertainty of the early transition period followed by consolidation of either democratic or authoritarian regimes, 'hybrid regimes' relative to full-fledged democracies and autocracies, could be perpetuated by a characteristic condition of political and institutional uncertainty.

²⁵⁰ Vladimir Gel'man, 'Regime Transition, Uncertainty and Prospects for Democratization: The Politics of Russia's Regions in a Comparative Perspective' (WZB Discussion Paper, P99-001, 1999), abstract.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Mariam Mufti, 'What Do We Know about Hybrid Regimes after Two Decades of Scholarship?', *Politics and Governance* 6, no.2 (2018).

²⁵³ Ibid, 114.

The latter assertion was in some way corroborated by a survey research conducted by Kenyon and Naoi, in which surveyed firms ‘...report higher levels of concern over policy uncertainty than those in either more authoritarian regimes or liberal established democracies’²⁵⁴. By validating the assumed association between policy uncertainty and broader political environment, it was revealed that potential variations in the degrees of perceived uncertainty within hybrid regimes can be explained by reference to the intense and polarised character of political competition that creates a heightened sense of informational uncertainty amongst business firms over possible policy changes²⁵⁵. The research found that some post-communist countries, including Georgia, Ukraine, Romania and Kyrgyzstan, variably classified as hybrid regimes, and that in general exhibited higher levels of policy uncertainty shared similar features of political competition, whereby so-called ‘anti-system parties’ or political forces held considerable potential to opt for new policy directions or reverse previous policy choices²⁵⁶.

3.4.1 Classifying political regime in Kyrgyzstan

The implications of the presumed correlation between the levels of uncertainty and political regime types logically necessitates a more refined and context-based conceptualization of a political regime in Kyrgyzstan, one that extends beyond general category of hybrid regimes. According to Freedom House annual reports on political rights and civil liberties, Kyrgyzstan is recurrently designated a status of a ‘partly free’ country²⁵⁷, which, based on the assessment of both local and external analysts, however, falls short of being qualified an ‘electoral democracy’ ensuring competitive, fair and regular elections and freedom of media for contending candidates and parties.

²⁵⁴Thomas Kenyon and Megumi Naoi, ‘Policy Uncertainty in Hybrid Regimes: Evidence from Firm-Level Surveys’, *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no.4 (2010):1.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Freedom in the World 2018, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/kyrgyzstan>.

The term 'electoral democracy' typically applies to those countries holding 'party free' statuses that provided conditions for a genuine political contestation, but unlike 'liberal democracies' face systematic issues with protecting civil liberties. On the democratic spectrum of regime types, Freedom House's classification seems to share a resemblance to the classification of regime types proposed by Larry Diamond and that offers an analytically rigorous framework for understanding and classifying so-called ambiguous or hybrid regimes.

In addition to distinguishing between liberal and electoral democracies based on the extent of civil liberties, Diamond further offers to divide 'non-democratic' or broadly authoritarian regimes into diminished categories, made up of *competitive*, *hegemonic electoral* and *politically closed authoritarian* sub-types that vary in terms of the degrees of electoral competition and continued existence of political opposition²⁵⁸. In contrast to politically closed authoritarian regimes, which 'do not have any architecture of political competition and pluralism'²⁵⁹ and completely ban opposition parties and politicians and non-state media outlets, competitive and electorally hegemonic authoritarian regimes formally allow opposition forces to compete in elections. This, nevertheless, tends to be accompanied by the deployment of varying levels of repression, intimidation and human rights abuses targeting opposition candidates and parties and independent media outlets that in some instances associated with hegemonic authoritarian regimes could seriously undermine the meaningfulness of elections.

When weighed against Freedom House scores for 'partly free' category, and following Diamond's classificatory model, Kyrgyzstan appears to display features characteristic of competitive authoritarian regimes, a distinctive type of 'hybrid regimes', conceptualized originally by Levitsky and Way amidst the growing number of countries that failed to consolidate into authoritarian or

²⁵⁸ Larry Diamond, 'Thinking about Hybrid Regimes', *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.2 (2002).

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p.26.

democratic regimes in the post-Cold war era²⁶⁰. It was established that despite 'large-scale abuse of state power, biased media coverage, (often violent) harassment of opposition candidates and activists'²⁶¹ elections remain an arena of fierce competition 'generating considerable uncertainty'²⁶² and increased chances of regime breakdown. In effect, competitive authoritarian regimes are frequently inclined, in the face of international observers and domestic political pressures, to combine democratic rules with authoritarian practices of governance, which in itself 'creates an inherent source of instability'²⁶³. The so-called 'coloured revolutions' in post-Soviet countries, including Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, exemplify the potentiality of regime turnovers and feasible democratic breakthroughs following mass mobilization over electoral fraud in highly competitive authoritarian regimes.

In a more recent study based on a comprehensive and longitudinal dataset developed by the Varieties of Democracy project, Luhrmann et al presented a newly refined typology of political regimes (The Regimes of the World Typology) that constitutes a systematic effort to adapt and improve extant measures of democracy²⁶⁴. In particular, the typology endeavours to reduce oft-committed measurement errors and the opaqueness of 'ambiguous regimes' by making an analytic distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* multi-party competition and setting stricter standards on the democratic spectrum²⁶⁵. More specifically, it proposes that in order to qualify as *electoral democracies* countries need to '...achieve a sufficient level of institutional guarantees of democracy, such as freedom of association, suffrage, clean elections, an elected executive, and freedom of

²⁶⁰ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, 'The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism', *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.2 (2002).

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, 55.

²⁶² *Ibid*.

²⁶³ *Ibid*, 59.

²⁶⁴ Anna Luhrmann et al, 'Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening New Avenues for the Comparative Study of Political Regimes', *Politics and Governance* 6, no.1 (2018).

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.1.

expression²⁶⁶, a conceptual approach that deviates from a minimalist understanding of democracy shared by extant typologies and analytically conforms to Dahl's substantive notion of 'polyarchy'²⁶⁷. Based on the evaluation of political and electoral processes, Kyrgyzstan was, as of 2016, subsumed under the category of electoral democracy with, however, an additional note that it could, alongside few other countries, be potentially '...placed in the next lower category' – or *electoral autocracy*, which was essentially 'built on...the notion of competitive authoritarianism developed by Levitsky and Way'²⁶⁸. The latter sub-type contrasts so-called *closed autocracies* on the authoritarian spectrum and despite holding *de-facto* multi-party elections fails to meet basic standards of democratic elections, fair competition between contending parties and candidates and related freedoms and guarantees associated with Dahl's 'institutional prerequisites for democracy'²⁶⁹.

3.4.2. Periodization and uncertainty in Kyrgyzstan (2010-2015)

The fact that Kyrgyzstan has demonstrated some noticeable temporal changes in terms of democratic and civil society performance, continued to oscillate between moderate forms of democracy and authoritarianism or remained an ambiguously 'hybrid' case reflects real-world political developments facing the country since 1991 independence. Best captured by the notion of competitive authoritarianism, measured along a numerical continuum, Kyrgyzstan has undergone recurrent periods of intense elite competition for power and resources amplifying an inherent level of uncertainty characteristic of ambiguous or 'hybrid regimes'. In effect, the correlation between higher levels of democratic competition and pluralism and surrounding political uncertainty seemed most evident in the wake of mass protests that brought down two incumbent presidents, Akayev in 2005 and Bakiyev in 2010, and consequently caused 'post-revolutionary' periods of unconsolidated

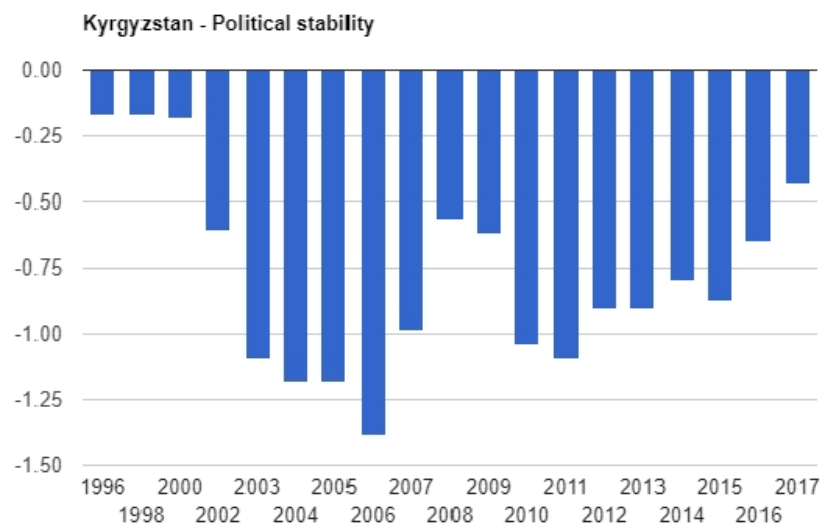
²⁶⁶ Anna Luhrmann et al, 'Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening New Avenues for the Comparative Study of Political Regimes', *Politics and Governance* 6, no.1 (2018):2.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

political power and ensuing changes in the configuration of political elites. As the Figure 1 below illustrates, the overall level of political stability in Kyrgyzstan was displayed with the lowest values, 2006 and 2011 accordingly, when so-called ‘post-revolutionary’ political forces just embarked on the process of institutionalizing some form of power-sharing and when a period of profound uncertainty over the future configuration of political forces and institutional arrangements remained prevalent²⁷⁰.



Source: TheGlobalEconomy.com, The World Bank

Figure 1. Political Stability Index: Kyrgyzstan.

In general, the extent of political instability and related uncertainty appeared somewhat similar across both ‘post-revolutionary’ periods of unconsolidated power (2005-2007 and 2010-2015), especially in terms of the continual and intense character of small-scale political protests and the unpredictability of behind-the-scenes communications between major political forces over the new configuration of power and institutional amendments. Nonetheless, in the former period of

²⁷⁰ The World Bank, available at https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Kyrgyzstan/wb_political_stability/.

uncertainty, the 'post-revolutionary' developments have not been effectively accompanied by the formation of crucial conditions conducive to profound institutional reforms, including those aimed at fostering parliamentarism and party-building. In fact, following the forcible resignation of president Akayev in April 2005, Bakiyev was shortly identified as a unified presidential candidate on behalf of 'post-revolutionary' political forces, a deal earned in part due to his formal status as an opposition leader prior to the outbreak of mass protests in March 2005. This has prompted, especially after his eventual election as president, some viable political forces, including mainly old regime loyalists to express political support and strengthen his position vis-a-vis divided opponents enhancing, as Gel'man put it, '...the monopoly power of the dominant actor'²⁷¹ as a way to overcome uncertainty.

By contrast, the subsequent removal of president Bakiyev from power in 2010 amidst violent protests has led to the formation of an interim government, consisting of a few dozen of prominent politicians, and an appointment of Otunbayeva as its head, in charge of overseeing the transitional period of preparation for both parliamentary and presidential elections. Notably, and in the absence of a clearly identifiable 'post-revolutionary' leadership, the interim government was predominantly occupied with securing political support in the southern provinces, regulating ongoing socio-economic activities and forging the new constitution that was expected to establish a strengthened parliament. Owing to the preceding experience with overutilizing presidential powers, in this instance there has been a vehemently articulated political demand amongst fragmented politicians to curb presidential powers and promote parliamentary democracy and hence party institutions. In addition, the formation of the interim government was viewed in itself as a reflection of the informal consensus between 'new' political actors that largely conformed to the 'elite

²⁷¹ Vladimir Gel'man, 'Regime Transition, Uncertainty and Prospects for Democratization: The Politics of Russia's Regions in a Comparative Perspective' (WZB Discussion Paper, P99-001, 1999): abstract.

settlement scenario of outcome of uncertainty' noted by Gel'man. This kind of outcome, also characterised as being 'fragile' and prone to 'changes in the political situation', was further reflective of the deliberative and extensive manner in which the lead designers of the new constitution, led by prominent politician Tekebayev, held political and public consultations over constitutional provisions stipulating the distribution of political power.

Considering the initial absence of a dominant actor in this transitional period, and given the general consensus over the formal groundworks for political competition and distribution of power, the planned 2010 parliamentary vote was widely seen as a critical juncture that would, in effect, determine the future configuration of political power. The vote specifically provided an opportunity for both independent political figures as well as old regime loyalists alongside 'post-revolutionary' forces to compete on an even footing and along formal party lines, which contributed to perpetuating the general sense of political and electoral uncertainty. In a surprising vote outcome, 'Ata-Jurt' party, associated closely with previous president Bakiyev's regime, managed to obtain the highest number of legislative seats, shared with two parties led by prominent members of the interim government, namely SDPK and 'Ata-Meken', and two largely independent parties, including 'Respublika' and 'Ar-Namys'²⁷². Given the hectic character of the short election campaigning period and new political conditions under which party competition was organized, it was reasonably expected that contending parties would not have sufficient time and incentives to make initial investments in building party organizations and sustaining its own electoral support base.

However, with the subsiding of the overall state of initial uncertainty over political and regime trajectory, and as the model of political and institutional uncertainty predicted, parties would be growingly incentivized based on preceding electoral wins to build permanent party offices,

²⁷² Kyrgyzstan: Parliamentary Elections, 10 October 2010: OSCE Final Report, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/74649>.

establish a sustained interaction with the targeted electorate and preferably pursue some ideological representation by adopting principled positions on so-called 'valence' issues. This mainly applies to the cycle of local council elections held between 2012 and 2014 and the pre-election period for next 2015 parliamentary election. As the Freedom House reported, despite continued domestic political tensions associated with strengthening president Atambayev's power at the expense of select political forces associated with the old regime, 'Kyrgyzstan's government remained stable during 2013'²⁷³. Such a depiction accurately reflects early signs of growing consolidation of Atambayev's regime as prominent opposition politicians, including old regime loyalists, including Keldibekov, Tashiyev and Japarov, faced criminal charges, widely believed to be politically motivated. In the context of fierce political confrontation disallowing any previously practiced informal deals with the regime, it would be fair to expect, combined with electoral incentives, that both opposition and somewhat independent parties would be impelled to invest political and organizational resources in strengthening party institutions as a way to increase own leverages in both the electoral and political processes.

It is, therefore, anticipated that the variation in the level of uncertainty, defined both as a structurally inherent feature of hybrid or competitive authoritarian regimes and an idiosyncratic pattern observed during 'post-revolutionary' periods of intense power competition, would cause observable changes in terms of the extent of investments made by party elites towards organization-building and deploying mixed strategies of electoral mobilization. On a practical level, this would manifest itself in the form of a) expanding membership bases, b) establishing permanent local offices, c) introducing democratically inclusive mechanisms of decision-making and party leadership and candidate selection to sustain linkages with both the targeted electorate and local

²⁷³ Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2014: Kyrgyzstan, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2014/kyrgyzstan>.

party activists. In addition, as the model of political and institutional uncertainty postulates, the variation in the level of uncertainty would bring about d) noticeable changes in the patterns and strategies of electoral mobilization, such as the institutionalization of either programmatic or clientelistic linkage mechanisms. Finally, with the perceived reduction of uncertainty levels, individual politicians, including notably sitting legislators, would be less compelled to e) switch party allegiances and act and vote in accordance with the party position.

Beyond evaluating the cogency of the uncertainty model to explain prevalent patterns of party organization, mobilization and coherency, associated commonly with the low levels of party institutionalization, the present research will provide an opportunity to trace plausible variation within individual parties in terms of how they organize internally, mobilize voters and cope with internal tensions. Following the logic of a case study methodology, it would be feasible, in addition to determining the extent to which uncertainty can explain the absence of investments in party-building, to examine how specifically political and party actors respond to broader institutional incentives, as well as, disincentives and political and electoral contexts and investigate the complex causal mechanisms by revealing contributing factors.

3.4.3. Measuring party Institutionalization

Whilst contextual uncertainty can be perceptively observed on the basis of its inherent embeddedness in 'hybrid regimes' or competitive authoritarian sub-types and idiosyncratic conditions associated with the legacy of regime volatility and 'post-revolutionary' contexts, the notion of party institutionalization refers to the consistency and stability of organization and mobilization patterns. As briefly discussed in Chapter 2, the dimensions of party organization and mobilization are commonly acknowledged as essential elements of the process of party institutionalization, enabling to compare party systems across both established and developing democracies. By all accounts, and owing to the organized nature of parties, the organizational

dimension tends to be frequently identified as a paramount criterion for measuring party institutionalization, compared on the basis of complexity of organizational structures and extensiveness of the party's branch offices. In effect, institutionalized parties are those that embrace organizational complexity reflected in the presence and sustained operation of intra-party coordination and communication mechanisms. The significance of such mechanisms lies in the fact that in order to efficiently cope with the external environment in view of long-term political and electoral goals, parties need sophisticated mechanisms and procedures to coordinate actions and decisions at all party levels.

In methodological terms, the organizational dimension can be measured according to the number of party's sub-units and presence of organizational structures that are both reflected in party statutes and practically implemented. This presupposes further examination of the patterns of intra-party coordination and interaction at both national and local levels as well as between central party offices and elected party representatives and determination of party leadership structures. As a general rule, party organizations that manifest complex organizational structures in the form of an iterative and meaningful coordination at all levels and somewhat de-centralized authority structures with rank-and-file members engaging in party decision-making processes would be associated with higher levels of party institutionalization. In practice, developing such an organizational model necessitates establishing operative mechanisms of internal accountability and decision-making procedures permitting the broader 'selectorate' to select senior party leaders and party-fielded candidates on regular basis. Empirically, this would be captured by examining individual party statutes, complemented with in-depth interviews with both senior party leaders and local party activists, and exploring common patterns and potential variation in organizational practices.

Related to the organizational features is another crucial dimension of party institutionalization, which accommodates varying party-voter linkage mechanisms and electoral

mobilization strategies. It is broadly acknowledged that programmatic linkages between voters and parties enhance democratic and representative functions of parties and tend to indicate a high level of institutionalization amongst parties with, to use Mainwaring and Torcal's terminology, strong 'roots in society'²⁷⁴. Crucially, and echoing the attitudinal notion of value infusion, '...which refers to followers' emotional affiliation to their party'²⁷⁵, this mobilizational dimension refers to the extent to which relations with followers prove both viable and deeply 'rooted' contributing to a party's ability to channel societal preferences and overcome collective action problems, including those relating to voter mobilization, and, as a result, to the stabilization and institutionalization of the broader party system²⁷⁶. Given the empirical complications of capturing the attitudinal dimensions in the absence of an historical and long-term legacy of political competition along party lines and conducive institutional settings, as was the case in Kyrgyzstan, it would be justifiable to examine and measure party-voter relations in terms of specifically mobilization patterns and strategies. The latter would be effectively captured in party elite investments in terms of campaigning through a sustained rhetoric and based on programmatic appeals.

In practice, the analysis of the campaigning strategies would entail undertaking non-participant observations of the election campaign processes and analysing printed campaign materials and commercials to determine the degree of programmatic mobilization and character of party-voter linkage patterns. In addition, the intensive interviews with both the party leaders and local party activists would conceivably demonstrate the extent of familiarity with the party's campaign platform and ideological positions on valence issues and party elite commitments toward appealing to a broader electorate based on a specific bundle of policy issues. Predictably, a high

²⁷⁴ Scott Mainwaring and Mariano Torcal, 'Party System Institutionalization and Party System Theory after the Third-Wave of Democratization' (Kellogg Institute, Working Paper 319, 2005).

²⁷⁵ Nicole Bolleyer and Saskia P. Ruth, 'Elite Investments in Party Institutionalization in New Democracies: A Two-Dimensional Approach', *The Journal of Politics* 80, no.1 (2017):288.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 289-290.

level of party institutionalization would be characterized by the presence of detailed policy documents setting out the party's main value orientations and philosophy and a consistent communication of the campaign platform during party rallies or public meetings with potential voters. In addition to examining the campaigning period, it would be further plausible to assess the party's credibility and performance within the legislature against specific statements, promises and policy commitments made by party elites during the campaigning period.

At the same time, considering the inchoate character of party organizations and characteristic problems with credible policy commitments, it would be unfeasible to envisage programmatic mobilization in developing democracies, particularly those with low and mid-level economies. As relatedly established by Kitschelt and Kselman, '...political uncertainty characteristic of younger and less economically developed democracies has an important impact on political parties' optimal mix of clientelistic and programmatic linkage strategies'²⁷⁷. This implies that a period of heightened political uncertainty defined in terms of regime volatility gives way to an increase in the prevalence and efficiency of clientelistic networks, especially when it is accompanied by economic development²⁷⁸. In developing democracies, as further posited, 'heavily clientelistic tendencies' based on stable patterns of compliance and interaction between patrons and clients are growingly associated with higher levels of democratic performance, a somewhat peculiar pattern explained with reference to the capacity of clientelistic practices to strengthen democratic accountability²⁷⁹. In line with the conventional measurement tools, this research makes an extensive use of expert interviews and media commentaries on the extent, character and specific types of

²⁷⁷ Herbert Kitschelt and Daniel M. Kselman, 'Economic Development, Democratic Experience, and Political Parties' Linkage Strategies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1477.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1478.

clientelistic strategies of electoral mobilization, complemented additionally with the parties' rhetoric and campaign activities in relation to provision of clientelistic benefits and services.

As well, intensive interviews with local party activists and experts would further help shed some light on the extent of investment made by party elites toward establishing a network of local 'intermediaries', or brokers, in order to monitor and ensure the enforcement of clientelistic transactions. It is posited that by recruiting local notables to act as brokers parties in patronage-ridden societies manage to garner a significant share of votes, which can be sustained by fostering 'clientelistic' accountability or holding 'patrons' accountable for delivering clientelistic benefits and services, including chiefly before the brokers. In turn, maintaining a dense network of local intermediaries, or brokers, would necessitate considerable resources on the part of party elites toward developing more complex organizational structures and operating a network of party branch offices for maintaining patron-client relations and 'administering' clientelistic transactions. Since clientelistic or patronage networks tend to lie in the realm of informal institutions or organizations, measuring the extent and character of clientelistic mobilization could prove difficult, a task that would be dealt with by tracing changing party allegiances of local notable politicians and conducting interviews with both national and local-level experts in order to uncover some common patterns in the operation and manifestation of presumed clientelistic strategies of party mobilization.

Similarly to organizational and mobilizational dimensions, and contrasting complex attitudinal indicators, party coherence, in particular its elements relating to factionalism and party-switching tendencies, appears to be another crucial aspect of party institutionalization that can give an observable insight into the internal dynamics of organization and intra-party politics. A characteristic feature of predominantly young democracies, frequent party switching, notably by sitting legislators, often hinders the process of party institutionalization by reinforcing emerging organizational challenges of maintaining intra-party unity and discipline. In addition to exposing

internal tensions and entailing potential electoral risks, large-scale party switching can seriously erode the trust in individual defectors as well as broad party institutions, thereby undermining the ability of parties to uphold democratic accountability and representation. As an essential attribute of the coherence dimension, party switching would be measured based on the general display of discipline reflected in the absence or presence of principled factionalism within legislative groups and a cumulative number of individual legislators that defected from each legislative party and presumably shifted party allegiances.

In the meantime, the extent of intra-party conflicts and tensions would be reflected in the number of incidences associated with expulsions of individual legislators, leading to subsequent shifts in party allegiances. Aside from determining the number and character of party switching incidences, the empirical research on this front would further involve revealing the underlying motivations and incentives shaping such tendencies by analysing existing coverages of intra-party conflicts in media outlets and conducting expert interviews in order to generate broader analytic explanations in terms of the causes and potential consequences of party switching phenomenon for the institutionalization of parties and inter-party competition. It is worth noting that the rationale behind concentrating on party switching stems from both its crucial implication for the coherence dimension, and hence party institutionalization, and the frequency and prevalence amongst individual legislators seen within the Kyrgyz parliament during heightened period of political uncertainty (i.e. 2011-2013). In other words, the choice of this particular attribute as capturing the dimension of party coherence was made among other things on the basis of its observable and measurable characteristics that would allow to make some credible inferences without denigrating other characteristics or attributes, such as the practice of party discipline in parliamentary voting and organizing parties along coherent ideological lines. As early field research indicated, in the latter cases, both party-line voting and ideological underpinnings of party competition are implied as being

either of low parameters or illusive and indicating, as with party-switching, profound problems with maintaining party coherence and cohesion.

As suggested above, the selection of the three main dimensions, including the latter attribute of party institutionalization, was generally dictated by the empirical consideration that mobilizational and organizational dimensions, alongside party switching phenomenon capturing the dimension of party coherence, could be observed and measured in a sufficiently rigorous manner. In line with the critical realist paradigm, this implies that the generation of credible inferences typically entails collecting strong evidence during observation and investigation of observable phenomena. In the context of this research, the plausibility of observing and measuring selected dimensions does not belittle other, closely related, attitudinal and ideological dimensions, which could likewise, albeit mostly in mature democracies, prove relevant in terms of explaining the variation in party institutionalization. As the model of political uncertainty implied, contextual conditions tend to shape the behaviour of party elites and actors in relation to those party-building strategies, such as organizational and mobilizational, that require feasible investments and commitments. In addition, an inquiry into the attitudinal or values-and ideology-based dimensions would present objective difficulties due to the relative newness of party-based political competition in newer democracies.

Furthermore, the exhaustive character of selected dimensions stems from the fact that they encapsulate a range of dimensions reflected in alternative approaches to operationalizing and measuring the notion of party institutionalization. Building on Panebianco's conceptual model, Bolleyer and Ruth noted, in particular, that the dimension of *routinization*, reflecting structural features of party institutionalization, indicates a growing stabilization of organizational rules and structures, both formal and informal, that provide the structural and behavioural basis for routinizing the practice of communication and interaction with party branches as well as with

followers²⁸⁰. The dimension of *organizational complexity*, adopted heretofore as capturing the notion of party institutionalization, reflects, in a similar way, the extent of elaboration of organizational structures and application of coordination, communication and broad decision-making mechanisms. At the same time, Panebianco’s second core dimension of party institutionalization, *value infusion*, associated with the ability of parties to forge emotive ties with distinct societal groups, seems equally congruent with the party-voter linkage mechanisms capturing the mobilizational dimension. As noted above, the mobilizational features of party institutionalization imply an ability of parties to mobilize on the basis of programmatic and ideological appeals and the reliance on committed party activists to mobilize voters and communicate party positions on ‘valence’ issues (see Table 1).

Table 1. Dimensions and indicators of party institutionalization.

Dimensions	Observable indicators
Organization	Extensive membership base
	Extensive network of branch offices
	Complex organizational structures reflected in the presence of meaningful intra-party coordination and communication mechanisms
	Democratic mechanisms of candidate and leadership selection
	Internal accountability mechanisms
Mobilization	Mobilizing on programmatic or ideological appeals
	Mobilizing on clientelistic appeals based on stable and credible clientelistic promises
	Relying on committed party activists to mobilize voters on the ground
	Regular meetings with potential voters to communicate party positions on ‘valence’ issues
Coherence	Strong party discipline
	Low rates of party switching, defection and legislative floor-crossing
	Low rates of party expulsions due to the intolerance of internal dissent
	Ideological coherence

3.5. Methods of data collection

²⁸⁰ Nicole Bolleyer and Saskia P. Ruth, ‘Elite Investments in Party Institutionalization in New Democracies: A Two-Dimensional Approach’, *The Journal of Politics* 80, no.1 (2017):290.

In view of the main assumptions undergirding the model of political uncertainty and stressing the crucial role of party actors in shaping organizational structures, practices of electoral mobilization and intra-party relations, the present study seeks to undertake semi-structured in-depth interviews, a qualitative data collection technique commonly used in political and social science research. In contrast to structured interviews, mostly of quantitative nature, the semi-structured interviews permit a certain degree of flexibility in terms of framing interview questions and consequently ‘...can provide a basis for constructing more-general theories, they can be used for testing the accuracy of theories’²⁸¹, by uncovering causal mechanisms that underlie political phenomena²⁸². Since the patterns of party organization and mobilization are supposedly explained with reference to party elite behaviour, conducting semi-structured interviews would permit to elicit both ‘valid’ and ‘reliable’ data relating to the actions, decisions and motivations of party elite actors with regard to party-building.

As elucidated by Mosley, the validity of the interview-based data would hinge on the appropriateness of interview questions, accuracy of interview responses and ensuing interpretation of the interview material²⁸³. Following this rationale, the overall interview research would involve undertaking initial interviews with *local experts* with the purpose of exploring broad contextual conditions that have affected party formation and development in Kyrgyzstan after establishing independence in 1991. In addition to generating expert-based characterizations of political and party competition in Kyrgyzstan, it would be further plausible to reveal the extent of influence of political uncertainty and continued political instability on the strategic behaviour of political elite actors in relation to broader political and electoral objectives. The decision to meet with local experts and political commentators in the initial stage of the research process also stemmed from a

²⁸¹ Layna Mosley, *Interview Research in Political Science* (Cornell University Press, 2013):2.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 21.

need to explore an issue in-depth and develop an insightful understanding of the topic at hand that could prove valuable in further refining contextual, theoretical and methodological frameworks.

The selection of a panel of experts as part of an interview research would be initially based on a competent level of expertise and knowledge demonstrated by experts in the domain of electoral and party politics. The panel would include local researchers with scholarly peer-reviewed publications as well as political commentators frequently providing media commentaries and producing editorial articles on political institutions and processes in the country. The validity of the interview material would be enhanced by author's familiarity with the local expert community, including with those experts who can provide reliable and knowledge-based answers, and an expansion of the initial expert panel to include previously un-identified experts with pertinent expertise to be approached based on a 'snowball' or convenience sampling technique. Designing such a sampling strategy in relation to elite or expert interviews allows to purposefully identify experts or academics for interviews based on the possession of broad expertise on electoral processes and party development in Kyrgyzstan, but who cannot be easily accessible or knowable due to the exclusive collaboration with either Kyrgyz or Russian-language expert communities.

In the meantime, the accuracy and reliability of all interview responses would be maintained by developing a list of standard questions available to all interviewees and by audio-recording the interviews or taking detailed notes upon obtaining a verbal permission. The list would be complemented with 'expertise' questions that specifically apply to experts and serve the purpose of inviting a more profound reflection on the potential determinative factors affecting party development, mobilization and competition in the country. Considering the character of research objectives, the sub-section of 'standard questions' will chiefly touch on broader causal factors affecting party institutionalization and subjective evaluations of the presumed effect of political and institutional uncertainty on the behaviour and strategic decisions of party elites in relation to

organizational structures and voter mobilization strategies. Posing a set of standard questions would thus enable to trace patterns in interview responses and refine potentially the original interview design in order to fit the emerging dynamics and direction of the interviewing.

Following the same line, the interview component of the empirical research would further involve interviewing party officials and activists at all organizational levels. This includes meeting with senior leaders of the main legislative factions as well as other 'major' parties intending to run for the legislature, and, above all, conducting intensive or in-depth interviews with provincial and city-level party coordinators. As with expert interviews, senior party leaders would be asked to share personal reflections on the general state of party development and competition in the country and specifically evaluate the extent of influence of surrounding political uncertainty on the top-down efforts to build solid organizational structures and mobilize voters based on issue-based and programmatic appeals. In this part, the questions would specifically inquire party elites about the presumed effect of so-called institutional uncertainty, defined in terms of frequent changes in the legislation regulating electoral processes and party activities, on advancing both organizational and voter mobilization strategies. In effect, the interview responses providing detailed as well as fairly analogous explanations regarding the detrimental effect of political and institutional uncertainty on party organization and mobilization would corroborate in significant ways the originally proposed hypotheses.

Whilst the interview questions for senior party leaders would broadly revolve around political aspects of party-building and strategic decisions made by party elites, the list of interview questions available to local party activists, including mainly provincial and city coordinators of regional party branches, would specifically be designed to elicit detailed information on the actual operation of party organizations on the ground. In particular, the questions would aim to evaluate the extent of *organizational complexity* and the clarity and effectiveness of intra-party coordination

and communication mechanisms, and identify prevalent patterns of electoral mobilization and interaction with broader party 'selectorate'. It is projected that intensive and semi-structured interviews with local party activists would provide much-needed descriptive data on party organization and local electoral politics that could be utilized as a substantive basis for testing the original hypotheses and conducting a causal analysis of both observable and un-observable aspects of party institutionalization. As with party leadership, the interviews with local party activists would be evaluated based on the completeness and perceptiveness of experiences and qualitative accounts.

Given the importance of senior and mid-level party activists for understanding the organizational and campaign dynamics of party politics, the selection of party-affiliated interviewees would be based on particularly three criteria, including a) a party's organizational and mobilizational capacity, b) a party's long-time or recent history of participation in local electoral politics, c) interviewees' ability to provide insightful responses on how parties organize and operate internally, hence mid-level party activists, and d) interviewees are affiliated with parties that demonstrate a certain level of party activism at local level and operate in provincial centres that ensure geographical representation. Building on this reasoning, it was hence decided to undertake empirical research predominantly in the form of an extensive field research to take place in Bishkek, the capital city, and across four major provincial towns, including Naryn, Karakol, Jalal-Abad and Osh. The first two provincial centres are located in the northern part of Kyrgyzstan and recurrently display a relatively rigorous party-based political competition, whereas both Jalal-Abad and Osh represent two largest southern provinces with observable regional dynamics and specificities of the politics. In general, a considerable part of the field research process would be undertaken in Bishkek, including research preparations for the regional field research and multiple elite interviews with senior party leaders, local experts and politicians.

The initial phase of the field research process, to be completed between 2013 and 2014 period, would involve conducting preliminary research on the state of party research in Kyrgyzstan, collecting some pertinent and general data, such as party lists, characteristics, programs and results for past elections, and interviewing a number of local experts in order to refine both methodological and theoretical frameworks and assess competing theoretical explanations. This would be followed by a series of intensive interviews, to be held between 2014-2015 period, with either leaders or deputy leaders of the 'leading' parties, holding legislative seats or demonstrating the perceived potential to mobilize organizational and financial resources to contest the next 2015 parliamentary election. The decision to interview some deputy party leaders stemmed from either the difficulty of arranging meetings with a number of party officials and the realization made during the first phase of preliminary research that party leaders are frequently confined to providing generic responses to 'standard' questions and sharing detailed and often politicized interpretations of ongoing political processes that are not directly related to own party activities and strategies.

In the meantime, the final and significant part of the field research process would consist of undertaking three-months long (May-July, 2015) field research activities across four provincial centres aimed at exploring the inner workings of party organizations and different voter mobilization patterns. At this stage, and depending on the party, the interview questions would specifically ask regional and city coordinators of party branches to reflect on the a) internal functioning of the party's organizational structures, b) mechanisms by which internal communication, coordination and dispute resolution normally operate and c) planned strategies of electoral mobilization in advance of the parliamentary election to be held in October, 2015. Given the past tendency amongst leading parties to plunge into a fully-fledged election campaign one month prior to the election day, such a timeframe appears both reasonable and practical in terms of understanding the operation of party organizations and membership expansion efforts beyond

active campaigning period. At the same time, this part of the field research would be usefully complemented with a scrupulous monitoring of the election campaigning period (September-October, 2015) in the form of collecting printed campaign materials and occasional one or day-long trips to the regions in order to observe campaign rallies and constituency meetings of party candidates with prospective voters.

3.5.1. Secondary data sources

In addition to in-depth interviews and first-hand data of both quantitative and qualitative nature to be derived from the planned meetings with party officials and activists, a substantial part of the empirical research would be based complementarily on the collection and analysis of secondary data. Applied to various stages of the research, this involves reviewing scholarly published materials, such as books, textbooks, peer-reviewed articles, dissertations and conference proceedings, and utilising extant empirical material, including chiefly area-based findings, as bases for understanding the relationship between contextual uncertainty and patterns of party organization and mobilization in Kyrgyzstan. The process of selecting scholarly sources of secondary dataset involves evaluating the quality and credibility of the primary data sources employed in order to validate empirical and theoretical conclusions and determining the appropriateness and depth of investigation and ensuing analysis of similar dimensions of party institutionalization.

In the meantime, a wide range of secondary data would be drawn from both official and non-official sources of information, such as government statistics and data on political parties, statistical electoral data compiled by the Central Election Commission, international election observation reports, including those provided regularly by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, newspapers and website articles and news stories. In this regard, a special emphasis is placed on the collection and processing of data relating to party expenditures incurred to organizationally sustain party branches and finance campaign activities. Similarly to

scholarly sources, this type of secondary data would be selectively evaluated based on the credibility and accuracy of data excluding plausible errors or incomplete information and an increased appropriateness of available data for elucidating research questions and theoretical hypotheses of this research study.

3.6. Method of causal analysis

Essentially, the application of a range of both primary and secondary data for subsequent empirical analysis appears broadly congruent with the philosophical conviction of the critical realist paradigm to extend causality beyond the observed regularities to integrate causal mechanisms and processes²⁸⁴. The claim is that establishing causality or causal relationships between phenomena, viewed as the principal objective of social scientific research, entails a real and profound understanding of the dynamic effects of 'contextual influences and mental processes'²⁸⁵. This implies that 'some causal processes can be directly observed, rather than only inferred from measured covariation of the presumed causes and effects' and feasibly explained in terms of interpretations of 'social and psychological processes'²⁸⁶. In effect, treating the context as integral to causal processes, and not as a mere 'extraneous variable', implies placing considerable importance on direct observations and adopting a holistic approach for generating causal explanations. In addition, such an approach to causality presupposes the collection of an extensive array of empirical data and knowledge that would be crucial to uncovering causal mechanisms by tracing the relationships between multiple causal factors, and contextual influences, involved in bringing about a phenomenon under investigation.

Consistent with the critical realist stance towards establishing causal relationships is a process-tracing technique that would be employed as a complementary method of causal inference

²⁸⁴ Joseph A. Maxwell, 'Using Qualitative Methods for Causal Explanation', *Field Methods* 16, no.3 (2004).

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 247.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

for evaluating the cogency of theoretical hypotheses and developing a more nuanced and context-driven argumentative framework. As a method, process-tracing entails a deployment of a 'longitudinal research design whose data consist of a sequence of events (individual and collective acts or changes of a state) represented by nonstandardized observations drawn from a single unit of analysis'²⁸⁷. This contrasts conventional research designs, such as experiments and statistical models, based on the analysis of 'standardized observations' of a set number of variables and across a number of units of analysis²⁸⁸. By providing a more detailed and temporally ordered within-case examination, process-tracing technique specifically allows to trace complex set of causal chains and unravel potentially alternative causal pathways through which a phenomenon under investigation occurs²⁸⁹.

In the context of this study, the application of the process-tracing technique would be carried out in the form of testing the validity of the main hypotheses underscoring the contextual effects of political uncertainty on the behaviour of party actors in relation to strategies and patterns of organization-building and voter mobilization, normally associated with low levels of party institutionalization. This necessitates undertaking continuous observations and explanations of both heightened and low periods of political uncertainty and tracing possible alterations in party strategies in response to contextual fluctuations. At the same time, the analysis of party formation and competition in Kyrgyzstan would be likewise based on detailed observation and tracing of concomitant factors, such as political system and institutional settings, that supposedly shaped the circumstances in which parties evolved, organized themselves and competed. Finally, and though testing the validity of research hypotheses emphasizing the explanatory power of political and

²⁸⁷ David Waldner, 'Process-Tracing and Causal Mechanisms', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science*, ed. by Harold Kincaid (Oxford University Press, 2018):69.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

institutional uncertainty would remain the primary objective, this study would complementarily seek to uncover a more complex causal mechanism linking contextual uncertainty to the distinctive patterns of weak party institutionalization by revealing additional factors that in some ways affect and interact with the main hypothesized factors in order to produce a more nuanced and wide-ranging explanation of the overall causal process.

Methodological challenges and limitations

In addition to aforementioned difficulties associated with measuring the notion of political uncertainty despite its conceptual and theoretical cogency, a number of methodological issues could arise due to the lack of prior research based on systematic and longitudinal data analysis and pursuing similar objectives and research questions. This holds relevance for the practical application of the theoretical framework underpinning the model of political uncertainty as scientific inquiries and appropriate research designs for testing the relationship between contextual uncertainty and resultant patterns of party development seem nearly absent. At the same time, the lack of scholarly research on party formation and organization in Kyrgyzstan could cause methodological issues with both the availability and reliability of the empirical data. As preliminary research indicates, the extant data and analytic information on political parties as reflected in local and un-published sources appears to be either incomplete or generic in terms of providing descriptive characterizations and lacking substantive discussions and causal explanations.

In turn, the issue with maintaining the reliability of the data could stem from the absence of an official register and competing figures on party characteristics, including, for example, party membership numbers. In the meantime, and as the initial interviews with a number of politicians and local experts in the field displayed, extracting complete and reliable information based on intensive interviews needed to support theoretical conclusions and empirical observations could prove a difficult endeavour, especially as party elites could be tempted to take over the interview

process and choose not to reveal either complete and correct information. There also exists a strong possibility of similar character that mid-level party activists would opt to offer inadequate and unreliable responses that do not completely reflect the practical ways by which parties tend to operate and organize internally. This could arise due to objective reasons associated with a limited role placed in regional and city party coordinators in coordinating party-related activities and decision-making processes or the tendency to provide somewhat 'tactful' responses that do not reliably reflect the actual state of operation of organizational structures and decision-making mechanisms.

It should be further noted that although an investigation of broader causal factors conditioning weak party institutionalization remains the main overarching research purpose, this study would not seek to feasibly offer an alternative argumentative framework. For the most part, the substantive and analytic component of the study would be confined to discussing the implications of the empirical evidence for determining the strength of the presumed causal relationship between high levels of political uncertainty and the absence of elite investments in party organizational and voter mobilizational strategies fostering increased party institutionalization. Rather, and given the broader theoretical implications of the uncertainty model on a variety of crucial dimensions associated with party institutionalization, it would provide a detailed examination of the selected dimensions that form the bases for the initially adopted argumentative framework and identify concomitant factors that come into play in both influencing the main attributive causal dimensions and contributing to low levels of party institutionalization. The substantive discussion would endeavour to offer a potentially nuanced and complex causal explanation, evaluate the validity of the main research hypotheses stressing contextual influences of political uncertainty and propose future avenues for research in the field.

Conclusion

Building on the philosophical tenets of critical realism combining ontological realism and epistemological relativism, this study presents a methodological framework that incorporates a case study research design and specifies techniques and methods for investigating a range of causal factors conditioning weak party institutionalization in Kyrgyzstan and evaluating the cogency of the main theoretical propositions. The choice of a case study methodology stemmed chiefly from its inherent appropriateness for testing and refining existing theories and its emphasis on context-based 'thick' description and explanations of the political phenomenon under investigation. This further appears to be congruent with a set of theoretical assumptions and propositions undergirding the model of political uncertainty put forward by Lupu and Riedl. In effect, and given considerable implications of political uncertainty on varying patterns of party competition, organization and mobilization, observing and examining multiple dimensions of party institutionalization necessitates undertaking a single-case study analysis based on systematic and longitudinal data.

Following the methodological implications of the uncertainty model, Kyrgyzstan was selected as a crucial or critical case, which according to said theoretical predictions, exhibited both low levels of party development and institutionalization and heightened periods of political and institutional uncertainty. Subsumed in a category of competitive authoritarian regimes, Kyrgyzstan specifically saw continued cycles of political uncertainty and instability associated mainly with the removal of incumbent presidents and post-uprising uncertainty over the future configuration of political power and new institutional arrangements. This has been notably accompanied with renewed momentum for democracy and party-building and curiously puzzling outcomes associated with the absence of elite investments in strong party organizational structures and programmatic strategies of electoral mobilization. In line with the process-tracing method of causal analysis based on the establishment of complex causal relationships and examination of concomitant factors, the collection of the empirical data would be based on interview research involving party officials and

local experts in the field as well as a wide variety of secondary data, including both published and un-published sources, that would permit to produce compelling causal explanations.

Chapter 4. Uncertain context of party formation and development in Kyrgyzstan.

Introduction

The dynamics of party formation and development in Kyrgyzstan has been affected in fundamental ways by continued political and institutional instability, widely seen as a defining feature of politics of the post-independence period, i.e. 1991 onwards. Combined with the continuous tendency toward authoritarian consolidation and consequent regime breakdowns following popular uprisings of 2005 and 2010, the unviability of social and institutional precursors for party development, in effect, induced continual utilization of party institutions as formal instruments for regime consolidation. In the meantime, the institutional frameworks, within which parties emerged and developed, tended to reflect, especially in the early stages of post-communist transition, the prevailing inertia of old Soviet-type practice of electing legislators under SMD, and the propensity to curb potential consolidation of political opposition along party (elected under PR system) lines.

In a broader context, there remained considerable uncertainty over the regime trajectory, reinforced by short-lived processes of democratization and economic liberalization associated with the first president Akayev in early 1990s and intense elite competition that, bolstered by recurring waves of public discontent over rampant corruption and chronic poverty, prompted popular uprisings and forcible resignation of the first two incumbent presidents, Akayev in 2005 and Bakiyev in 2010 accordingly. In general, former opposition forces, assuming political power in the wake of 'post-revolutionary' period of political competition and instability, embarked characteristically on a reproduction of old modes of consolidating power around new incumbent presidents vested with significant political powers. Despite the common view that regime breakdowns following democratic uprisings are conceived of as reflecting episodes of 'democratic transition' and 'people's power', in effect, they tend to indicate intense competition and power re-structuring in political elite circles. Whilst the prospects for democratization look gloomier following the last popular uprising and

regime change in 2010, and against the backdrop of low capacity of civil society and media to monitor power holders and insignificant 'critical' mass pressures for democracy, there nonetheless remains a fair degree of likelihood of intense political confrontation in the foreseeable future, contributing to the overall state of political and regime uncertainty, that in combination with few democratic accomplishments hitherto made could potentially spur top-down democratization processes.

In addition to sustaining a broader state of political uncertainty, elite power competition, viewed on the surface as resembling democratic governance²⁹⁰, was also reflected in frequent changes in the institutional frameworks regulating formal distribution of power, political competition and electoral mobilization. Faced with political pressure from opposition groups or in an effort to extend and retain executive powers, the incumbents have thus far held eight constitutional referenda (Table 3), since independence in 1991, that at times brought about substantial changes in the competition rules and power configurations. In this context of institutional fluidity, party actors faced shifting institutional incentives toward investing in party-building and programmatic appeals and viewed party organizations mainly as instrumental vehicles for strengthening the incumbent authoritarian power or opposition unity. The combination of political and institutional uncertainty, as formerly postulated, has had implications for the type of strategies, such as flexible organizational structures and a mix of clientelistic and programmatic appeals, adopted by party elites for the purposes of building internal organization and electoral mobilization.

²⁹⁰ Rostislav Turovsky, 'Party Systems in Post-Soviet States: The Shaping of Political Competition', *Perspective on European Politics and Society* 12, no.2 (2011).

This chapter serves to provide contextual insights into political and institutional environments that influenced the formation and development of parties in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The first section will discuss the main political developments of the early independence period (1989-2000) that saw the formation of first parties and growing consolidation of an authoritarian regime of president Akayev. This is followed by a discussion of electoral and party competition that ensued following changes of an electoral system from SMD to mixed and that marked the beginning of intense political rivalry and growing severity of political repression, eventually leading to mass protests and an overthrow of president Akayev in a so-called 'Tulip revolution of 2005'. The third section will cover the uncertain 'post-revolutionary' period of heightened political contestation between 'new' political forces and gradual establishment of a highly repressive authoritarian regime by president-elect Bakiyev, which was similarly dismantled as a result of mass violent uprising, commonly dubbed as an 'April revolution', in 2010. In this section, the emphasis will be laid upon institutional efforts to formalize the authoritarian grip on power by creating a dominant 'party of power' and shifting to a full PR system and concurrent efforts by oppositional parties to compete in elections and coalesce into a political force across party lines. The last section will form the basis for subsequent empirical analysis in terms of setting the context of enhanced political uncertainty surrounding 'post-revolutionary' period and supposedly informing the strategic choices of party actors relating to organization-building and voter mobilization and seen as incompatible with party institutionalization.

4.1. Early period of party formation and Akayev's presidency (1990-2000)

Despite prevailing perceptions that independence was imposed on Kyrgyzstan in 1991 in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there existed nonetheless a youth civic movement that provided an initial platform for party formation and new democratic forces. Driven by chronic

housing issues, allegedly managed by local (Soviet) authorities in favor of non-Kyrgyz populations moving from Soviet Russia since 1920s, a group of predominantly young ethnic Kyrgyz began seizing lands on the outskirts of Bishkek, the capital city, during April-June of 1989²⁹¹. Faced with the possibility of punishment by the local communist party, the group, reinvigorated by the support of like-minded young historians and scientists, later established a socio-political movement 'Ashar' (Mutual help) in June 1990 and held a series of anti-communist protest rallies against the persecution of its rising leader Jypar Jeksheev and fellow members²⁹².

By tapping into concrete socio-economic and environmental issues, and in the light of growing pro-democracy and 'openness' sentiments across the post-communist region, the movement has further sparked a series of public discussions and debates that attracted prominent writers and poets, i.e. so-called 'creative intelligentsia', and extended to sensitive matters of political significance, including notably the revival of Kyrgyz language and culture, and challenged in fairly subtle ways the local communist authorities²⁹³. Comparing to strong anti-communist and confrontational strategies adopted by pro-democracy and nationalist movements in the Baltic and Caucasian regions, it nonetheless took a somewhat moderate line that at a fundamental level precluded a profound level of animosity toward the communist (Soviet) rule. This attitude reflected the mild character of anti-communist and anti-Soviet revisionist sentiments across the populace and was premised on the general belief that the ruling communist party could be forced to make concessions on promoting socio-economic and housing issues, democratic governance, freedom of expression and cultural rights of the titular nation.

²⁹¹ Tynchtykbek Chorotegin, 'Demokraticeskomu dvijeniuy Kyrgyzstana 25 let', Azattyk. May 28, 2015, available at <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27040609.html>.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

In addition, the initial intensity of nationalist claims has seemingly waned over time due to secured compromises and the expansion of the movement into a significant political organization, renamed accordingly as a 'Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan' (DMK), and inclusion of 24 public associations²⁹⁴. As an activist of DMK and prominent historian Tynchtykbek Chorotegin said, the expansion of DMK was accompanied by growing efforts amongst 'democratic' forces, including public associations, to merge into a broad political movement by retaining own brands and dissociating from the nationalist group 'Asaba' (Banner) that along with 'Ashar' movement formed the basis for DMK²⁹⁵. In effect, the inclusion of divergent political forces in a DMK entailed broadening of positional views and a growing 'compromisability' as evidenced by close collaboration with reform-oriented communist party affiliates, including notably the president of Kyrgyz Soviet Republic (KSR) Askar Akayev and speaker of the 'legendary parliament' (Jogorku Kenesh) Medetkhan Sherimkulov. It was further conceivable that the election of Akayev, a former Director of Kyrgyz Soviet Academy of Science and who sought to associate himself with democratic forces as DMK was growing in prominence, as a president of KSR in 1990 by the 'legendary parliament' was moderately attributed to ongoing protest rallies and hunger strikes organized by democratic forces, including DMK, in support of a presidential form of government, multipartyism and de-registration of the local communist party, in the days preceding parliamentary (failed) voting on the candidacy of Apsamat Masaliev, then communist leader and parliament speaker, for president of KSR.

With the election of Akayev in a largely un-contested presidential election in October 1991 following the declaration of political independence in August 1991, DMK extended, if not diffused, its political influence in both the government and parliament as president-elect Akayev attempted

²⁹⁴ 'Tynchtykbek Chorotegin: Demokraticeskomu Dvijeniuy Kyrgyzstana 25 let', Azattyk, May 28, 2015, available at <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27040609.html>.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

to strike a delicate political balance between democratic forces, which he represented on the surface, and potent communist-dominated parliament. As president of KRS, and demonstrating his commitment toward democratic reforms and at the same time his un-confrontational stance toward the local communist authority, Akayev appointed Kazat Akmatov, a prominent democratic activist and co-leader of DMK, and Jumgalbek Amanbayev, former first secretary (akin to executive head) of KSR, as members of the presidential council in charge of setting a strategic direction for the republic.

In the meantime, the growing, but still limited, influence of democratic forces in power echelons was also accompanied by the formation of new parties, including democratic ‘Erkin Kyrgyzstan’ (Free Kyrgyzstan), nationalist ‘Asaba’, socialist ‘Ata-Meken’ (Fatherland) and ‘Human rights movement of Kyrgyzstan’ parties in 1991-1992, that grew out of DMK platform. This has marked the emerging trend at the time amongst prominent political figures, typically holding legislative seats, to coalesce into smaller political groups, such as political parties and socio-political movements, founded concurrently by local communist leaders, such as a former first secretary of KSR Apsamat Masaliev, or with clearly socialist or communist connotations (see Table 2). That said, and as Table 2 shows, 12 parties in total retained formal registration with the Ministry of Justice prior to 1995 parliamentary elections, first since independence, alongside 6 socio-political movements, out of 65 parties and socio-political movements in total that acquired formal statuses in November 1991 and soon ceased to exist demonstrating political perturbations in the search for political blocs across individual politicians and presumed reaction to institutional ‘dis-incentives’ provided by an adopted SMD system for elections to a bi-cameral parliament.

Table 2. List of registered parties as of 1995.

No	Party name	Leader’s name	Date of registration
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1.	Progressive-democratic party of 'Erkin Kyrgyzstan' (Free Kyrgyzstan)	Tursunbai Bakir uulu	04.12.1991
2.	Party of national revival 'Asaba' (Banner)	Ch. Bazarbayev	30.12.1991
3.	Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan	Apsamat Masaliev	17.09.1992
4.	'Ata-Meken' (Fatherland) socialist party	Omurbek Tekebayev	16.02.1992
5.	Republican People's Party	J. Tentiev	16.12.1992
6.	Party of 'Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan'	Jypar Jeksheev	16.07.1993
7.	Agrarian Party of the Kyrgyz Republic	Emil Aliyev	26.11.1993
8.	Party of Unity of Kyrgyzstan	E. Alymkulov	08.06.1994
9.	Democratic Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan	Tokon Shaylieva	14.10.1994
10.	Party of the Veterans of the War in Afghanistan	A. Tashtanbekov	14.10.1994
11.	Agrarian-Labor Party of Kyrgyzstan	Usen Sydykov	14.10.1994
12.	Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan	Abdygany Erkebayev	16.12.1994

Despite much enthusiasm and political activism in the immediate aftermath of independence, the ensuing political and electoral competition has not been structured along party lines. As argued by Koldys, the initial period of party formation and development in Kyrgyzstan was significantly influenced by institutional constraints, including 'the majority electoral system', envisaged in a newly accepted 1993 constitution, and adopted (in 1994) amendments to the electoral legislation '...allowing public associations and "local communities" (essentially local government councils) to field candidates alongside political parties, labor collectives, meetings of voters at their place of residence, and self-nominated candidates'²⁹⁶. It was conceivable that the

²⁹⁶ Gregory Koldys, 'Constraining Democratic Development: Institutions and Party System Formation in Kyrgyzstan', *Demokratizatsiya* 5, no.3 (1997):351.

consensus on a SMD system stemmed from a belief, shared by ‘moderate democrats’, led by president Akayev, as well as reform-oriented communist legislators, that opting for a proportional representation would result in potential consolidation of ‘hard-liners’ in both democratic and communist camps into larger party-based politico -electoral blocs.

That strategic and short-term calculations of ruling political actors affected the choice of political and electoral institutions further proved cogent as Akayev issued a decree in 1994, in accordance with the ‘Law on public associations’ that governed party activities, allowing public associations and ‘local communities’ to ‘nominate candidates in parliamentary elections’²⁹⁷, alongside political parties. Consequently, just over one third of a 105-seat bi-cameral parliament, elected under single-member majority system in 1995 (Table 3), was represented by legislators, including predominantly party leaders, nominated by political parties, with the remaining larger group of legislators elected mainly as independents²⁹⁸. As Koldys noted, extending nomination rights to non-political organizations could potentially weaken the crucial contribution of public associations toward democracy-building as they would be ‘...forced to compromise their specific goals’²⁹⁹ and forge alliances and electoral blocs with other public associations pursuing differing interests for vote maximizing goals³⁰⁰. In the meantime, such an ambiguous legislation has the potential to diminish the instrumental significance of parties as sole political organizations entitled to nominate candidates for elected political offices and develop a broad platform amongst a range of fairly similar interests and positional views, shared including by public associations³⁰¹. However, as the 1995 election to the parliament showed, against a background of weak civic associations and

²⁹⁷ Gregory Koldys, ‘Constraining Democratic Development: Institutions and Party System Formation in Kyrgyzstan’, *Demokratizatsiya* 5, no.3 (1997):356.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 357.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

inchoate party organizations, the overwhelming majority of candidates chose to run as independents by capitalizing on personal reputations and attempting to minimize potential responsibilities that institutional nominations would entail.

Table 3. List of parties elected to a bi-cameral parliament –Jogorku Kenesh (consisting of Legislative Assembly - 35 seats and Assembly of People’s Representatives - 70 seats) in Feb. 5-19, 1995:

Party name	Seats
1. Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan	14
2. Party of national revival ‘Asaba’ (Banner)	4
3. Party of Unity of Kyrgyzstan	4
4. ‘Ata-Meken’ (Fatherland) socialist party	3
5. Republic Democratic Party	3
6. Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan	3
7. Republican People’s Party	3
8. Agrarian Party of the Kyrgyz Republic	1
9. Agrarian-Labor Party of Kyrgyzstan	1
10. Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan	1
11. Democratic Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan	1
	38 (161)
Independents and local community nominees	67
Total	105

As Marat Ukushov reported, the election of a significant number of self-nominated and politically independent candidates to a new bi-cameral parliament in 1995 was somewhat unanticipated by Akayev’s growing regime, seeking to elect a ‘rubber stamp’ parliament, and intensified political competition in transformative ways³⁰². The surge of independent opposition politicians was notably preceded by continued confrontation between president Akayev and a large group of communist legislators (elected in 1990 as members of a unicameral Kyrgyz Soviet parliament), between 1992 and 1994, over the growing inability of the government, steered by Akayev toward implementing sweeping market liberalization and privatization reforms, to manage

³⁰² Marat Ukushov, ‘Kyrgyzstan i Parlamentskaya Forma Pravleniya: Opyt Razocharovaniya. Chast 1’, October 25, 2017, available at <http://center.kg/article/84>.

profound social and economic problems facing the country³⁰³. The heightened phase of this executive-legislative confrontation began in late 1993s when the parliament, hailed later as 'legendary' for approving historical independence documents and posing a significant political challenge to president Akayev, expressed a 'vote of no confidence' against then prime minister Tursunbek Chyngyshev, backed by president Akayev, implicating a privatized 'Kumtor' gold mining company and indirectly president Akayev himself with alleged high-level machinations (popularly dubbed as a 'Golden Scandal')³⁰⁴.

The resignation has further sparked a series of continual accusations and follow-up investigations by a special parliamentary commission against the government, and hence president, over the legality of government schemes for privatizing state-owned assets, culminating in a months-long legislative crisis. In mid-1994, there has emerged an initiative by a proponent of Akayev and head of Chui oblast (province) administration Felix Kulov regarding the establishment of a bi-cameral parliament and holding of a corresponding constitutional referendum, in the light of the criticism of parliament as sabotaging president Akayev's reforms, that shortly coincided with announcements in the parliament to publicize the findings of a parliamentary investigation launched following the 'Golden Scandal' and presumably implicating both government and parliament members. The plenary session scheduled for Sept. 14, 1994 to discuss the commission's findings was, however, postponed due to the lack of quorum, which seemingly was an indication of an alleged collusion between the presidential administration and a group of 160 sitting legislators (out of 350 in total) refusing to participate in parliament's plenary sessions, as informed in a joint letter sent to president Akayev. As stated in the letter, the legislators accused the parliament at large of

³⁰³ Marat Ukushov, 'Kyrgyzstan i Parlamentskaya Forma Pravleniya: Opyt Razocharovaniya. Chast 1', October 25, 2017, available at <http://center.kg/article/84>.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

attempting to overthrow the president Akayev ‘in the wake of economic difficulties and social tensions’, and who they considered as the legitimate head of state, unlike the parliament elected in the Soviet period³⁰⁵.

The continual character of the parliamentary crisis soon implied that holding of a constitutional referendum followed by new parliamentary elections would be imminent, turning constitutional amendments into an issue of subsequent political confrontation between Akayev, his allies, and growing opposition forces in the parliament and outside. The main provision of the constitution that drew widespread attention and caused much political controversy amongst opposition forces revolved around the justifiability of establishing a bi-cameral parliament, consisting of a lower chamber- *Legislative Assembly* (35 seats) and an impermanent upper chamber - *Assembly of People’s Representatives* (65). In addition to popular criticisms, expressed including by members of Osh oblast (province) council and opposition legislators, that creating a bi-cameral parliament was at odds with the unitary structure of government and would undermine the professionalism of the parliament and potentially cause political regionalism, it was essentially conceivable that by reducing the size of the main lower chamber to 35 seats (from 350 seats) and electing an ad hoc-based upper chamber (65 seats), whose members can combine legislative duties with outside non-government jobs, the incumbency eventually sought to extend its political control over the parliament.

As previously mentioned, the election of the new parliament (first since independence) in 1995 under a single-member district majority system, that reportedly was accompanied by widespread voting irregularities and the misuse of administrative state resources deployed against

³⁰⁵ Marat Ukushov, ‘Kyrgyzstan i Parlamentskaya Forma Pravleniya: Opyt Razocharovaniya. Chast 1’, October 25, 2017, available at <http://center.kg/article/84>.

opposition candidates³⁰⁶, nonetheless brought a fair number of prominent opposition figures, including notably Daniyar Usenov, Omurbek Tekebayev, Adahan Madumarov, Kubatbek Baibolov and former communist leader Apsamat Masaliev, into both parliament chambers. As a legal expert Marat Ukushov noted in his article, the independent character of the 1995 parliament was soon evident in a joint decision made in both chambers to reject proposals by initiative groups to hold a referendum on extending president Akayev's term until October 2001, deemed to contradict the constitution of 1993³⁰⁷. The extension of presidential terms and powers in referendum has been seen as a common practice to consolidate authoritarian regimes in neighboring Central Asian countries, which growingly took a more repressive and closed authoritarian political trajectory. The relative openness of the political system, combined with the relative, but still limited, media freedom, civic activism and vibrant political elite competition, has, however, often set Kyrgyzstan apart from its neighbors as demonstrating enhanced prospects for democratization, hence its oft-dubbed informal title as an 'island of democracy', and at the same time chronic political instability.

That being said, the patterns of political competition continued to reflect the 'politics of personalism', manifested in a characteristic confrontation between the rising personalistic authoritarian regime of Akayev and fragmented political opposition represented by a restricted group of individual legislators with unpronounced ideological convictions, who, as a rule, figured as outspoken critics of the government. In the previous 'legendary parliament', however, and despite the saliency of personal political stances in relation to the executive-legislative confrontation, there nonetheless existed a large, but amorphous, group of communist legislators that opposed radical

³⁰⁶ Report on the Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan: February-March 2000, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.csce.gov/sites/helsinkicommission.house.gov/files/2000%20Kyrgyzstan%20Parliamentary%20Elections.pdf>

³⁰⁷ Marat Ukushov, 'Kyrgyzstan i Parlamentskaya Forma Pravleniya: Opyt Razocharovaniya. Chast 1', October 25, 2017, available at <http://center.kg/article/84>.

policies of economic liberalization and privatization and 'un-democratic' tendencies of president Akayev, whose growing authoritarian regime, conversely, was associated with the dismantlement of early democratic forces, to which he was closely related, with the potential to transform into a viable political organization. As Koldys contended, the preservation of an SMD system, in combination with restrictive electoral laws, as a basis for 1995 parliamentary elections has further inhibited political and electoral competition that would be otherwise, and based on PR system, conducive to structuring political cleavages across broad and institution-based party organizations³⁰⁸.

Commenting on political consequences of formal institutional changes, Ukushov further stressed that the main constitutional provision, approved in a referendum of 1994, and envisaging the formation of a bi-cameral parliament, as opposed to an initial 105-seat unicameral parliament, has intensified the traditional 'north-south' regional divide that, along with high levels of personalism and localism, has been arguably the defining feature of electoral politics in Kyrgyzstan³⁰⁹. The early presidential elections held in late December 1995, following the failure to extend presidential terms by referendum, exposed the pronounced effect of a regional factor as election results revealed 'substantial regional variations' reflecting the 'existing balances of power within both the regions and country'³¹⁰. This, however, was not entirely unexpected given traditionally strong regional allegiances that date back to pre-Soviet times and growing opposition in the south, including Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken provinces, over Akayev's regime associated with

³⁰⁸ Gregory Koldys, 'Constraining Democratic Development: Institutions and Party System Formation in Kyrgyzstan', *Demokratizatsiya* 5, no.3 (1997).

³⁰⁹ Marat Ukushov, 'Kyrgyzstan i Parlamentskaya Forma Pravleniya: Opyt Razocharovaniya. Chast 1', October 25, 2017, available at <http://center.kg/article/84>.

³¹⁰ John Anderson, 'The Kyrgyz Parliamentary and Presidential Elections of 1995', *Electoral Studies* 15, no.4 (1996):532.

northern-based political forces in Chui, Naryn, Talas and Issyk-Kul provinces, as evidenced by the election of a fair number of prominent opposition figures representing 'southern' provinces in the upper chamber of the parliament.

The timing of 1995 presidential elections, i.e. about one year earlier than had been expected, and tightening up of legal regulations on both the dates and requirements of collecting voter support signatures, which consequently resulted in the denial of registration of three (including two popular) prospective candidates due to alleged technical errors in collection documents, indicate that there has been an apparent political move to undercut potential opponents and thwart electoral consolidation of opposition forces around a unified candidate. The voting irregularities further extended to include the misuse of administrative resources, as displayed in extensive and positive coverages of an incumbent candidate Akayev and the exploitation of local government resources and services for election campaign purposes that also involved creating obstacles to the opposition candidate Apsamat Masaliev. The last leader of the local communist party and first secretary of KSR, Masaliev has been a principled critic of Akayev and respected sitting legislator (in the upper chamber), who, despite widespread irregularities and (undeservingly) enduring popular reputation of Akayev as a 'democrat' committed to implementing efficient economic reforms, nonetheless managed to gain 24,7 % of votes, and about 47% of votes in the southern provinces, against 72,4% of nationwide votes for incumbent president Akayev with the last candidate, former speaker of the 'legendary parliament', Medetkhan Sherimkulov, receiving 1,7% of votes³¹¹.

³¹¹ 'Istoriya Vyborov Prezidenta KR', Kabar Information Agency Sept. 16, 2017, available at: <http://kabar.kg/news/iatc-kabar-istoriia-vyborov-prezidenta-kr/>.

It was noteworthy that despite significant effect of the regional voting overshadowing the influence of substantive issue-based voting factors and that of party institutions, including particularly the organizational bases of the communist party, in shaping presidential contest, the causal effect of regional allegiances on electoral competition occurred, in actuality, in the context of growing opposition sentiments in the southern provinces, reinforced by strong oppositional stances shared by prominent 'southern' legislators, including Madumarov, Tekebayev, Usenov, Sadyrbayev, and emergent public perceptions that 'northern', and often loyal, political groups and politicians, in particular those with background from Chui and Talas provinces, are being favored by the incumbent regime. This implies that, contrasting the notions of political 'clans' and 'native son' in Kyrgyzstan³¹², and elsewhere in Central Asia, the implications of regional allegiances for political and electoral competition are not always straightforward and unambiguous. In effect, both regional and local identities tend to affect political competition and electoral mobilization in rather complex and multifaceted ways and under the broad influence of power-opposition dynamics, varying levels of public discontent and types of elections, personal reputations of politicians, media and public discourse.

The following feature analogously affecting the characteristic patterns of political and electoral competition in Kyrgyzstan was the frequency with which the incumbency has altered political and electoral institutions in an effort to extend its powers or as a way of forging political compromises with opposition forces. In the ensuing months after the electoral victory in late 1995, the presidential administration has thus embarked on the process of initiating changes to the 1993 constitution, subject to approval by a nationwide referendum held in February 1996 (see Table 4), shifting an extensive array of nomination and decision-making rights, including the rights to issue

³¹² Kathleen Collins, 'The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories', *World Politics* 56, no.2 (2004).

executive orders, from the parliament to the president³¹³. On top of institutional mechanisms of containing political opposition, and in the light of continued confrontation with the parliament, the incumbency has further resorted to politically motivated instigations of alleged criminal (corruption) charges against opposition legislators and political opponents, a practice that has been recurrently used by all subsequent presidents to silence dissent. Reflecting the culmination of ongoing political confrontation throughout 1997-1998, 3 members of the lower chamber and 9 members of the upper chamber of the parliament faced criminal charges with potential prosecution, denied shortly by both parliament chambers on the grounds of parliamentary immunity guaranteed by the constitution³¹⁴.

Table 4. List of constitutional referenda (1991-present).

No	Date	Subject matter	Results
1	30 Jan., 1994	Confirming the presidency of president Akayev.	Approved – 97%, Turnout – 96%
2	22. Oct., 1994	Creating a bi-cameral parliament.	Approved - 90%, Turnout - 86%
3	10 Feb., 1996	Extending presidential powers and prerogatives.	Approved – 98.6% Turnout – 96.6%
4	17 Oct., 1998	Increasing the number of seats in the lower chamber from 35 to 60, reducing the number of seats in the upper chamber from 70 to 45; Limiting parliament’s right to revise the national budget without the government approval; Removing parliamentary immunity.	Approved – 95.4% Against – 4.6% Turnout – 96.4%
5	2 Feb., 2003	Creating a unicameral parliament with 75 seats; Extending presidential rights; Confirming the presidency of Akayev until 2005.	Approved – 89% Against – 10% Approved – 92% Against – 8%
6	21 Oct., 2007	Shifting to a PR voting system and creating a unicameral parliament with 90 seats; Granting president the right to appoint and dismiss government members and removing his/her right to dissolve the parliament.	Approved – 95% Against – 4% Turnout – 80%

³¹³ Marat Ukushov, ‘Kyrgyzstan i Parlamentskaya Forma Pravleniya: Opyt Razocharovaniya. Chast 1’, October 25, 2017, available at <http://center.kg/article/84>.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

7	27 June, 2010	Strengthening parliamentarism by increasing the number of seats from 90 to 120 seats in a unicameral parliament elected under a PR system and granting it with prerogative powers to choose the prime minister and form the government; Confirm the interim presidency of Roza Otunbayeva until the end of 2011.	Approved – 92% Against – 8% Turnout – 72%
8	11 Dec., 2016	Strengthening prime-ministerial powers and prerogatives; Reforming the judicial system.	Approved – 80% Against – 15% Turnout – 42%

The latter instance has soon prompted renewed government-led proposals for ‘constitutional reforms’, for a consecutive (fourth) 1998 referendum (Table 4), that following the continued practice of reducing the scope of legislative oversight and competencies, further entailed substantial changes in the formulation of provisions guaranteeing parliamentary immunity. It was proposed specifically that legislators would be immune from (criminal) prosecution and assuming responsibilities for legislative activities as exhibited in voting and expressions of political views³¹⁵. In essence, the proposed formulation determined the partial character of the parliamentary immunity, which deviated from broad immunity guarantees provided in the original constitution of 1993, viewed popularly as incorporating fundamental democratic principles and mechanisms despite assigning significant powers to the president. In the meantime, and indeed a noteworthy aspect of this constitutional referendum, emphasized more openly as reflecting ‘constitutional reforms’, was the introduction of changes in the number of legislative seats, i.e. from 35 to 60 seats in the lower chamber and from 70 to 45 seats in the upper chamber, with an important and novel specification

³¹⁵ ‘Zakon KR ot 21 Oktyabrya 1998 goda no. 134 ‘O vnesenii Izmeneniy i Dopolneniy v Konstitutsiyu Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki’, available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/141?cl=ru-ru>.

that 15 seats of the lower chamber would be filled by political parties elected under a PR system and that passed a 5 per cent threshold of the nationwide votes³¹⁶.

On the surface, the introduction of a mixed voting system based on built-in incentives for party formation and development echoed the views of few democratic forces that emerged around the independence period on creating a multi-party democracy and that waned over the years. In effect, however, and combined with the increase in the number of seats in the lower chamber, it reflected the tactical need for the incumbency to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of constitutional amendments by making insignificant and 'controlled' concessions, conditioned additionally by the growing criticisms of increasingly authoritarian tendencies of president Akayev's regime. The practice of making constitutional changes to gain public support for the legitimacy of presidents in the wake of fierce confrontation with opposition groups and reinforcing the formal institutional bases of political power was often accompanied by minor proposals of constitutional provisions of seemingly democratic and populist nature (e.g. 2016 referendum). In the meantime, and as will be revealed shortly afterwards, the practical application of a provision on electing a part of the lower chamber based on nationwide party list vote has resulted in the formation (or resurgence) of parties that have briefly come to the fore in both political and electoral competition during critical 1999-2000 period.

4.2. Heightened period of political struggle and Akayev's demise (1999-2005)

Despite systematic efforts to exploit formal institutional rules for political competition and in the light of continual institutional alterations, the shift to a mixed voting system in 1998 has indeed increased the heuristic utility of party institutions for both political and electoral ends, albeit based

³¹⁶ 'Nurlan Sheripov: Konstitutsionnoe Razvitiye Kyrgyzskoi Gosudarstvennosti: Sovremenniy Etap', Akipress, June 23, 2014, available at: http://kghistory.akipress.org/unews/un_post:2159.

on a dominance of party leaders and amorphous organizational structures. The shift has further prompted the refinement of a legal framework regulating party activities and electoral processes that involved adopting a general Law on political parties, '...that would institutionally separate political parties from public associations'³¹⁷ in 1999 and making significant changes in the Election Code specifying procedures for the registration of parties for the elections, party financing and election campaigns³¹⁸. In actuality, however, and given the critical implication of upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, scheduled for Feb.20 and Oct. 29 2000 accordingly, for the future configuration of political power, the application of the electoral legislation has proven to be highly selective and inconsistent restricting the broad participation of opposition parties and contending candidates.

In a political domain, the significance of 2000 elections resided in the fact that the issue of presidential succession remained at the time an open question with opposition groups claiming that the incumbent president Akayev 'had already served two terms, being elected in 1991 and 1995', and cannot, therefore, re-run in October 2000 presidential elections. Previously, in June, 1998, the Constitutional Court, viewed then as heavily dependent for political matters on the presidential administration, permitted Akayev to re-run for presidency on the grounds that his first term as a president and *de jure* began in 1995 following the adoption of 1993 constitution, based on a 'non-retroactive' principle. The ruling has sparked much controversy, as expressed further in competing claims that the corresponding provision, specified in an article 43, section 2, of the constitution, and stipulating that 'the same person cannot serve more than two consecutive terms as a president of

³¹⁷ Gregory Koldys, 'Constraining Democratic Development: Institutions and Party System Formation in Kyrgyzstan', *Demokratizatsiya* 5, no.3 (1997):370.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the Kyrgyz Republic'³¹⁹, needs to apply, similarly to all other constitutional provisions, to the post-independence period, i.e. August, 1991, which would potentially result in a disqualification of Akayev as an ineligible candidate, initially and *de facto* elected in October 1991. The ambiguity of this issue remained fairly strong, heightening the political stakes of both presidential and parliamentary elections of 2000 and surrounding uncertainty over political succession, as political opposition sought to consolidate its forces ahead of election campaigns and potentially put pressure on the incumbency by securing considerable electoral gains in the preceding parliamentary elections.

Immersed in a context of intense political competition over succession prospects, opposition parties and politicians thus encountered significant legal (and illegal) barriers limiting their ability to compete on a level playing field in parliamentary elections of 2000, reported by OSCE as uncovering ‘..a series of negative trends’³²⁰, including ‘a high degree of interference in the process by state officials, a lack of independence of courts... and a bias in the state media’³²¹. In addition to about 420 independent candidates running for parliamentary seats (a total of 90 seats in both chambers) based on a single-member district voting system, the election was thus contested by eleven political parties and electoral blocs vying for the remaining 15 seats (out of 60) of the Legislative Assembly, including four main parties that represented hardline opposition forces, including ‘Ar-Namys’, ‘People’s Party’, Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan and Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan³²².

³¹⁹ ‘Konstitutsiya Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki’, Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic, available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1?cl=ru-ru>.

³²⁰ ‘Report on the Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan: February-March 2010’, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, p.3, available at: <https://www.csce.gov/sites/helsinkicommission.house.gov/files/2000%20Kyrgyzstan%20Parliamentary%20Elections.pdf>

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

In effect, the principal challenge facing opposition parties and candidates was securing party registration and ballot access in the early stages of the election campaign. Prior to election days (Feb.-March, 2000), the main opposition 'Ar-Namys' (Dignity) party was denied ballot access, seen as a highly controversial decision, by the Central Election Commission stating that it had 'registered less than one year prior to the calling of elections', which was at odds with the article 92 stipulated in the Election Code³²³. The 'Ar-Namys' party was founded by Felix Kulov, a long-time ally of president Akayev, who formerly held high-level government posts, including vice-president, provincial governor and minister of internal affairs (1991-1999), but turned into a viable opposition figure and critic of Akayev's regime closer to 2000 parliamentary elections. The defection of Kulov to an opposition camp signified the relative vulnerability of Akayev's regime, enhancing in turn the state of political uncertainty over succession, and implied an expected emboldening of opposition forces owing to his past positive reputation (as a 'Iron General') and political resources. In March 2000, or a few days prior to the second round of parliamentary elections, Kulov, was, however, arrested 'for corruption and sentenced to seven years by a military court' ³²⁴, marking the beginning of systematic persecution of his party fellows that continued to operate in a clandestine manner and as part of residual opposition forces throughout 2000-2005 period.

In the meantime, referring similarly to article 92 of the Election Code, the CEC has barred 'People's Party', led by another leading opposition figure Daniyar Usenov, from standing in parliamentary election due to the absence of a statement of objectives in the party's statute

³²³ 'Report on the Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan: February-March 2010', Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.csce.gov/sites/helsinkicommission.house.gov/files/2000%20Kyrgyzstan%20Parliamentary%20Elections.pdf>.

³²⁴ 'Background on Ar-Namys party', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Jan., 13, 2012, available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/01/13/background-on-ar-namys-party-pub-46466>.

envisaging its ‘...participation in elections of state bodies’³²⁵. The ‘People’s Party’ has made an appeal to the Ministry of Justice stating that it had revised its statute prior to the registration deadline ensuring that it was in accordance with the corresponding stipulation of the Election Code, a request that has been turned down by the Ministry and subsequently upheld by the decisions of local and Supreme courts³²⁶. As OSCE EOM noted, the article 92 of the Election Code was ‘in contradiction with the Law on Political Parties adopted in June 1999’³²⁷, envisaging the participation of all parties formally registered prior to the beginning of electoral processes and, as with the second stipulation that served as a formal basis for denying registration of ‘Ar-Namys’ party, could have been interpreted ‘in an inclusive manner’³²⁸. It also stated that the prevention of two main opposition parties from participating in the election has significantly undermined ‘the purpose of the new electoral system...to facilitate and promote the participation of political parties on the national political stage’³²⁹ and contributed to the negative assessment of parliamentary electoral processes as failing to provide fair and equal conditions for all aspiring candidates and political parties³³⁰.

At the same time, the selective and politicized application of the electoral legislation has also extended to independent opposition candidates seeking legislatives seats under a single-member majority voting system. This occurred particularly in the form of pursuance of criminal charges against prominent candidates, including Daniyar Usenov, Ishenbai Kadyrbekov and Marat Kaiypov, at the time of election campaign period, and de-registration of a significant number of

³²⁵ ‘Report on the Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan: February-March 2010’, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.csce.gov/sites/helsinkicommission.house.gov/files/2000%20Kyrgyzstan%20Parliamentary%20Elections.pdf>.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

candidates that qualified for the second round of elections (as one of two candidates with the most votes) on the grounds and based on complaints that they have provided inaccurate campaign finance reports or allegedly resorted to vote-buying transactions³³¹. This was further complemented by widespread reports made by both opposition and independent candidates on the misuse of administrative state resources, ranging from restricting access to local state-owned premises for constituency meetings, pressuring university students and public servants to vote a particular way and providing positive and favorable media coverages of pro-incumbent candidates and party blocs such as notably a 'Union of Democratic Forces' (UDF)³³².

The integrity of election results was additionally eroded by the perceived deficiencies in the administration of elections and a poor reflection of voter preferences as evidenced by the election of predominantly pro-incumbent electoral blocs (UDF-4 party seats), parties (Democratic Party of Women-2 seats, Party of Veterans of War in Afghanistan-2, 'Moya Strana' (My Country)-1) and individual candidates. On the other hand, the legal regulatory obstacles erected by the incumbency for political purposes has effectively prevented opposition parties and independent candidates from participating in the election on an equal basis and consequently gaining legislative seats, resulting in the election of formal (or nominal) opposition forces (including the Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan-5 seats and socialist 'Ata-Meken' party-1 seat)³³³. This, combined with post-electoral criminal proceedings (re)instigated against opposition figures, subsequent clampdown on independent media outlets, i.e. 'Respublika', 'Delo No.' and 'Asaba' newspapers, and infrequent rallies in support of a detained opposition leader Felix Kulov, has considerably weakened political

³³¹ 'Report on the Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan: February-March 2010', Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.csce.gov/sites/helsinkicommission.house.gov/files/2000%20Kyrgyzstan%20Parliamentary%20Elections.pdf>.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

opposition, albeit at the expense of reifying the regime's public reputation, which it formerly lacked, as capable of resorting to political repression and widespread voting irregularities.

4.2.1. 'The Aksy events' and constitutional referendum (2002-2003)

With the weakening of political opposition following the parliamentary election of 2000, which, in the absence of real opposition candidates, further ensured the re-election of Akayev (his third term, in actuality, deemed unconstitutional by opposition groups) as president in late 2000, the regime subsequently took the form of a 'closed' authoritarianism accompanied by violent crackdowns on opposition supporters. In March 2002, a largely peaceful march of a few dozen demonstrators in Aksy region of southern Jalal-Abad province has turned violent with police firing at protesters and killing at least five people. This tragedy was preceded by a series of protest rallies and campaigns in support of then moderate opposition and nationalist legislator Azimbek Beknazarov, elected from the same Aksy constituency, and who was detained earlier on corruption charges. It was widely held that the arrest and criminal persecution of Beknazarov had political implications for he was vehemently criticizing Akayev for a cross-border deal with China³³⁴.

The incident, what was later known as 'The Aksy events', fuelled widespread protest and discontent amongst political opposition groups, and to a lesser degree across the wider populace, prompting the consequent resignation of then prime minister Kurmanbek Bakiyev and renewed political pressure on president Akayev to ease repression. The political crisis that ensued afterwards compelled president Akayev to initiate the establishment of a constitutional council, including a number of moderate opposition politicians, in mid-2002 to discuss and propose amendments to create a unicameral parliament, ensure the broad inclusion of political parties in the parliament, which would also be involved, alongside the president, in forming the government, and foster

³³⁴ 'Aksyiskie Sobytiya', Azattyk Radio, March 17, 2017, available at: <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/28375146.html>.

judicial independence³³⁵. In effect, the initial idea of this set of constitutional proposals reflected political demands, expressed continually by few opposition groups since 1990s in relation to strengthening democratic institutions, including notably political parties, and constraining presidential powers, and conformed to established patterns of introducing institutional changes as a subject matter of political compromises.

Notwithstanding months-long and intense debates and continual discussions of proposed amendments in the constitutional council, it appeared that the revised version of a constitutional project signed by the presidential decree for approval in a nationwide referendum, set for February, 2003, diverged widely from the one proposed by the constitutional council. As stated particularly in a joint statement by eleven parties and six NGOs, led by a Coalition of NGOs for Democracy and Civil Society, the ‘replaced’ project developed by the presidential administration contrastingly strengthened presidential powers and provided a legal framework for an incumbent president to run for presidency for two additional terms³³⁶. In addition, ‘El Unu’ (People’s Voice) party, voicing concerns analogous to those expressed previously by eight members of the constitutional council, stated that ‘Akayev’s version’ of the constitution contained provisions that removed the principles and legal norms of democratic governance and undermined the delicate balance of power, creating an enhanced potential for destabilizing the political system³³⁷.

4.3. 2005 March uprising

³³⁵ Nur Omarov, ‘Vlast’ Pered Vyborom: K Sovremennoi Politicheskoi Situatsii v Suverennoy Kyrgyzstane’, Central Asia and the Caucasus, available at: https://www.ca-c.org/journal/2002/journal_rus/cac-06/08.omarus.shtml.

³³⁶ ‘Ryad Politikov, Partiy I NPO Kyrgyzstana Vystupauyt Protiv Predstoyashogo Referenduma’, Azattyk, Jan.17, 2003, available at: <https://www.azattyk.org/a/1204277.html>.

³³⁷ Ibid.

In the meantime, the approval of constitutional amendments in a highly controversial referendum, including due to allegations of vote rigging, has subsequently intensified political dissent, exacerbated formerly by tragic 'Aksy events', and conditioned the intense and critical character of political preparations ahead of 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections. This time, however, the dynamics of an ongoing political struggle was considerably influenced by the growing public dissatisfaction over the regime's inability to tackle profound socio-economic problems and curb systemic corruption, which, as popularly held, have expanded during 'Akayev's family-clan rule', and strengthening of opposition groups due in part to unprecedented cases of regime defection.

Following the resignation of Bakiyev in the wake of post-'Aksy events' in 2002, there has thus been an increasing tendency amongst former allies and prominent statesmen associated with Akayev's regime to voice opposition sentiments and form leading political blocs along with formerly moderate opposition and independent politicians. In December 2004, in a momentous political move, two political blocs, including the National Democratic Movement (NDK) consisting of nine parties and led by former prime minister Bakiyev, and 'Ata-Jurt' (Fatherland) political bloc, led by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Roza Otunbayeva, merged to combine efforts in developing a concerted vision on a range of socio-economic and political issues facing the country and a political platform to run for parliament and presidency in 2005³³⁸. This was soon accompanied by the formation of similar politico-electoral blocs, such as the 'National Congress of Kyrgyzstan', 'Jangy Bagyt' (New Direction) and 'For fair elections' movement, which pressed the incumbency to organize free and fair elections (Table 5) and agreed, as reflected in a joint memorandum on

³³⁸ 'Politicheskie Dvijeniya Ob'edinyautsya', Azattyk, Dec.17, 2004, available at: <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/2419776.html>.

political cooperation, to support own candidates for parliament and ensure ‘an efficient advancement of opposition’s goals’³³⁹.

Table 5. List of politico-electoral blocs (2004-2005).

Bloc name	Parties/Members	Leader
1. ‘Ata-Jurt’ socio-political movement	Omurbek Tekebayev, Adahan Madumarov, Dooronbek Sadyrbayev, Bolot Sher, Ishak Masaliyev etc.	Roza Otunbayeva
2. National Democratic Movement (NDK)	Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, nationalist ‘Asaba’ party etc. Ismail Isakov, Viktor Chernomorets, Usen Sydykov etc.	Kurmanbek Bakiyev
3. National Congress of Kyrgyzstan	‘Ar-Namys’ party, SDPK.	Almazbek Atambayev
4. ‘Jangy Bagyt’ movement		Muratbek Imanaliev
5. ‘For Fair Elections’ movement		Misir Ashyrkulov

As Otunbayeva noted then, 2005 parliamentary election represented a critical juncture as president Akayev has ‘exhausted all the [legal] possibilities to stay in power for five more years’ and, therefore, should pursue ‘a constitutional and peaceful transfer of power...in October 2005’³⁴⁰. In effect, there remained a real possibility, albeit political one, that Akayev would manage, as he did in the past, to find political, and hence legal, ways to extend his presidency despite repeated claims stating otherwise. This implied a crucial political implication of 2005 election, which, if resulted in electing a parliament consisting of a majority of pro-presidential candidates, would pave the way for either re-electing the incumbent president or making new constitutional amendments stipulating the election of president by parliament. In short, there existed a potential set of future political power transition scenarios, which, nonetheless, and as Otunbayeva stated, could be equally

³³⁹ ‘Rossiya Doljna Ispravitsya?! Kirgizskie Opozitsionery Vystupili v Moskve’, Centrasia, Feb., 17, 2005, available at: <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1108628520>.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

problematic, heightening the overall level of political uncertainty over the future configuration of power and creating conducive political opportunity structures for elite defections.

In the context of enduring uncertainty over political succession and a broad disillusionment with the extant regime, the dynamics of political and electoral competition was further affected in a crucial way by the outbreak of local constituency protests that erupted concurrently across the country over alleged vote fraud and irregularities in the parliamentary election of 2005, held in two rounds in February-March. The protests, held in a critical and intense manner in Jalal-Abad, Osh and Naryn provinces, ensued after continued protests in Bishkek over de-registration of diplomats from standing in the election and repeated allegations of rampant voting irregularities, made by leading opposition figures and civic activists prior to election day. It was alleged widely that in addition to the conventional practices of electoral manipulation, such as 'inconsistent and disproportionate de-registration of candidates, often on minor technical grounds', 'administrative interference in the election process by officials'³⁴¹, and alleged and widespread vote-buying, the incumbency further created legal and illicit obstacles to opposition and independent candidates competing against candidates nominated by a pro-presidential 'Alga-Kyrgyzstan' (Forward Kyrgyzstan) or sympathizing with 'Akayev's regime'³⁴². The 'Alga-Kyrgyzstan' party was founded in 2003 by Bermet Akayeva, president Akayev's elder daughter, who has, along with her brother Aidar Akayev, stood for election on behalf of the party, contributing to a growing public perception of the regime as fostering a 'family-clan rule' in the country.

The latter trend, reflected in an increasing concentration of political power in the hands of few long-time allies and core 'family' members, was also accompanied by the growing

³⁴¹ Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 27 February and 13 March 2005: Final Report, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, May 20, 2005, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/14835>.

³⁴² Ibid.

disgruntlement amongst formerly loyal or independent notables that ran against pro-presidential candidates on the ground. As Kulov proposed, the triggering effect of widespread electoral fraud and manipulation in parliamentary election on the outbreak of local protests was critically reinforced by a 'winner-takes-all' logic inherent to single-member majority system and heightened electoral contestation³⁴³. This has been manifested in the fact that a significant number of single-member constituencies was contested by single pro-presidential candidates, mostly affiliated with 'Alga-Kyrgyzstan' party and holding local government posts, competing against a few notable candidates capitalizing on personal reputations and provisions of continued clientelistic benefits to garner political and electoral support. It was high levels of electoral contestation that determined both the rampancy and discernibility of alleged voting irregularities and widespread voter discontent over the incumbent's failure to organize free and fair election. As contended relatedly by Radnitz, aside from a low level patronage, the variation in the extent of local support for defeated candidates was further attributed to the 'strength of "top-down" ties between certain elites and rank-and-file members of their communities'³⁴⁴ and the salience of informal interpersonal ties, that provided an unwavering support of 'close acquaintances, neighbors and extended family' to defeated patron-like candidates³⁴⁵.

The initial eruption of local protests, stressed justifiably as crucial for subsequent protest movement by Radnitz, and that took place in the context of heightened competition, unseen in previous 2000 election, widespread resentment over systemic corruption and poverty and continued persecution of political opposition, subsequently led to nationwide protests demanding

³⁴³ Emir Kulov, 'March 2005: parliamentary elections as a catalyst of protests', in *Domestic and International Perspectives on Kyrgyzstan's 'Tulip Revolution': Motives, Mobilization and Meanings*, ed. by Sally Cummings, *Central Asian Survey* 27, no.3-4 (2008).

³⁴⁴ Scott Radnitz, 'What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?', *Journal of Democracy* 17, no.2 (2006):137-138.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

free and fair election and then resignation of president Akayev. The organization of large-scale protests began in the southern Jalal-Abad province, a stronghold of former prime minister and a notable opposition figure at the time Kurmanbek Bakiyev, and spread to Bishkek, the country's capital, on March 24, attracting the main opposition leaders, including Bakiyev, Otunbayeva and Atambayev, and culminating in the eventual resignation of president Akayev after protesters clashed with police and stormed the president's office on the same day. Hailed popularly as a 'Tulip Revolution' of 2005, the successful outcome of protest mobilization was likened in academic circles, albeit with reservations, to so-called 'colored revolutions' that previously took place in the post-Soviet countries, including Georgia ('Rose Revolution' of 2003) and Ukraine ('Orange Revolution' of 2004). The analogy was broadly based on shared similarities in terms of organizing largely peaceful protest rallies and campaigns following widespread allegations of electoral fraud, whereby local NGOs and civic activists played a crucial role, a feature that proved least pronounced in Kyrgyzstan, in achieving the goal of forcing the resignations of incumbents.

4.4. Bakiyev's presidency and his demise (2005-2010)

In addition to a minor significance of NGOs, the main reason that set 'Tulip Revolution' apart from similar cases of 'colored revolutions' as a somewhat extreme case was, presumably, that 'successful' authoritarian regime breakdown was not followed by broad systemic transformation and political democratization. On the contrary, the initial 'post-revolutionary' period was characterized by continual confrontation between a new president Kurmanbek Bakiyev, elected June 2005, and a parliament hitherto elected in a controversial 2005 (Feb.-March) election, that caused the resignation of former president Akayev, who fled to Russia for political protection, over the new political and institutional configurations of power. In effect, this was reflected in efforts undertaken in systematic ways by president Bakiyev for consolidating his grip on power and containing the

emergent opposition forces, represented fragmentarily in and outside the parliament by individual politicians, notably Omurbek Tekebayev, who served as a parliament speaker in 2005-2006, Dooronbek Sadyrbayev, Melis Eshimkanov, Azimbek Beknazarov and later Omurbek Babanov. It was also noteworthy that raising concerns over the forcible re-distribution of assets in favor of groups associated with president Bakiyev, culminating in controversial assassinations of two legislators, namely Bayaman Erkinbayev and Jyrgalbek Surabaldiev, with business and 'half-criminal' background and considerable assets, overshadowed political demands that broadly involved advocating for limited presidential power and calling for economic reforms and a fight against corruption.

Having said that, and following fierce criticism in the parliament over Bakiyev's deepening autocratic tendencies and alleged collaboration with organized criminal groups, opposition forces, including opposition legislators and former ministers under Bakiyev-appointed government, including, Almazbek Atambayev and Roza Otunbayeva, and civic activist Edil Baisalov, soon united into a broad 'For reforms' movement that has staged a series of protests in 2006 'demanding political reforms'³⁴⁶, stipulating constitutional limits on presidential power, and further pressuring the president to approve a new constitution³⁴⁷. After continued resistance against empowering parliament, which president Bakiyev justified on the grounds that the crucial pre-conditions, such as 'a robust economy, a vibrant civil society, the rule of law and strong political parties' are not sufficiently ripe³⁴⁸, Bakiyev was, nonetheless, forced to sign a new constitution under pressure of

³⁴⁶ 'Kyrgyzstan on the Edge'. International Crisis Group, Asia Briefing no.55, Nov., 09, 2006, available at: <http://old.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/B055%20Kyrgyzstan%20on%20the%20Edge.html>.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ 'Kyrgyzstan – First Parliamentary Republic in Central Asia?', The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, Feb., 08, 2006, available at: <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/10625-field-reports-caci-analyst-2006-2-8-art-10625.html>.

intense opposition protests held in November 2007. It was envisaged that the 'November' constitution would provide considerable checks on presidential power and extend legislative powers to form the government, changes that, as claimed subsequently by a group of mainly pro-Bakiyev legislators, entailed confusion and inconsistencies rendering the technical implementation of a consensus reached by political forces an impossible task. Shortly afterwards, in December 2007, president Bakiyev managed to pass through his own version of constitution that was approved by the majority of legislators and purported to make clarifications, albeit complemented with important provisions that retained presidential powers.

This last political move, seen widely as a sign of 'political betrayal' and a result of co-optation in the parliament, further proved the viability of co-optation strategies, as manifested notably in the appointment of a prominent moderate opposition figure Almazbek Atambayev to the position of prime minister, thereby undermining opposition strength and unity. In addition, then prominent legislator and critic of president Bakiyev, Melis Eshimkanov, was offered an ambassadorial position that came after a clampdown on protests organized in April 2007 by 'For reforms' movement and a 'United Opposition Front' (UOF) movement, led by Felix Kulov, a former prime minister under Bakiyev, and demanding the resignation of president Bakiyev and for new parliamentary elections. It was presumed then that UOF's decision to take the lead in opposition protests, expected to turn into a large-scale and long-lasting protest movement following a series of sporadic protest rallies, has affected the internal dissent within broad opposition forces, as its leader Kulov, whose political credibility was under question due to his former ties with Bakiyev's regime, failed to bring opposition groups together and attract a sizable crowd during two-weeks long protests. The 'failed' protests further prompted the main opposition 'For Reforms' movement to

cease collaboration with UOF and led to the alleged collusion between few prominent opposition legislators, namely Melis Eshimkanov and Kabai Karabekov, and president Bakiyev's regime³⁴⁹.

In mid-2007, and in the light of waning political opposition, Eshimkanov and Karabekov appealed, as sitting legislators, to the Constitutional Court questioning the legality and demanding an annulment of 'November' and 'December' 2006 constitutions. The Court held that the adoption of both 2006 constitutions in the parliament was in violation of the constitution for they needed to be approved in a nationwide referendum, a ruling that subsequently laid legal groundwork for president Bakiyev to initiate a constitutional referendum and hence dismiss the parliament in September 2007. As stated by an opposition politician and leader of 'Ata-Meken' socialist party Omurbek Tekebayev, the announcement of snap elections to the parliament, following the constitutional referendum and based on a full party-list proportional representation system, was made to hinder opposition forces from contesting in a consolidated and efficient manner³⁵⁰. In general, creating a 90-member parliament elected from a nationwide party list, was seen as the main novelty of proposed constitutional amendments that additionally entailed strengthening presidential powers to appoint and dismiss government members and removing the president's power to dissolve the parliament.

It was noteworthy that the proposed shift to a PR system, approved as part of changes to the constitution and Electoral Code in a nationwide referendum held in October, 2007 has not been made under the pressure of opposition groups or as a matter of political compromise, but instead reflected contextual and politico-strategic considerations. In particular, there has been an increasing trend at that time across post-Soviet Eurasia, including notably Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan,

³⁴⁹ Sultan Kanazarov and Andrei Shariy, 'Miting v Bishkeke "Maidan s Kirgizskoi Spetsifikoi', Radio Svoboda, April 12, 2007, available at: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/387539.html>.

³⁵⁰ '2007- Jyl Kyrgyzstanda Saiasii Aksiyalar Menen Ottu', Azattyk, Dec., 31, 2007, available at: <https://www.azattyk.org/a/1277425.html>.

to centralize and legitimize political power by ensuring the dominance of ‘parties of power’³⁵¹, created effectively to institutionalize the existing informal power relations and patronage-based networks that serve as power bases for incumbent authoritarian regimes³⁵². The employment of party institutions, in addition to both subtle and violently repressive authoritarian practices, for regime consolidation and legitimation purposes proved an efficient strategy in Russia (as evidenced by ‘Edinaya Rossiya’ (‘United Russia’ party) and neighboring Kazakhstan (‘Nur-Otan’ party)), countries that traditionally exerted significant economic and political influence on Kyrgyzstan and which political model Bakiyev has seemingly emulated. In addition, and crucially, the timing of parliamentary election, set for December, 2007, i.e. two months after the referendum, implied that opposition groups and politicians would not be able to consolidate forces under broad party platforms, given the fragmentation of, and declining popular support for, political opposition. In effect, this has resulted in fielding of a limited number of opposition figures that shared close political and personal ties with leaders of two main opposition parties, including ‘Ata-Meken’, led by Omurbek Tekebayev, and SDPK, led by Almazbek Atambayev, contesting snap election. It was finally conceivable that the adoption of a PR system was also related to the presumed likelihood that electing the new parliament by an existing single-member majority system would potentially provoke local, turned into nationwide, protests, similar to those organized by defeated candidates on the ground and that eventually deposed the first president Akayev in March 2005.

In addition to a timing issue that has affected the ability of fragmented opposition forces and un-institutionalized and electorally inexperienced parties to compete on both an equal and efficient basis, the revised election code also contained an increasingly controversial provision

³⁵¹ A. Del Sordi, Legitimation and the Party of Power in Kazakhstan, in *Politics and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, ed. By M. Brusis et al (Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

³⁵² Ibid.

requiring parties to pass two separate electoral thresholds³⁵³. The first 5 per cent threshold was ‘calculated against all registered voters nationwide’, whilst the second threshold imposed an additional 0,5 per cent of votes that parties would need to gain in each of the seven provinces (oblasts) and two main cities, including Bishkek and Osh³⁵⁴. The latter provision has remained largely unspecified and contentious until the end of an Election Day (Dec.15. 2007), when the Supreme Court overturned the prior decision of CEC determining 0,5 per cent ‘regional’ threshold based on the total ‘number of registered voters nationwide’ and upheld alternatively that the threshold would be calculated from a total number of actual votes, effectively preventing the main opposition ‘Ata-Meken’ party from gaining parliamentary representation. The ‘Ata-Meken’ party, steered by an outspoken and principled opposition figure Tekebayev, has finished second with 9,3 per cent of nationwide votes after conducting an ‘organized and resourced’ election campaign, reportedly biased in favor of ‘Ak-Jol’ party affiliated with president Bakiyev³⁵⁵. However, owing to the court ruling following the Election Day and shortly before the announcement of official results, released with continual delays and alleged discrepancies, ‘Ata-Meken’ party was officially reported to have failed to pass the regional 0,5 per cent threshold in Osh city, causing heated political controversy and calling into question the credibility of election results³⁵⁶.

Despite widespread claims of electoral fraud and significant voting irregularities, such as misuse of administration resources, intimidation of voters and media bias in favor of ‘Ak-Jol’ party, however, twelve parties registered to contest the election with three parties managing to secure parliamentary seats following the issuance of controversial results (Table 6). That said, as with ‘Ata-

³⁵³ ‘Pre-term Parliamentary Elections: 16 December 2007’, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/57949>.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

Meken' party, the consecutive results for winning parties, provided by the CEC, similarly exposed apparent inconsistencies as the final votes for a pro-incumbent Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan (PCK) and moderately opposition SDPK party have considerably increased relative to the initial results, viewed as a plausible move to 'push' the two parties through the election and give the impression of political representation against the backdrop of a controversial loss for 'Ata-Meken' party. Contrary to initial hesitations regarding its political stance toward the incumbent regime, SDPK party soon after turned into the main public voice of political opposition, significant part of which took the form of an unassertive, but latent, force following the formalization of authoritarian dominance of president Bakiyev. In actuality, this has been a result of systematic misuses of administrative resources in favor of 'Ak-Jol' party as well as the strategies of few principled opposition figures to run with own parties (e.g. 'Turan', 'Asaba' and 'Erkindik' parties) and organize low-key election campaigns. In contrast, the two main opposition parties, 'Ata-Meken' and SDPK, efficiently utilized 'rallies, door-to-door campaigning, posters and billboards' and managed to recruit some prominent figures (especially SDPK) with varying oppositional views.

Table 6. Official results of 2007 early parliamentary election.

Party name	Per cent of votes	Seats
Pro-presidential 'Ak-Jol'	47%	71
Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan	5,05%	11
Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan	5,12%	8

As mentioned, the election of SDPK party has enabled its elected notable members, including Roza Otunbayeva and Bakyt Beshimov, though overshadowed by the dominance of 'Ak-Jol' party with the most seats (71 out of 90) and a pro-presidential PCK in the parliament, to continue expressing dissent and criticism toward president Bakiyev's regime, blamed increasingly for growing

levels of systemic corruption, political and media repression and nepotism and alleged association with criminal groups for both political and business goals³⁵⁷. As Freedom House reported, in 2008 alone, ‘about a dozen journalists were attacked by unknown criminals’³⁵⁸, prompting a number of independent journalists, in the absence of proper investigation and safety guarantees, to seek protection from abroad. In the meantime, it was widely speculated then that the violent assassinations of a former chief of staff for president Bakiyev, Medet Sadyrkulov³⁵⁹, shortly after he resigned and expressed intention to coalesce with opposition groups, and a prominent independent journalist Gennady Pavlyuk in 2009³⁶⁰, were linked to president ‘Bakiyev’s clan’, in particular his brother Janysh Bakiyev, notoriously known for exercising an informal and decisive influence on political and security matters.

At the same time, a similar informal power in a ‘family-clan’ was allegedly wielded by president Bakiyev’s youngest son, Maxim Bakiyev, who ‘controlled the economics and [investment] portfolio’³⁶¹ by forcibly seizing business assets and engaging in embezzlement schemes, and who shortly emerged as a fierce rival of his uncle over the competition for political influence³⁶². The subsequent and controversial appointment of Maxim Bakiyev to an influential post as a Head of a newly created Government Agency for Development, Investment and Innovation, confirmed the growing trend of nepotism and suggested that this was a political move to ‘test his abilities’ as a

³⁵⁷ ‘Nations in Transit 2008:Kyrgyzstan’, Freedom House, available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2008/kyrgyzstan>.

³⁵⁸ Ibid

³⁵⁹ ‘Kyrgyz Politician Believed Dead, Some Suspect Foul Play’, Radio Liberty, March 13, 2009, available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/Kyrgyz_Politician_Believed_Dead_Some_Suspect_Foul_Play/1509568.html

³⁶⁰ ‘Violent Death of Kyrgyz Journalist Follows a Disturbing Pattern’, Radio Liberty, Dec.,22, 2009, available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/Violent_Death_Of_Kyrgyz_Journalist_Follows_A_Disturbing_Pattern/1910726.html

³⁶¹ ‘Kyrgyzstan Demands Extradition of Maxim Bakiyev’, The Guardian, June 15, 2010, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jun/15/kyrgyzstan-demands-extradition-maxim-bakiyev>).

³⁶² Ibid.

potential successor of his father ahead of presidential elections in 2014³⁶³. In the light of nepotistic tendencies and worsening socio-economic circumstances, the growing influence of Maxim Bakiyev, who was increasingly associated with increasing levels of corruption and poverty, has coincided with intensifying public discontent and an outbreak of a series of small, and tightly controlled, protests by opposition groups in March 2010. The last straw that fueled public anger, however, was the government's, in effect, the agency headed by Maxim Bakiyev, proposal to impose a 60 tiyin (15 cents) phone call tax, that on top of systematic power outages during past winter period and rising electricity bills, shortly prompted opposition groups to mobilize and stage protests.

4.5. April 2010 uprising – present

In an effort to pre-empt opposition plans to organize nationwide protests, a group of prominent opposition figures, including Almazbek Atambayev, Omurbek Tekebayev, Temir Sariyev, former Abdygany Erkebayev and Bolot Sherniyazov, was detained on April 6, by special services (GKNB) on suspicion of 'forcible seizure of power'³⁶⁴. The latter politician and member of 'Ata-Meken' opposition party Bolot Sherniyazov was allegedly arrested by local police in his home town Talas after arriving in the country, triggering a violent clash between his supporters and local police forces. The continued clash led to the killing of 10 protesters as police opened fire, prompting the crowd to seize the local government building and extricate Sherniyazov, and further escalating a precarious political situation³⁶⁵. The following day, and in the wake of public anger mounted over the killings of protesters in Talas, a similarly violent clash broke out between opposition protesters

³⁶³ 'With First Son's New Role, Kyrgyz Government Remain A Family Affair', Radio Liberty, Nov., 05, 2009, available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/With_First_Sons_New_Role_Kyrgyz_Government_Remains_A_Family_Affair/1870575.html.

³⁶⁴ 'Hronika Sobytiy; Miting v Talase, 6 Aprelya', Kloop Media, April 06, 2010, available at: <https://kloop.kg/blog/2010/04/06/srochno-v-talase-zaxvacheno-zdanie-oblastnoj-administracii/>

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

and police near the premises of SDPK opposition party, led by Atambayev, that turned into a large-scale protest march of 10 000 protesters through to the central square of the capital city Bishkek.

In hours-long protest demanding the release of opposition leaders and a continued stand-off with police, 87 protesters have been reportedly shot dead and hundreds of others injured as police snipers sporadically fired from the premises of the presidential administration. Despite initial expectations, the killing of multiple protesters has not, however, resulted in suppression of the protest and conversely increased the resilience of protesters, forcing eventually the president Bakiyev to flee to the southern region, viewed as his main stronghold. The initial resistance to resign and potentially mobilize political support has proven inefficient as opposition supporters in the southern provinces of Osh and Jalal-Abad expressed intention to confront him and therefore prompted his formal resignation in exchange for a safe departure of president Bakiyev and his close relatives to Belarus as a matter of an alleged political compromise reached with former opposition leaders.

The resignation has formally sparked the beginning of political and institutional arrangements that would provide provisional mechanisms for restoring political stability and holding parliamentary elections following the dissolution of the parliament. It was agreed that an 'interim government', led by Roza Otunbayeva and consisting of other leading opposition figures, including notably Atambayev, Tekebayev, Sariiev, would be formed to sustain political and socio-economic stability and prepare a new version of constitution to be approved in a nationwide referendum set for June 2010. The general consensus in terms of institutional preferences, as expressed by the main 'designer' and prominent politician Tekebayev, was that the new constitution would need to envisage a parliamentary form government and contain provisions that would prevent the president from usurping and over-utilizing his political power vis-à-vis other power branches. As he further

assured, the constitutional council has gained an unprecedented momentum and opportunity to design an institutional framework for bringing about genuine democratic governance by ensuring the broad participation of former opposition politicians, legal experts and civic activists and taking the past discussion points and opposition preferences as a basis for constitutional amendments³⁶⁶.

Meanwhile, the discussion of constitutional amendments was soon overshadowed by renewed political instability, as violent clashes erupted between supporters of ousted president Bakiyev and ‘forces of the interim government’ in the southern provinces (Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken) following the incapability of the interim government, associated predominantly with the northern political groups, to gain full political control of the south and act as a cohesive force. In Jalal-Abad province, a stronghold of Bakiyev, which saw intense clashes in mid-May 2010 leading to the death of one protester and dozens of injuries, the continuing political struggle took on ethnic connotations as few leaders of local Uzbek communities, the largest ethnic minority group living predominantly in southern Jalal-Abad and Osh provinces, expressed political support for the interim government. It was amidst enduring political fragility and growing ethnic hostility over largely unsubstantiated claims that Uzbek groups sought separatist or secession goals, made by ethnic Kyrgyz on both political camps, that a small clash between young men sparked an ethnic conflict and week-long (June 10-17) violent clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the southern city of Osh, resulting in deaths of about 400 civilians, mostly Uzbeks, and forcing thousands of Uzbek refugees to flee to neighboring Uzbekistan³⁶⁷.

³⁶⁶ ‘Omurbek Tekebayev: V Kyrgyzstane Sformirovan Bezpretsedentniy Sostav Konstitutsionnog Soveshaniya’. 24.kg, May 04, 2010, available at: <https://24.kg/archive/ru/politic/73337-omurbek-tekebaev-v-kyrgyzstane-sformirovan.html/>.

³⁶⁷ ‘Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010’, available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full_Report_490.pdf.

Whilst the main structural and proximate causes of this ethnic violence, widely known as ‘Osh tragic events of 2010’, still remain largely speculative and convoluted, its negative impact on worsening inter-ethnic relations in the region, socio-economic and political stability ahead of planned parliamentary and presidential elections was clearly significant. In particular, and given considerable civilian casualties and the destruction of personal properties and physical infrastructure, there has emerged calls urging to postpone the constitutional referendum set for June 27 and focus on resolving the humanitarian and refugee crisis and persistent security problems in the south³⁶⁸. Despite further hesitations over the credibility and feasibility of holding a ‘trustworthy referendum’, the head of the interim government Otunbayeva, however, ‘announced that the referendum will proceed as planned’³⁶⁹.

It was further revealed that aside from a constitutional project, the planned referendum would also confirm Roza Otunbayeva as acting president until December, 2011, during which time she would be tasked with overseeing post-conflict reconstruction processes and parliamentary election of October 2010 as part of broader goals to ease the transition toward establishing a legitimate authority and restoring political stability. It was plausible that the decision to postpone presidential election until October 2011 was also affected by justifiable concerns about the likelihood of fierce competition for presidential power, potentially involving forces linked to ousted president Bakiyev and as interim government’s overall reputation has deteriorated due to ‘Osh 2010 events’.

³⁶⁸ Alina Dalbaeva, ‘Kyrgyz Experts, Politicians Voice Opposition to Constitutional Referendum Plans’, Eurasianet, June 16, 2010, available at: https://www.eurasianet.org/kyrgyz-experts-politicians-voice-opposition-to-constitutional-referendum-plans?quicktabs_5=0.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

As OSCE/ODIHR reported then, the referendum campaign was exceedingly overshadowed by the rhetoric of fostering ‘stability and the legitimacy of the provisional government’³⁷⁰, which has not been conducive to providing a proper discussion of constitutional amendments³⁷¹. A number of shortcomings of a new approved constitution that have been overlooked in the process of campaigning would be at a later point and recurrently identified as inimical to establishing a full-fledged parliamentary form of government and promoting democratic mechanisms of accountability and representation. In particular, it retained significant power for president to appoint, as part of duties to maintain national security and unity, top security officials, such as the general prosecutor and the head of GKNB (former KGB-type security agency) and presidential prerogatives to give a mandate to a chosen party to form a ruling coalition and dissolve the parliament when it fails to form a government³⁷². In effect, as demonstrated by president Atambayev, president’s constitutional powers over the security sector could be potentially misused and overused to contain political opposition (Chapter 6) and exert a political influence on government affairs, i.e. socio-economic matters, for power consolidation purposes.

In addition to president’s powers, the old provision imposing electoral thresholds at both the country and regional level that has formerly prevented opposition ‘Ata-Meken’ party from gaining parliamentary seats has been further complemented with a novel provision ‘limiting a single political party to 65 seats [out of 120 in total], notwithstanding the number of votes received’ that could potentially cause distortion in representation³⁷³. This, however, has not crucially affected the

³⁷⁰ ‘Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 10 October, 2010: Final Report’, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Oct.10, 2010, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/74649>.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Article 85, section 6 of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic, available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1?cl=ru-ru>.

³⁷³ ‘Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 10 October, 2010: Final Report’, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Oct.10, 2010, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/74649>.

outcome of 2010 parliamentary election, held shortly after the successful referendum vote and that saw five parties (Table 7) passing both electoral thresholds and securing parliamentary representation with the sixth 'Butun-Kyrgyzstan' (Entire Kyrgyzstan) party falling short of the national 5 per cent threshold with 4,6 per cent of the votes³⁷⁴. The election differed markedly from those of the past in terms of the absence of a dominant political force or a ruling party and in providing both inclusive and competitive campaign environment, '...which provided voters with a genuine choice of political alternatives' and enabled an unexpected win for the nationalist 'Ata-Jurt' party, associated with pro-Bakiyev's forces and the electorate in the southern provinces³⁷⁵. By positioning itself as a new opposition force, 'Ata-Jurt' party, consisting of former senior government officials under Bakiyev's government, campaigned mostly by capitalizing on the failure of the interim government to prevent and manage the ethnic violence that erupted in Osh and tapping nationalist and regional sentiments that remained strong amongst the electorate in the southern provinces represented predominantly by ethnic Kyrgyz.

Table 7. List of parties elected to the parliament in 2010.

Party name	Party leader	% of votes	Number of seats
'Ata-Jurt' nationalist party	Kamchybek Tashiev	8,47	28
Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan	Almazbek Atambayev	7,83	26
'Ar-Namys'	Felix Kulov	7,57	25
'Respublika'	Omurbek Babanov	6,93	23
'Ata-Meken'	Omurbek Tekebayev	5,49	18

Furthermore, the election produced a negative surprise outcome for 'Ata-Meken', SDPK and 'Ak-Shumkar' (White eagle) parties, which was part of the interim government with other former

³⁷⁴ 'Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 10 October, 2010: Final Report', Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Oct.10, 2010, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/74649>.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

opposition politicians and expected to secure a significant number of seats by taking credit for the downfall of Bakiyev's autocratic regime and articulating increased pretensions for political power in a 'post-revolutionary' period. In a broad sense, the poor performance of these parties, particularly that of 'Ata-Meken' party, with its long-time organizational and support bases, was attributed to a low reputation of the interim government and affiliated parties in the southern provinces, damaged further due to Osh tragic events, and the tactical decisions to refrain from merging into broader party blocs despite the registration of a large number of parties (29 in total) contesting the election as has been the case of 'Ak-Shumkar' party, which support base was mostly confined to one northern Chui province. Having said that, the electoral success of 'Ar-Namys' and 'Respublika' parties, both led by 'northern' leaders, indicates, that in addition to the dynamics of 'post-revolutionary' political struggle with regional connotations, the election outcome was also influenced by the ability of parties, such as 'Respublika', to organize an efficient campaign emphasizing media visibility and marketing strategy and attract notable political figures (e.g. 'Ar-Namys').

The latter campaign strategy, combined with the persistent centrality of personalism in party politics, would remain the defining feature of party mobilization and competition as parties contested local elections held since 2012 and onwards. In other words, and contrary to broad expectations, and despite improvements in administering the electoral process and institutional incentives for party development, party elites continue opting to dis-invest in building extensive extra-parliamentary organizations and structures, based on internal democratic mechanisms, and forging stable party-voter linkages for maximizing electoral support. As demonstrated in subsequent local elections, parties, with the exception of a ruling SDPK party utilized to consolidate Atambayev's increasingly authoritarian regime, commonly conduct election campaigns on an ad-hoc basis, feature loose organizational networks and emphasize media marketing strategies, personality

factors and sporadic practices of clientelism to mobilize voters. As hypothesized, this in effect may be traced to the broader effect of political uncertainty, which typically heightens during post-democratic uprising period, i.e. 2010-14 in Kyrgyzstan, associated with the enhanced likelihood of changes in power configurations and an authoritarian reversal and inducing party elites to prioritize short-term political interests that are not conducive to building viable party organizations.

Conclusion

As has been heretofore shown, the process of party formation and development in Kyrgyzstan has unfolded within broader context of continued political instability and uncertainty, conditioned by post-communist transition and intense intra-elite competition for power and office. In this context, parties have not, however, evolved into vital institutions of democracy structuring political and party competition along ideological and issue-based dimensions, which was arguably due to both the socio-institutional legacies of the communist past, such as low levels of political efficacy, distrust of parties and the near absence of socio-ideological dividing lines, and institutional preferences of extant political elite actors. In contrast, the observed pattern of intra-elite competition was a reflection of both the competitive nature of authoritarianism, which distinguished Kyrgyzstan from autocratic Central Asian neighbors, and high levels of personalism in politics, which, combined with widespread public discontent over poor socio-economic conditions, served as crucial factors causing the fall of incumbent authoritarian regimes in 2005 and 2010. Despite resembling democratic governance, the regime breakdowns in effect entailed profound re-structuring of elite groups and renewed prospects of democracy and party development, contributing to the broader state of political and institutional uncertainty.

In the meantime, the initial process of party formation and development in Kyrgyzstan has been seemingly suspended with the gradual dismantlement of the democratic movement of the

early independence period. It was conceivable then that formal institutional designs effectively constraining party development derived from institutional preferences of incumbent president (Akayev), who sought to prevent potential consolidation of communist and democratic hard-liners along party organizations. At the same time, promoting a full-fledged 'parliamentarism' and party politics was not a top demand of opposition forces as they systematically pushed for institutional reforms to curb presidential powers as a matter of political compromises. As a general rule, making frequent constitutional amendments to ease political tension, (re)gain political legitimacy and extend or compromise presidential powers has turned into a common practice for incumbent presidents facing strong political opposition that nevertheless remained fragmented, personality-based and largely shallow in terms of proposing coherent and alternative institutional designs. The ease with which institutional rules can be altered by incumbents for political goals also implied the persistence of uncertainty over 'the rules of the game', inducing party elites to prioritize short-term gains, associated with securing political offices at the expense of investing in broad-based extra-parliamentary party organizations and programmatic strategies of electoral mobilization.

Despite political and institutional constraints hitherto affecting party institutionalization, the ouster of Bakiyev's autocratic regime in April 2010 and ensuing institutional changes that broadly sought to strengthen parliamentarism have created a supportive environment for party-building. This expectation has been further reinforced by the election of five parties in October 2010 that set a strong precedence for multi-party competition and presumed that new legislative parties would be incentivized, given the absence of a dominant political force and the intense character of emerging party competition, to build extensive organizations based on complex party structures for coordination purposes and forge durable linkages with constituencies ahead of local (2012-2014) and parliamentary elections (2015). However, as demonstrated by subsequent election campaigns, parties continued deploying loosely organized and highly centralized party structures and

campaigning based on clientelistic and populist appeals causing credible commitments problems. As posited formerly, the prioritization of organizational and mobilizational models that are in the long-run conducive to promoting party institutionalization could be the reflection of strategic decisions made by party elites under the broad influence of enduring political and institutional uncertainty.

Chapter 5. Uncertainty and party organization in Kyrgyzstan.

Introduction

A range of scholarly research on party politics in both established and newly emerging democracies typically accentuate building a viable organization as integral to promoting the process of party institutionalization. As Mainwaring and Scully argue, party organizations with extensive regional networks and internally democratic mechanisms and procedures of decision-making and candidate selection may be 'a sign of greater institutionalization' of parties and party systems³⁷⁶. In effect, maintaining stable extra-parliamentary organizations at both local and national level implies that parties would be capable of maintaining stable linkages with the electorate and ensuring that policy decisions reflect the voter preferences. Crucially, for party leaders, as political entrepreneurs, investing in party organizations can be also heuristically instrumental in ensuring electoral success.

Tavits in particular provides a compelling evidence from post-communist democracies that parties with strong organizations tend to perform better electorally than parties with fewer members and limited and impermanent local organizations³⁷⁷. The contention holds that regular and direct contacts with potential voters in constituencies enable local party branches to provide 'information shortcuts' that voters employ to evaluate candidates and party platforms during campaign periods³⁷⁸. Permanent local offices with professional staff, as Tavits further notes, are additionally well-positioned to promote an image for parties as credible and informed sources.

³⁷⁶ Timothy R. Scully and Scott Mainwaring, *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin American* (Stanford University Press, 1995):5.

³⁷⁷ Margit Tavits, 'Organizing for Success: Party Organizational Strength and Electoral Performance in Postcommunist Europe', *The Journal of Politics* 74, no.1 (2012).

³⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 85.

Beyond electoral consequences, and on a lesser note, strong party organizations can be also purportedly crucial for supporting party unity and policy-making³⁷⁹.

Given the notable implications of organizational dynamics for electoral outcomes, why party elites in emerging democracies do not tend to invest in strong organizations? As evidenced across both old and newly formed parties in Kyrgyzstan, building viable organizations has not been viewed thus far as a priority strategy for electoral purposes. In organizational terms, Kyrgyz parties, despite exhibiting some variation in the degree of party organizational strength, have established only a limited local presence with impermanent local offices operating typically during a short campaign period. Similarly, and as a result, the actual party membership remains effectively low and insignificant with national and regional leaders exerting greater influence on party activities. Oftentimes, party leaders also tend to maintain flexible structures of coordination with local branches, yet they have proven to adopt decisive and uncoordinated decisions on key issues relating to candidate selection for parliamentary elections or a merger with other parties.

Lupu and Riedl suggest that parties in emerging democracies may prioritize organizational flexibility and short-term strategies that are not associated with building strong organizations in order to cope with political or regime uncertainty³⁸⁰. In particular, rigid and inflexible organizational structures may pose challenges for parties in adapting to potential changes associated with either the electoral rules regulating party competition or regime dynamics³⁸¹. Consistent with this premise, Panebianco held in turn that party leaders, who tend to be particularly decisive in the early stages of party formation and organizational development, require a certain degree of flexibility and

³⁷⁹ Margit Tavits, 'Organizing for Success: Party Organizational Strength and Electoral Performance in Postcommunist Europe', *The Journal of Politics* 74, no.1 (2012).

³⁸⁰ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1349.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

‘maneuverability’ in adjusting organizational principles and structures to sustain an organization³⁸².

As further presumed, with the rise of membership and emergent intra-party factions, however, leaders will be pressured to compromise power resources or retain them by successfully dominating the ‘external environment’, a choice that can be shaped by internal power dynamics³⁸³. Central to both of these accounts is a proposition that strategic decisions for building organizations would be determined by how parties respond to the external environment, especially as they embrace the need for organizational survival in the early stages of party formation and institutionalization. However, Lupu and Riedl’s model offers a more contextualized explanation for the kinds of organizational strategies, such as developing inflexible structures, that parties in emerging democracies tend to opt for in the face of uncertain political environment.

Clearly, the dynamics of political competition in emerging post-communist democracies has been shaped in important ways by the newness of democratic institutions and an inherent ambiguity over the rules and expectations. Political actors do not typically possess complete information on either other competing actors or the potential support base, leaving them with fewer options for adopting strategically informed decisions. A group of post-Soviet countries, including Ukraine, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan, exemplifies a pattern, whereby the initial uncertainty over democratization has been further heightened by either the subsequent regimes changes or continued political instability. In other words, the state of broader uncertainty over political trajectories describes most newly emerging democracies, but there may be also intense periods of uncertainty following institutional or regime changes.

³⁸² Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988):15.

³⁸³ Ibid.

In Kyrgyzstan particularly, political developments that ensued after popular uprisings of 2005 and 2010, and that resulted in the overthrow of incumbent presidents, have been clouded with considerable uncertainty. In both instances, and more visibly during 2010 post-uprising period, possibilities that formal rules on political contestation would change, even after agreeing on a particular set of rules and laws, or that an authoritarian regime would return remained potent. Essentially, the reasons why political actors emphasized short-term strategies of political competition may be partly related to an uncertain political climate. In 2010 post-uprising parliamentary elections, parties running now under a proportional representation system that was expected to promote party-building incentives concentrated on organizing efficient campaigns that stressed media visibility and personalism in politics.

However, closer to the subsequent elections held in 2015 and as the degree of uncertainty gradually subsided, parties still showed no signs of building extensive organizations and developing accountable and inclusive mechanisms of internal decision-making. This implies that whilst a high degree of uncertainty can distantly inform short-term electoral strategies and personalistic party politics observed during 2010 parliamentary elections, complementary and more nuanced explanations need to be produced in order to account for similar patterns of party organization and mobilization observed in the wake of 2015 parliamentary elections.

The empirical findings that will be presented in the chapter suggest that organizational strategies are determined predominantly by vote and office-seeking incentives and a reproduction of previously observed patterns of elite-restructuring and electoral mobilization. In essence, and on a theoretical level, the results validate a number of theoretical arguments put forward by van Biezen

emphasizing the institutional nature of party development in new democracies³⁸⁴. As it was posited, parties are ‘internally’ formed by a group of extant elites that view organizational development from the perspective of retaining the ‘party in public office’³⁸⁵. In established democracies, conversely, parties typically transformed as mass-membership based organizations that proved critical in ensuring electoral gains. In new democracies, however, building extra-parliamentary organization does not emerge as a strategic electoral priority for parties, which manage to employ media marketing strategies focusing promoting the campaign visibility.

The chapter proceeds as follows. Part one examines organizational structures common across parties and provides an analysis of a legal framework formally regulating party organization and coordination. Part two evaluates the degree of internal party democracy in parties by scrutinizing internal decision-making and deliberation mechanisms. Part three analyses the institutional and contextual circumstances, such as uncertainty, that incentivize parties to stress ‘the party in public office’ and concludes with a discussion of theoretical implications of research findings.

5.1. Legal regulation of internal party organization

The legal regulation governing the internal functioning and operation of parties in Kyrgyzstan is formally laid out in the Law on political parties, adopted with substantial amendments in 2012³⁸⁶. In substantive terms, the law provides an extensive description of formal requirements for party registration and sets out detailed provisions regulating funding and financial reporting of parties³⁸⁷. The law particularly stipulates that for the purposes of formally registering with the Ministry of

³⁸⁴ Ingrid Van Biezen, *Political Parties in New Democracies: Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ ‘Law on Political Parties of the Kyrgyz Republic’, available at: www.kenesh.kg.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

Justice, a prospective party needs to form a founding Committee consisting of 50 members³⁸⁸. The Committee, tasked with forming territorial branches and organizing meetings with prospective members, subsequently holds a founding Congress with a participation of at least 250 delegates, to elect senior leaders and adopt the party statute³⁸⁹. Overall, convening the founding Congress and publishing its transcripts in print media constitute a major part of registration process alongside completion of formal documentation.

The relative ease with which new parties manage to fulfill the formal requirements for registration, including a provision requiring a small number of delegates to attend the founding Congress, clearly provides an indication of a democratic and non-restrictive nature of the law. However, as Jones and Mainwaring suggest, in a less politically repressive environment providing a reasonable degree of political contestation, low barriers to entry for new parties can potentially create a high level of party system fragmentation undermining the institutionalization of individual parties³⁹⁰. As observed during 2015 parliamentary elections, three parties, including 'Kyrgyzstan', 'Bir Bol' and 'Onuguu-Progress', out of six parties in total that secured seats in the parliament, had only been formed a few months ahead of elections. Medet Tiulegenov, a local expert on NGOs, suggests that the leniency of registration requirements and common organizational standards also serves as a source of a high number of formally registered parties most of which had never run election campaigns and remain inactive³⁹¹.

In a similar vein, the law provides further specification regarding the sources of funding for parties and the mechanisms of controlling and reporting financial activities³⁹². In effect though,

³⁸⁸ 'Law on Political Parties of the Kyrgyz Republic', article 11, section 1, available at: www.kenesh.kg.

³⁸⁹ Ibid, article 13, section 2.

³⁹⁰ Mark P. Jones and Scott Mainwaring, 'The Nationalization of Parties and Party Systems: An Empirical Measure and an Application to the Americas', (Kellogg Institute, Working Paper 304, 2003).

³⁹¹ Medet Tiulegenov in discussion with the author, August 2013.

³⁹² 'Law on Political Parties of the Kyrgyz Republic', article 12, section 3, available at: www.kenesh.kg.

as with registration requirements, financial provisions are rendered a mere formality. For example, a list of sources eligible for funding of parties includes voluntary contributions, revenues from party's activities and, optionally, membership dues if they are envisaged in party statutes³⁹³. However, parties for the most part prove to solicit and accept contributions from physical entities, not official membership fees, including primarily from senior leaders and notable members, and meet minimal requirements for financial reporting, enabling to sustain formal registration in-between elections without engaging grassroots members in day-to-day activities.

Aside from emphasizing formal requirements, the law additionally envisages a number of non-binding and loosely defined provisions that may be formally in line with democratic principles of accountability and inclusiveness. The law in particular requires that parties operate in an accountable and transparent manner by publicizing party platforms and statutes and create equal opportunities for women to assume party leadership posts and candidate nominations. In practice, as the analysis of 2015 parliamentary election reveals, only about ten parties have proven to host and maintain websites and publish newspapers or other 'periodicals', which in turn tend to be visible mostly during campaign periods as a part of media marketing strategy.

Similarly, with regards to women's participation in party and electoral politics, parties continue to be overwhelmingly dominated by male activists as evidenced by observations made in both central and regional party offices. For example, of the total number of interviews held with party officials and administrators, men constituted about 90 per cent of respondents with women activists mostly holding administrative and clerical positions. Beyond party affairs, a constitutional law 'On Elections of the President and Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic' also

³⁹³ 'Law on Political Parties of the Kyrgyz Republic', article 27, section 1, sub-section 1, available at: www.kenesh.kg.

requires that parties promote gender balance in politics by ensuring that a minimum 30 per cent of women be included in the candidate list and that every fourth candidate be of opposite gender³⁹⁴. However, a statistical data released by Jogorku Kenesh (parliament) reveals that the number of women legislators has dropped from an original 30 per cent or higher to 22 per cent as of December 2015³⁹⁵.

Because there exists no legal provision necessitating that the gender quota be applied to the candidate list remain effective after parties are elected to the parliament, party leaders manage to find legal loopholes to replace some members, including women originally placed in the top list, with other, typically male and notable, members. Thus, a total of 16 women legislators from four parties had been replaced by signing letters of resignation on the grounds that they previously agreed with party leaders to resign if they fall short of minimum votes in the assigned constituencies. Controversial as it may be, given that parliamentary elections are held on the basis of a party-list proportional representation system, it may still be an illustration of both continuing domination of men in public sphere and an ability of parties to minimize the effect of legal requirements for electoral success.

In addition to provisions broadly designed to induce democratic mechanisms of transparency and women's participation in party politics, the Law on political parties also includes a set of general provisions relating to an internal organization of parties. For example, an article 21 on party organizational structures envisage that the governing body consist of national congress and regional conferences and that leadership elections be held every five and three years accordingly³⁹⁶.

³⁹⁴ 'Law on the Election of the President and Deputies of Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic', article 60, section 3, available at: https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/konstitucionnye-zakony-kr/konstitucionnye-zakony-kr/O_vyborah_Pr-1913/.

³⁹⁵ 'Jogorku Kenesh v Tsifrah', Akipress, Dec.28, 2015, available at: <http://kg.akipress.org/news:628954>.

³⁹⁶ 'Law on Political Parties of the Kyrgyz Republic', article 21, sections 1-3.

In effect, it leaves the option of defining ways of structuring local branches and coordinating across branches to parties. Relatedly, the law requires that internal party decisions regarding party's statutes, organization and selection of candidates to both national and local councils be adopted by a majority vote³⁹⁷.

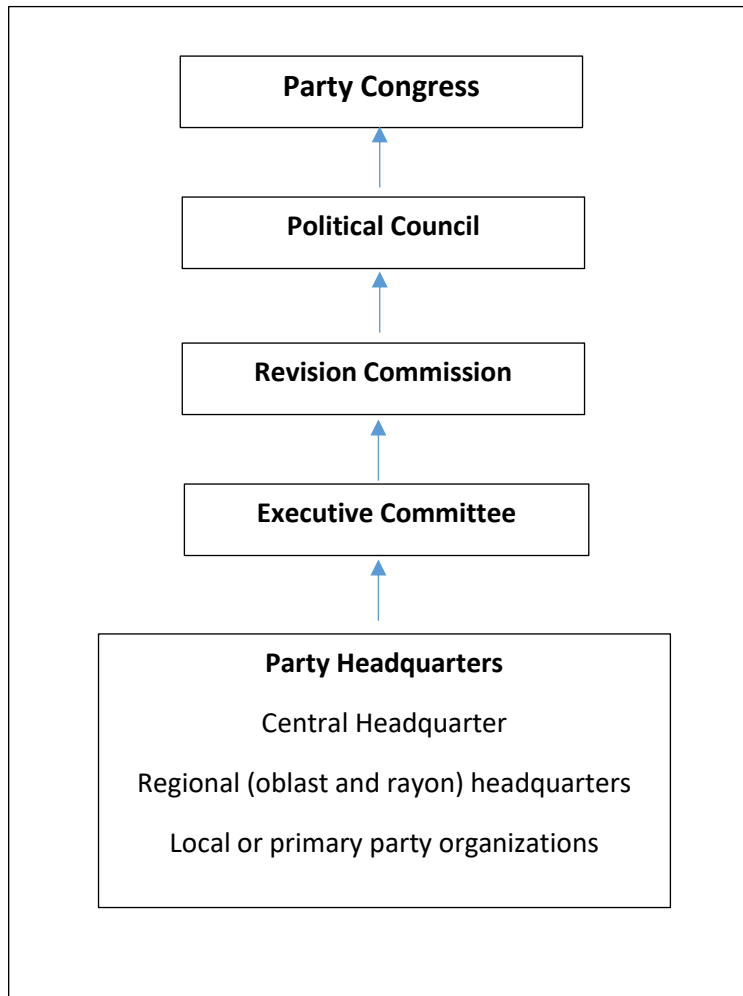
Meanwhile, a closer examination of select party statutes reveals that beyond state legal regulations parties have not in turn laid down internal regulations prescribing institutional mechanisms of intra-party coordination and communication. Typically, sections of party statutes describing party organizational structures provide a detailed listing of rights and responsibilities of highest governing and controlling bodies, including that of party congress and political council (see Figure 2 for a party organogram) and, in the statutes of two parties - 'Onuguu-Progress' (Progress) and 'Zamandash' (Contemporary), a separate sub-section describing a set of extended rights granted to party leaders³⁹⁸. For example, a leader of 'Onuguu-Progress' party holds the right to independently nominate senior members to the political council, appoint and assign responsibilities and powers to deputy party leaders and potentially override decisions of governing bodies if they are deemed to be in conflict with pertinent regulations, a party statute or hitherto adopted documents of a party congress³⁹⁹. Other party statutes are not as this explicit in terms of delegating formal prerogatives to a designated party leader, yet they similarly envisage an extensive array of rights of control over the party activities by governing bodies.

³⁹⁷ 'Law on Political Parties of the Kyrgyz Republic', article 21, sections 1-3, available at: www.kenesh.kg.

³⁹⁸ Party statutes of 'Onuguu-Progress' and 'Zamandash' parties.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

Figure 2. Party organogram.



On the other hand, sections of party statutes regarding regional party branches (see the organogram) provide only a limited amount of regulation with major provisions confined mostly to establishing formal rules and procedures of selecting coordinators of primary party organizations and determining the frequency of party conferences. As interviews with regional party activists and local experts suggest, the absence of formalized and clear lines of coordination between central and local levels clearly reflects the uncoordinated ways in which regional party branches operate on the ground. Erlan Askarov, a coordinator of ‘Ata-Meken’ party in Naryn province and a member of Naryn city council, noted relatedly that in-between elections regional party branches maintain a

high degree of decisional autonomy over major issues regarding grassroots activities or the party mandate in local councils⁴⁰⁰.

In other words, and as confirmed during interviews with other council members, party strategies on issue positions or coalition formation are adopted without considerable oversight and coordination by central party offices, leaving the possibility for parties on the ground to enter into regional and local coalitions that may often be incongruent with national coalitions and ideological platforms⁴⁰¹. In effect, the absence of close intra-party coordination implies that the dynamics of party politics and coalition formation at local level is shaped typically by non-programmatic factors associated with local specificities and group interests. An illustrative example of this and the extent of party dis-unity is an SDPK party, 3 members of which joined the majority coalition of Karakol city council in 2015, whilst 4 others remained as members of an opposition faction⁴⁰². Meanwhile, regional party branches with a visible presence are typically prevalent in regions associated with party leaders (for example, leaders of a southern-based 'Ata-Jurt' party in Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces) and where local business notables are frequently attracted as party candidates to act as brokers and oversee campaigning activities.

In organizational terms, the need for co-opting local notables with unstable party preferences, particularly by ruling parties, combined with the lack of intra-party coordination, means that regional party branches would consequently exhibit heterogeneous organizational structures with varying degrees of unity and involvement in local party affairs. A former chairman of Karakol city council Avtandil Abdykadyrov shared that the extent of engagement amongst council members in scrutinizing local issues was predominantly determined by either vested interests or

⁴⁰⁰ Erlan Askarov in discussion with the author, June, 2015.

⁴⁰¹ Maksat Joldoshbekov in discussion with the author, June 2015.

⁴⁰² Kamil Ruziev in discussion with the author, May, 2015.

preferences for particular issue positions, which tend to systematically deviate from party platforms⁴⁰³. Whilst attributing this to the lack of intra-party coordination, and expressing doubts over the prospects over party development, he also emphasized that council members with business interests are typically less inclined to partake in party affairs contributing to a popular perception of parties as disunited organizations driven by particularistic interests⁴⁰⁴.

Whilst this pattern of party organization at local level was similarly observed in other regions, there have been observed few exceptions amongst regional party branches operating on the basis of more viable organizational structures and higher levels of party unity and discipline. Notably, the city branches based in Naryn and Jalal-Abad of the socialist 'Ata-Meken' party and 'Zamandash' (Contemporary) party emerged as examples of party organizations placing a greater role of local party officials in coordinating party-related affairs and liaising with party-affiliated members of local councils. For instance, the core staff of 'Ata-Meken' party's office in Naryn city and 'Zamandash' party in Karakol city evidently included party activists retaining loyalties to parties, or party leaders, over an extended period of time and showing increased activism in local party politics. The example of 'Ata-Meken' party's regional branch in Naryn city clearly constituted an attempt to emulate a 'classic' model of party organizations, whereby the regional party office, led by a loyal party activist and coordinator, was committed to a more rigid and viable party organization and coordinating policy positions amongst party-affiliated city council members.

A similar way of attempting to ensure intra-party discipline and coordination at local level was noted in the southern Jalal-Abad city, where local party activists similarly developed long-time loyalties to a party and saw building rigid party organization as a priority stressed by its charismatic

⁴⁰³ Avtandil Abdykadyrov in discussion with the author, May, 2015.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

leader Tekebayev. Seen as a leading opposition figure in the past, Tekebayev earned a reputation of an implacable politician and built a base of core supporters on the ground, who joined him whilst he was in opposition. Since the popular uprising of 2010, however, and despite the initial perception of a party as a leading political force that brought about an ensuing change of power, the broader base of electoral support has evidently weakened in the face of election campaigns emphasizing media visibility and the work of professional consultants hired from outside of parties. In the first parliamentary elections held after popular uprising in 2010, 'Ata-Meken' party has finished last with barely passing the 5 percent national threshold, a rather unexpected outcome that a local expert Tiulegenov suggested was due to both the shortage of campaign resources and the low reputation of Tekebayev in the southern provinces⁴⁰⁵.

In subsequent elections, the party has similarly received a minimum number of votes prompting party defections amongst broader base of supporters along the way and leaving a considerable part of constituencies without a strong electoral support base. In the meantime, the commitments to building rigid party organization at local level observed in both Naryn and Jalal-Abad cities reflected continued interest of the party leader to retain loyalties amongst core supporters along party lines and individual commitments of core party activists that may account for variation in party organizational strength across party's regional branches.

On the other hand, 'Zamandash' party's tendency to emulate a more viable and coordinated party organizational model has been associated with its mission to act as a charity organization founded by a group of labor migrant associations, based in Russia and Kazakhstan⁴⁰⁶, which in a way determined the choice of subsequent organizational strategies. As observed particularly in Bishkek

⁴⁰⁵ Medet Tiulegenov in discussion with the author, August, 2013.

⁴⁰⁶ Daniyar Omurbekov: Partiya "Zamandash" ne Imeet Nichego Obshego s "Onuguu", Vecherniy Bishkek, Feb.,10, 2017, available at: https://www.vb.kg/doc/355172_daniyar_omurbekov:_partiia_zamandash_ne_imeet_nichego_obshego_s_onugyy.html.

and Karakol cities, the party consisted of a group of core activists that, unlike most other parties, tend to remain engaged in local community affairs in-between elections by pursuing the originally built-in objectives of distributing goods and providing charitable contributions to local communities. As a coordinator of party's branch in Karakol city noted Murat Osmonaliev, the party operates according to a plan of actions aimed to provide support for local communities and the incoming ad-hoc requests from community members for financial support, which do not necessarily fit into the electoral cycle⁴⁰⁷.

Based on interviews with party coordinators in other regions, including Bishkek, Naryn, Jalal-Abad and Osh, it was further revealed that, whilst the party seeks to mobilize supporters and voters amongst the financial aid recipients, vote-seeking seemingly was not regarded as a priority organizational strategy on the ground. The original purpose of the party as emphasizing charity activities clearly conditioned the formation of a more structured party organization at both national and local level, yet the declining success demonstrated recently in local elections has been also attributed to the passing of its founding leader Omurakunov and consequent split amongst senior party leaders.

Despite exhibiting relatively cogent organizational capabilities, akin to 'Ata-Meken' party, which have previously proven to garner much electoral support in local elections, the party has further corroborated the common patterns of party organizations observed across other parties. In a similar vein, the centrality of 'personalized' leadership has been notably seen as critical for maintaining party organizational networks, liaising with other parties and mobilizing voters. In the meantime, local party branches do not appear equally robust in displaying organizational capabilities across the country. As with 'Ata-Meken' party, it built a select network of party branches

⁴⁰⁷ Murat Osmonaliev in discussion with the author, May, 2015.

with the view of facing the limitedness of resources, including local activists, the support base identified in part on the basis of regional considerations) and the prospects for voter mobilization. Accordingly, the extent of coordination and communication between the party's central office and regional and local offices was determined predominantly by the need to organize campaigning activities and ad-hoc charitable activities in local communities.

Meanwhile, the responses obtained from field surveys of regional party activists, conducted by Friedrich Ebert Foundation, suggest that the lack of institutionalized mechanisms of intra-party coordination and communication, specifically for maintaining contacts with central party offices and party leaders, creates an additional obstacle to building strong grassroots organizations⁴⁰⁸. The views equally apply to both ruling parties with extensive networks and 'regional' parties; the exceptions included previously discussed 'Zamandash' party, providing funds to sponsor holiday events and party-related activities and 'Ata-Meken' party, whose leader and senior members reportedly keep regular contact with regional party activists without interfering in local party affairs⁴⁰⁹. It also appears that most regional party activists are not usually involved in internal decision-making and deliberation procedures at national level, including on party matters relating to coalition formation and campaign strategies, further weakening the linkage with local constituencies and broader mechanisms of democratic representation and accountability⁴¹⁰.

As field interviews similarly indicate, party members on the ground preferred a more frequent communication with party leaders and greater involvement in internal decision-making, noting concurrently that the absence of internal democratic procedures contributes to a public image of parties as 'closed' and unaccountable organizations. On a strategic level, as a local expert

⁴⁰⁸ 'Asel Doolotkeldieva, 'Razvitie Partii i Predvybornaya Situatsiya v Regionah: Vzgl'yad Regional'nyh Predstavitelei Partiy', Friedrich Ebert Foundation in the Kyrgyz Republic, 2014.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, p.31.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

based in Karakol Azat Zagirov noted, the prevalence of blurred and weak mechanisms of intra-party coordination and internal decision-making has also prompted frequent party defections, especially amongst core party activists and broader membership, and undermined the prospects of establishing an electorally stable support base⁴¹¹.

The examination of legal regulations governing the internal functioning of parties reveal that party organization-related provisions, envisaged in the Law on political parties and select party statutes, typically fall short of stipulating an extended set of institutional mechanisms of intra-party coordination and communication. In effect, the national party law established only a limited amount of regulation with provisions generally confined to prescribing the formal requirements for party registration and determining the frequency of party conferences. Beyond public regulation, however, statutory provisions similarly prove to lack substantive specifications on coordination and communication mechanisms regulating the relations amongst different party levels, whilst granting considerable rights and prerogatives for governing bodies and party leaders.

On a practical level, the extent of intra-party coordination clearly reflects the limited character of statutory provisions on party organizational structures, as illustrated in the relative absence of intra-party coordination on a range of party-related matters, including local decisions on coalition formation and issue positions. As will be further discussed, the choice of a party organizational model based on a centralized leadership, loose coordination and a narrow network of regional branches, was shaped by the need for party leaders to preserve organizational flexibility in political maneuvering and align with campaigning trends emphasizing candidate-centered strategies, media visibility and campaign resources.

⁴¹¹ Azat Zagirov in discussion with the author, May, 2015.

5.2. Intra-party democracy and decision-making procedures

Similarly to the assumption that party organizational structures need to ease the mechanisms of intra-party coordination and communication, a common scholarly view holds that the internal procedures of candidate selection for public offices and decision-making must conform to democratic principles. This implies particularly that a greater and direct involvement of party members on the ground in internal party affairs serves as an indication of commitments for democratic principles, otherwise known as intra-party democracy, espoused by party leaders, promote broader party membership and provide ‘...a sense of grassroots legitimation’⁴¹².

Whilst there exists no scholarly consensus on the extent of state regulation requiring that internal party organizations and governance structures are based on democratic principles, with views at one extreme suggesting too much external interference in internal party affairs may be seen as a mechanism of political control of parties, the prevalent assumption holds that a certain degree of state regulation would contribute to ensuring that broader principles of democratic accountability and representation are further promoted in an efficient manner⁴¹³. The decision to extend beyond general regulations prescribing the establishment of intra-party democracy to include extended procedural specification is, however, left largely with individual parties as they pursue to maintain a network of regional branches.

As will be shown, the example of parties in Kyrgyzstan indicates that the establishment of internal mechanisms of intra-party democracy are not prioritized for organizational purposes by party leaders, as evidenced by the absence of detailed internal procedures contained in party

⁴¹² Ingrid Van Biezen, *Political Parties in New Democracies: Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴¹³ Ibid.

statutes and the practical application of democratic principles. The underlying rationale for constraining the creation of an inclusive environment conducive to a more engaged participation of party members in decision-making processes can be shaped markedly by strategic incentives to retain leadership autonomy over negotiations with external political forces and internal decisions on candidate selection, holding crucial implications for voter mobilization and campaigning strategies.

5.2.1. Candidate selection procedures

The Law on political parties prescribes that party statutes provide details of procedures of electing members of the governing bodies and nominating candidates for public offices⁴¹⁴. As with party organizational structures, it, however, provides no clear requirements regarding the internal decision-making procedures, leaving the possibility of establishing the scope of intra-party democracy to individual party statutes⁴¹⁵. As shown in select party statutes, in turn, the issue of candidate selection is briefly mentioned in a section describing party organizational structures⁴¹⁶ and linking it to a prerogative of a party council, or a political council for other parties, to nominate candidates to both the national parliament (Jogorku Kenesh) and the local councils by a simple majority vote during party council sessions.

The reasons for generic prescriptions on organizing internal party structures along democratic principles with no legal implications may reflect the preferences of both legislators and individual party leaders to avoid excessive regulation of intra-party affairs and maintain organizational flexibility. As a former politician and activist Jypar Jeksheev said, ‘no laws can possibly enforce internal party discipline’ and that ‘any attempt to impose an external control over

⁴¹⁴ ‘Law on Political Parties of the Kyrgyz Republic’, articles 18, sections 8 and 12.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ For example, the party statute of ‘Ata-Meken’ party,

internal party affairs would entail a substantial risk...of limiting the freedom of political parties⁴¹⁷.

There also exist concurrent views, as expressed by local expert Shairbek Juraev, that the Law on political parties was designed by legislators, who also served as leaders of ruling parties, with the goal of providing greater flexibility and control for party leaders in adopting political and party-related decisions, including specifically on candidate selection⁴¹⁸.

In a practical setting, the processes of candidate selection within parties, particularly surrounding the past elections to Jogorku Kenesh held in 2010 and 2015, have generated much controversy prompting public calls for installing a more organized and an inherently democratic mechanism of selecting candidates for public offices. The main criticism, raised by some party members as well as civic activists, stressed that the procedures of candidate selection are conducted in closed settings with party leaders typically dominating decision-making on candidate nominations⁴¹⁹.

In the meantime, the generic character of interview responses provided by regional party coordinators seem to indicate in similar ways that party members on the whole tend exert limited influence on candidate selection decisions. The most frequently obtained responses ranged from general comments, including that ‘the candidate list is finalized in consultation with broader party members’, or that a party tend to ‘...feature a greater and meaningful involvement in compiling the candidate list for local elections’ to more ‘tactful’ statements noting that the candidates are selected based on ideological convictions, commitments to a party and extensive political experience⁴²⁰. For

⁴¹⁷ ‘Politicheskie Partii Kyrgyzstana: Degradatsiya ili Razvitie’, Polit.kg, Oct., 21, 2011, available at: <http://www.polit.kg/print/1/82>.

⁴¹⁸ Shairbek Juraev in discussion with author, May, 2015.

⁴¹⁹ ‘Daniyar Terbishaliev: Pora Othadit’ ot Sostavleniya Partiynyh Spiskov’, Kabarlar.org, Sept.22, 2014, available at: <http://kabarlar.org/news/31659-daniyar-terbishaliev-pora-othodit-ot-sostavleniya-partiynyh-spiskov-kogda-za-mesto-v-pervoy-desyatke-platyat-do-1-milliona.html>.

⁴²⁰ Erlan Askarov and Ulan Jaanbaev in discussion with the author, June, 2015.

example, the deputy leader of 'Ar-Namys' party Emil Aliev said that the party prioritizes placing senior party leaders with extensive party affiliation in the top list of party-nominated candidates followed by party members with the potential to mobilize a large number of voters and party followers⁴²¹. Whilst noting about the engagement of broader party membership in shaping party-related decisions and strategies, he has not, however, delved into specifics on how, in effect, regional party branches are involved in candidate selection processes⁴²².

In the meantime, an interview with a local coordinator of 'Zamandash' party, Murat Osmonaliev, branch based in Karakol town suggests specifically that the national list of party-nominated candidates is usually fielded by senior party officials with the view to ensure also that the legal requirements on ethnic and gender balance in candidate lists are fulfilled⁴²³. The response, combined with the vague and general character of other responses on candidate lists, seems to corroborate the adequacy of criticisms amongst civic activists and individual party members that democratic features of internal party decisions are significantly undermined by the closed and centralized character of candidate selection procedures.

A leader of SDPK party's youth wing Rinat Samuditnov, whilst stressing this as a particularly challenging issue facing the party organization, noted relatedly that the absence of 'long-time' party activists in the top list of candidates and an inadequate participation of party members in determining the candidate lists would hold potentially negative implications for party unity, discipline and an overall public image of the party⁴²⁴. As emphasized further, the tendency to field the top list of candidates by incoming new members, particularly with business interests, former public servants and local notables lacking extensive party membership and continued commitment

⁴²¹ Emil Aliev in discussion with the author, April, 2015, Bishkek.

⁴²² Ibid

⁴²³ Murat Osmonaliev in discussion with the author, May, 2015. .

⁴²⁴ Rinat Samuditnov in discussion with the author, April, 2015.

to a party will also hinder the process of building a stable party organization⁴²⁵. Commenting on the rationale for a centralized and closed pattern of decision-making within a party, he admitted that it may be due to the intention of a small clique of senior leaders to remain decisive and exclusive on strategic party decisions and the lack of reasonable understanding of how parties should be organized⁴²⁶.

Echoing similar concerns regarding the implications of candidate nomination procedures, another member of SDPK party and former member of Jogorku Kenesh Daniyar Terbishaliev also stated that ‘...the process of fielding the candidate lists these days is typically closed and dominated by a party leader’⁴²⁷. In his view, the candidate selection decisions are made particularly on the basis of personal ‘closeness’ of prospective candidates to a party leader and payment of fees to secure party nominations (e.g. based on his estimates, ‘nomination fees’ for the top 10 nominations range from 50 000 USD to 1 million USD), an observable trend across other parties that would not ‘contribute to a party system development in the country’⁴²⁸. The alternative mechanism of candidate selection, as he proposed, needs to entail open and transparent intra-party consultations involving party members at large, further allowing voters to vote for particular candidates based on a preferential voting system.

At the same time, widespread allegations claiming likewise that party members and, previously non-members, looking to be placed in the top list of party-nominated candidates, are expected to contribute ‘nomination fees’, seem to be confirmed owing to incidents of intra-party conflicts prompting subsequent dismissals of individual party members. The most notable incident

⁴²⁵ Rinat Samuditnov in discussion with the author, April, 2015.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ ‘Daniyar Terbishaliev: Pora Othadit’ ot Sostavleniya Partiynyh Spiskov’, Kabarlar.org, Sept.22, 2014, available at: <http://kabarlar.org/news/31659-daniyar-terbishaliev-pora-othodit-ot-sostavleniya-partiynyh-spiskov-kogda-za-mesto-v-pervoy-desyatke-platyat-do-1-milliona.html>.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

involved a former parliament member, elected from a socialist 'Ata-Meken' party, Omurbek Abdрахmanov who, in the wake of a decision to dismiss him by the party, made an open statement regarding the transfer of 100 000 USD toward the party's campaign fund⁴²⁹. The decision to make this information public, as Abdрахmanov stated, stemmed from the need to illustrate the extent of influence of 'nomination fees' in fielding the candidate lists and, as a result, the possibility for new members to secure places in the top party lists. Whilst the leader of 'Ata-Meken' party Omurbek Tekebayev has not provided an explicit confirmation of this information, soon after he admitted that, given the extended scope of Abdрахmanov's business networks, there was high possibility that he had made a substantial campaign contribution by 'mobilizing' his own followers to make individual campaign contributions⁴³⁰

Another former parliament member, who was allegedly dismissed by 'Ata-Meken' party on similar grounds of 'poor performance' in the assigned constituencies, Ravshan Jeenbekov stated at the time that he had also made 'the necessary amount of contribution' to the party's campaign fund and criticized the tendency of fielding party lists with formerly 'non-members' pursuing office-seeking objectives⁴³¹. The ambiguity and informality of criterion, or its lack thereof, for determining the amount of 'nomination fees' to be paid by individual party-nominated candidates, as he further noted, also served as a potential source of intra-party conflict and reflected broader structural

⁴²⁹ 'Otchet Monitoringa Pechatnyj SMI Kyrgyzstana', Media Development Center, August, 2015, available at: http://medialaw.kg/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Monitoring_otchet_AVGUST.pdf.

⁴³⁰ 'Deputat O. Tekebayev Podtverdil Fakt Perevoda 100 tys.dollarov v Fond Partii "Ata-Meken" Deputatom O. Abdрахmanovym', Gezitter.org, Dec., 17, 2014, available at: https://m.gezitter.org/politic/35884_deputat_o_tekebaev_podtverdil_fakt_perevoda_100_tyis_dollarov_v_fond_partii_ata_meken_deputatom_o_abdrahmanovyim/. Note: By Law individual contribution to a party's campaign fund cannot exceed 20 000 KGS or 300 USD and for party candidates – 50 000 KGS or 800 USD.

⁴³¹ 'Ravshan Jeenbekov: Nas vyganli, potomu chto my kritikovali Tekebayeva I ego okruzenie', Vesti.kg, April 17, 2012, available at: <https://vesti.kg/proisshestviya/item/11929-ravshan-zheenbekov-nas-vyignali-potomu-chto-myi-kritikovali-tekebaeva-i-ego-okruzenie.html>.

issues associated with the near absence of transparent and deliberative decision-making processes entailing a broader and meaningful engagement of long-time grassroots activists⁴³².

Whilst characterizing all other parties as ‘closed’ and lacking ‘intra-party democratic procedures’ and internally ‘robust competition’, Jeenbekov also said that ‘Ata-Meken’ party typified an organizational model featuring common attributes of ‘warlordism’, whereby an unaccountable leader would be single-handedly running the party without regard for alternative viewpoints⁴³³. A range of instances purportedly demonstrating the decisiveness and dominance of the party leader particularly involved the internal party decision-making on fielding the candidate lists, attracting campaign funds and selecting party cadres and candidates for ministerial posts⁴³⁴. In its present condition, as stressed further by Jeenbekov, the party serves the particularistic interests of its leader and that a vigorous intra-party competition based on ‘transparent mechanisms of decision-making’ would be required to strengthen party building and parliamentary form of government⁴³⁵.

The incident involving the dismissal of two former parliament members, previously affiliated with a socialist ‘Ata-Meken’ party, and openly revealing the informal deals over candidate selection decisions, in effect, represent a rare example of intra-party conflict, dissimilar to other instances of party defections. As was evident during early parliamentary debates and based on public statements, and beyond criticisms of the supposed undemocratic nature of internal party governance, both Abdrakhmanov and Jeenbekov appeared to support the progressive ideology based on promoting a free-market economy and individual rights, the positions that differed in substantive terms from the left-wing ideological orientations formally emphasized by a socialist

⁴³² ‘Ravshan Jeenbekov: Nas vyganli, potomu chto my kritikovali Tekebayeva I ego okruzenie’, Vesti.kg, April 17, 2012, available at: <https://vesti.kg/proisshestiya/item/11929-ravshan-zheenbekov-nas-vyignali-potomu-chto-myi-kritikovali-tekebaeva-i-ego-okruzhenie.html>.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

'Ata-Meken' party. Overall, however, Jeenbekov's observation that a particular pattern of decision-making that induces fielding the candidate lists with notable party members capable of making substantial campaign contributions and maintaining continued loyalty to a party leader, as shown by 'Ata-Meken' party, seems to equally apply to other ruling parties.

Following the logic of this pattern, a concurrent examination of candidate lists submitted for the past parliamentary elections of 2010 and 2015 showed particularly that the top-listed candidates nominated by parties, viewed as favorites and holding higher chances of securing legislative seats, are typically represented by business figures, former senior public servants, executive officials and local notables. As commonly noted, however, in practice, drawing a clear line between political and business elite in Kyrgyzstan may pose difficulty given the considerable influence of business interests in policy making. As an analysis of biographical data on parliament members from 1990 and onwards suggest⁴³⁶, for example, a significant proportion of parliament members was consisted of previously notable business figures seeking to further business and particularistic interests and formerly senior public servants who, by virtue of holding public offices and forging business connections, combined or moved to the business field after resignation⁴³⁷. A report on parliamentary activities showed additionally that the combined percentage of both business figures and senior public servants in the parliament has reached 62 per cent in 2015⁴³⁸.

It was equally notable that high profile figures with business interests stood as a general rule for the leading parties or emerged as leaders of newly formed parties, whilst parties with reduced electoral chances typically recruited small business owners, local notables and mid-level public servants, including school teachers, university lecturers and state administrative employees. For

⁴³⁶ For example, a project undertaken by the American University of Central Asia on elite background in Kyrgyzstan.

⁴³⁷ Ibid

⁴³⁸ 'Jogorku Kenesh v Tsifrah', Akipress, Dec.28, 2015, available at :<http://kg.akipress.org/news:628954>.

example, the leaders of four (out of six in total) parliamentary factions, formed following parliamentary elections of 2015, previously owned businesses (for example, leaders of 'Respublika-Ata-Just', SDPK and 'Onuguu-Progress' parties) or combined public service and business activities (leader of 'Kyrgyzstan'). The intricate nexus between politics and business, markedly shaping the trending dynamics of broader political competition in the country, also influences the ways in which individual legislators, including party leaders, consider law-making as an extension of particularistic business interests. As recently observed in parliament's plenary sessions, the most heated debates involving individual legislators and the executive officials occurred over government's bids and contracts, regarded as highly lucrative and hence susceptible to political corruption. In view of a local expert Tiulegenov, in addition to a conflict of interests potentially leading to high level corruption, the tendency to promote personal and vested business interests implies that individual legislators, for fear of political persecution on corruption charges, would be inclined to refrain from principled criticisms of the government and the extant regime⁴³⁹.

The analysis of the past two parliaments relatedly suggested that the average attendance records of legislators and the intensity of scrutinizing legislative initiatives along party ideological lines, by covering a wide range of economic, social and foreign policy issues, have overall decreased⁴⁴⁰. A common expert view holds that on the surface the weakening performance of the parliament indicates the inherent challenges with party building, but in a political domain it also shows that legislators prioritizing as a whole business interests are not capable of properly performing the general functions of legislative control and scrutiny and potentially curbing the consolidation (or now consolidated) of an authoritarian regime, revived by then-president

⁴³⁹ Medet Tiulegenov in discussion with the author, May, 2015.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid

Atambayev⁴⁴¹. In practice, a series of high level corruption charges instigated against some individual legislators, also viewed as politically motivated, showed that expressing critical views against the regime or attempting to build an opposing political force might incur severe political repercussions. In a country suffering rampant corruption and where political and business interests intersect in fundamental ways the practice of silencing political opponents by politically motivated persecutions proves to be a high possibility.

A noteworthy case illustrating the extent of this practice involved a former parliament speaker Akhmatbek Keldibekov, who had faced legal prosecution on corruption charges in 2013. Keldibekov, widely associated with the previous president Bakiev's regime toppled by a popular uprising in 2010 and allegedly accumulated 'unexplained' wealth in the past, was charged with illegally outsourcing tax collection services to a private company whilst heading the state tax agency in 2008 and enabling excessive budget spending for a special extra-parliamentary office whilst serving as a parliament speaker in 2012⁴⁴². A local political analyst Kalnur Ormushev stated at the time that the organized manner of the charges and the fact that alleged crimes were committed a few years ago showed the primacy of political motivations associated with a broader political struggle⁴⁴³.

In a more controversial case, a prominent opposition figure and leader of socialist 'Ata-Meken' party, Tekebayev was sentenced in 2017 on similar corruption charges to eight years prison. The prosecution alleged that Tekebayev received 1 million USD from a Russian businessman in exchange for a supposedly unfulfilled promise to secure an 'access' to the management of 'Alpha

⁴⁴¹ Medet Tiulegenov in discussion with the author, May, 2015.

⁴⁴² 'Delo Keldibekova: Mejdu Politikoi I Korrupsiey', Gezitter.org, Nov., 22, 2013, available at: https://m.gezitter.org/politic/25655_delo_keldibekova_mejdu_politikoy_i_korrupsiey.

⁴⁴³ 'Arest Keldibekova – Politbor'ba Pod Vidom Korrupsii', Sayasat.kg, Nov.,21, 2013, available at: http://www.sayasat.kg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=26736&catid=24&lang=ru&Itemid=132.

Telecom Company' in 2010 when Tekebayev was a member of the Interim Government⁴⁴⁴. The court trial, criticized for failing to provide substantive evidence of the deal, also attracted wide media attention and support from like-minded opposition figures and civic activists, claiming that the criminal case was intrinsically motivated by political purposes to restrict Tekebayev's participation in presidential elections held in 2017⁴⁴⁵. In turn, the prosecution also stressed that Tekebayev was allegedly incentivized to spend the 'requested' money toward political campaigns leading up to parliamentary elections of 2010. The instigation of criminal charges against prominent politicians, with a potential to pose a viable political challenge to the regime and yet implicated with dubious business deals in the past, shows the extent of susceptibility of individual legislators, linked to business circles, to politically motivated persecutions. In the meantime, the contextualization of the alleged deal as linked to parliamentary elections of 2017 may also in a way suggest the critical salience of financial resources for party-run political campaigns.

As the last two parliamentary elections have shown, parties need to raise significant contributions to run effective political campaigns, pressuring, in turn, party leaders to offer candidate nominations for prospective members, previously running businesses or employed as senior public servants, to share campaign costs. The official figures for campaign expenditures made by parties in connection to parliamentary elections in 2015, then publicized by the Central Election Commission, suggest a fairly significant correlation between the amount of overall party spending and the resultant vote share⁴⁴⁶. The six parties that managed to secure legislative seats proved

⁴⁴⁴ 'Ugol'noe Delo Protiv Tekebayeva', Sputnik, Feb., 26, 2017, available at:

https://ru.sputnik.kg/trend/criminal_case_against_Omurbek_Tekebaev_20170226/.

⁴⁴⁵ 'Delo Omurbeka Tekebayeva: Golos Mejdunarodnoi Organizatsii', Azattyk Radio, Sept. 18, 2018, available at: https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_tekebaev_edi_2018/29450511.html.

⁴⁴⁶ 'U partii "Onuguu-Progress" Po-Prejnemu Samye Bol'shie Rashody', 24.kg, Sept., 02, 2015, available at: https://24.kg/vybory/18492_u_partii_onuguu-progress_po-prejnemu_samyie_bolshie_rashodyi_/.

accordingly to incur the highest costs, with 'Kyrgyzstan' party featuring as an anomaly⁴⁴⁷. However, the party, whilst surprisingly finishing third with the least amount of official campaign spending comparing to other five parties, was frequently implicated in alleged vote-buying incidents⁴⁴⁸.

A member of the Osh-based election monitoring organization who wished to remain anonymous shared on this bases that the practices of systematic vote-buying have been particularly widespread during the last parliamentary election of 2015, visibly more so than the traditional clientelistic practices of distributing goods and services widely employed in previous elections to secure electoral support⁴⁴⁹. In his view, there remain challenges with finding formal evidence of vote-buying and conducting subsequent criminal investigation, as voters remain reluctant in reporting party-driven offers of money in exchange for votes⁴⁵⁰. Similarly, despite widespread reports made by local election observers and civic activists allegedly implicating some parties, including particularly 'Kyrgyzstan', the discrete nature of vote-buying and clientelistic practices also complicates the task of gauging the actual amount of election-related costs incurred by parties. In effect, it implies an increased likelihood that parties, including especially the ones that allegedly resorted to vote-buying in systematic ways, would de facto spend more than officially reported.

That said, the elections to local councils held across the country throughout 2016 also indicated the pervasiveness of vote-buying practices, employed both by incumbent and newly formed parties in an attempt to bolster the prospects of electoral success. The effectiveness of this practice as evidenced by recent electoral outcomes, in turn, implies that overall campaign

⁴⁴⁷ 'U partii "Onuguu-Progress" Po-Prejnemu Samye Bol'shie Rashody', 24.kg, Sept., 02, 2015, available at: https://24.kg/vybory/18492_u_partii_onuguu-progress_po-prejnemu_samyie_bolshie_rashodyi_/.

⁴⁴⁸ 'Maalyamat.kg: "Butun-Kyrgyzstan Emgek" Pereshel k Oktrytomu Podkupu Golosov', Vesti.kg, Sept., 30, 2015, available at: <https://vesti.kg/politika/item/36827-maalymatkg-butun-kyrgyzstan-emgek-pereshel-k-otkrytomu-podkupu-golosov.html>.

⁴⁴⁹ In discussion with the author, June, 2015.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

expenditures would rise, especially as party-run campaign strategies, associated with promoting media visibility amongst prominent candidates and emphasizing marketing strategies, emerge as critical in shaping voter choices. Faced with this trend, party leaders would be inclined to appeal to outside members, previously involved in business or public sector, and capable of making significant campaign contributions, to ensure that the planned electoral objectives are met.

As previously discussed, parties seem to evidently suffer from the deficit of internal democratic decision-making mechanisms, particularly as they relate to candidate selection decisions. The interviews with local party activists and observations made by civic activists commonly allude to the fact that internal party decisions on candidate nominations, particularly for top places, are usually made in 'closed' settings inhibiting extensive and transparent intra-party deliberation with party leaders or a group of senior leaders typically viewed as decisive in shaping particular candidate selection decisions. Meanwhile, as the last two parliamentary elections have revealed, the logic of trending voter mobilization strategies clearly dictates the need for party leaders to attract outside business figures and former senior public servants with business connections in order to raise the necessary campaign contributions.

5.2.2. Party leadership selection

The subsequent assumption, similarly in line with the constitutive norms of intra-party democracy, holds that selecting party leadership on regular and competitive bases involving the wider party 'selectorate' is considered essential in strengthening internal party accountability and sustaining the grassroots support base. In substantive terms, it also conforms to a view that the possibility of selecting party leaders in democratically meaningful ways would indicate a considerable degree of influence exerted by the selectorate on other party decisions holding strategic implications. In established democracies, nonetheless, as argued by Kenig et al, the degree of democratic

competition for party leadership has proven to vary markedly depending on the institutional and cultural environment and the size of the selectorate⁴⁵¹. In methodological terms, and as advised, a conventional way of evaluating the degree of competitiveness was based on a review of the internal rules, envisaged in individual party statutes, regulating the leadership selection process and determining to extent to which they conform to commonly accepted democratic norms and methods and, in effect, apply to actual leadership selection procedures⁴⁵².

As in some parliamentary democracies, examined by Kenig (2015), the leadership selection procedures employed by ruling parties in Kyrgyzstan seem to constitute a pure formality based typically on ceremonial re-elections of incumbent leaders. Reflecting in large part the tendency of party leaders to preserve exclusive autonomy over party decisions for both political and voter mobilization purposes, the formal regulations on party leadership selection, stipulated in both the Law on political parties as well as individual party statutes, appear to lack substantive details of internal methods and procedures promoting meaningful democratic competition amongst aspiring candidates. Whilst the Law on political parties does not contain any legal or prescriptive provisions on leadership selection processes, the party statutes of individual parties seem to highlight the broadness of a corresponding rule involving no further elaboration and requiring only that party leaders are selected by a party congress convened every five years⁴⁵³.

The statute of socialist 'Ata-Meken' party contains an explicit provision establishing the requirement to select a party leader and senior leaders every five years, but, similarly to other party statutes, it does not seem to offer substantive details on how and who specifically selects the party

⁴⁵¹ Ofer Kenig et al, 'Chapter 4. Competitiveness of Party Leadership Selection Processes', in *The Politics of Party Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2015):1-2.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ For example, the statutes of 'Onuguu-Progress', SDPK and 'Zamandash' parties.

leadership and detailed ways of holding those selected into leadership posts into account⁴⁵⁴. Owing to a limited character of formal regulations regarding leadership selection processes, in turn associated with the deficiency of internal party accountability mechanisms, leaders of major parties managed to get re-elected over the years in a rather ceremonial manner. For instance, the notable leader of 'Ata-Meken' party Tekebayev has been managing the party as well as the parliamentary factions associated with the party since its foundation in 1992⁴⁵⁵. The other party, also formally upholding leftist ideological orientations and that has similarly been present in politics for a long time, SDPK was continuously led by a former president Atambayev ever since replacing the founding leader in 1995⁴⁵⁶.

Meanwhile, the leadership model applied by 'Bir-Bol' (Be together) party, currently in a ruling coalition, seems to deviate from the general rule. In contrast to other parties in parliament, led exclusively by rather charismatic leaders, the party claims particularly to adopt a 'collegial' leadership model based on providing formal rights to a single designated leader, whilst vesting strategic decision-making powers in party's political council⁴⁵⁷. As was evident since its election in 2015, the party, formed by individual defectors from two other major parties ('Ata-Jurt' and 'Respublika') as well as prominent public figures, including two former prime ministers and government ministers, indeed remained largely immune to observable intra-party conflicts. According to a local political expert Shairbek Juraev this could be explained by the way it was initially formed, i.e. as 'a party of professionals' and equally notable figures, and the absence of a clearly

⁴⁵⁴ The statute of 'Ata-Meken' party.

⁴⁵⁵ 'Partii Kyrgyzstana: Ata-Meken', Sputnik, June, 04, 2015, available at: <https://ru.sputnik.kg/spravka/20150904/1017927271.html>.

⁴⁵⁶ 'Almazbeka Atambayeva Jdet Kreslo Predsedatelya SPDK', Gezitter.org, Jan., 19. 2018, available at: https://m.gezitter.org/politic/66892_almazbeka_atambayeva_jdet_kreslo_predsedatelya_sdpk/.

⁴⁵⁷ 'Partiya Predstavila Svouy Ideologicheskuyu Programmu', Vb.kg, Nov.,18, 2013, available at: https://www.vb.kg/doc/251329_partiia_bir_bol_predstavila_svou_ideologicheskuyu_programmy.html.

identifiable single leader, who was capable of imposing his/her own political objectives to other party members⁴⁵⁸.

In addition to this, and given the actual power configuration in the parliament, associated with an inability of both ruling and opposition parliamentary factions to present a potent challenge to the dominance of the president's administration and ruling SPDK party associated with it, political goals of senior party members at this point look equally modest and confined primarily to (legislative) office-seeking strategies. It is also plausible that the reason why the party chooses to refrain from pursuing more ambitious political goals, such as promoting a certain policy or a valence issue and seeking executive appointments, may be due to the political background of senior party members. The core group of senior party members thus consists of formerly notable government ministers and senior public servants, previously affiliated with former president Bakiyev's regime toppled in 2010 and allegedly involved in dubious deals, making it highly susceptible, as previously inferred, to legal persecutions with political undertones.

Consistent with this point are the recent corruption charges pressed against the current parliament members from 'Bir-Bol' party – Igor Chudinov and Akylbek Japarov, who also previously served as prime minister and first deputy of prime minister accordingly, in a time of heightened political tensions over presidential election campaigns in 2017⁴⁵⁹. As with previous examples, the timing of the investigation leading up to the charges and related to a deal that dates back to 2009 and the fact that soon after the formal leader of the party Altynbek Sulaimanov endorsed the candidacy of incumbent president and SDPK-nominated Sooronbai Jeenbekov suggest an attempt to prevent possible collusions between individual high level members of 'Bir-Bol' party and the

⁴⁵⁸ Shairbek Juraev in discussion with the author, May, 2015.

⁴⁵⁹ 'Ugolovnoe Delo v Otnoshenii Japarova, Chudinova I Drugih – Podrobnosti', Sputnik.kg. May, 30, 2017, available at: <https://ru.sputnik.kg/politics/20170530/1033603534/podrobnosti-dela-zhaparova-i-chudinova.html>.

opposing presidential candidates⁴⁶⁰. In this regard, a local civic activist Mavlyan Askarbekov has repeatedly expressed discontent over the ‘purposeful’ suspension of the criminal charges against former prime minister Igor Chudinov that was upheld following the presidential elections in 2017⁴⁶¹. He was particularly concerned that the criminal charges related to similarly high-level instances of corruption and embezzlement are not consistent and that conversely minor charges lead to excessive scrutiny and disproportionate punishment⁴⁶².

Meanwhile, a personalized manner of candidate endorsement made by the formal leader of ‘Bir-Bol’ party Sulaimanov and the way law-making processes (i.e. without proper deliberation and party-line votes and the primacy of individual preferences) usually take place indicate that parties based on a shared and ‘collegial’ leadership structure, found in ‘Bir-Bol’ party and to a lesser extent ‘Kyrgyzstan’ party, tend to be organized along highly independent senior party members with moderate political goals, retaining political loyalty to the incumbent regime and prioritizing legislative office-seeking objectives. The expected benefits of legislative seats could be also expressed in the form of ‘politicizing’ the underlying motivations of potential criminal charges and, as illustrated above with high certainty, trade political support and loyalty to the regime for immunity from a potential criminal persecution. Given the pronounced character of opportunistic tendencies within this party, as displayed in the form of party defections and the propensity to compromise political goals for short-term strategies, the likelihood of its institutionalization as an organization, even when compared to other more centralized parties, looks grim.

⁴⁶⁰ ‘Ugolovnoe Delo v Otnoshenii Japarova, Chudinova I Drugih – Podrobnosti’, Sputnik.kg. May, 30, 2017, available at: <https://ru.sputnik.kg/politics/20170530/1033603534/podrobnosti-dela-zhaparova-i-chudinova.html>.

⁴⁶¹ ‘7 Minge Jakyn Mongu Korgoogo Muktaj’, Yntymak.kg, Nov.11, 2017, available at: <http://yntymak.kg/7-mige-zhakyn-m-g-korgoogo-muktaj/>.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

Comparing to this, most other parties in Kyrgyzstan still appear to be managed by a single, and often charismatic, leader who tends to secure re-elections by rather formal procedures. In turn, the lack of formal party rules explicating the procedures and methods of leadership selection, conforming to standard norms of intra-party democracy, and actual competition amongst candidates, suggests that party leaders emphasize organizing parties on the basis of centralized and hierarchical leadership structures that are not conducive to promoting leadership accountability, intra-party competition and meaningful deliberation. This organizational strategy may be viewed in the context of a strategic effort by party leaders to retain and expand influence over both internal and external decisions relating to party's affairs and implementing voter mobilization strategies.

5.2.3. Decision-making procedures

Aside from internal candidate and leadership selection decisions, leaders of legislative party factions typically seek, in an effort to preserve the party in public office, to maintain a concerted stance on bargaining decisions regarding the formation of ruling or opposition coalitions and, related to this, political positioning toward the ruling regime. As Back contends, the efficiency of negotiations over coalition formation can be undermined by a 'decentralized authority' that 'often characterize[s] internally democratic parties'⁴⁶³ and high level of factionalism within a party⁴⁶⁴. It was argued particularly that parties employing more inclusive and democratic mechanisms of internal decision-making would be less tempted to easily enter into coalitions given the need to secure consent from broader party activists⁴⁶⁵.

⁴⁶³ Hanna Back, 'Intraparty Politics and Coalition Formation Evidence from Swedish Local Government', (a paper prepared for delivery at the ECPR Joint Sessions in Granada, April 14–19, 2005):5.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

As the parliaments of 2010 and 2015 have shown more vividly, legislative parties that joined the ruling coalitions in similar ways maintained increasingly centralized leadership structures inhibiting the formation of internal dissent and opposition. The propensity for legislative parties to eschew internal deliberation and extensive discussion of party strategies evidently reflects the underlying objectives of party leaders to contain possible challenges of party leadership and preserve an exclusive leadership autonomy over political decisions. Commenting on the expulsion of two members of socialist 'Ata-Meken' party in early 2012 – Jeenbekov and Abdrakhmanov, a local political analyst Mars Sariiev suggested at the time that they were 'expelled because of the competition for party leadership'⁴⁶⁶.

Though both Jeenbekov and Abdrakhmanov indeed figured as notable party members, capable of vying for a future party leadership, it was also evident that, as previously discussed, they clearly favored a more pro-reform oriented right-wing party ideologies and took a principled stand against the growing authoritarian tendencies of the regime formed by then president Atambayev. It was commonly believed at the time that the party's leader Tekebayev had acted as a source of significant political support in the parliament for then president Atambayev in eliminating the parliamentary opposition, associated with the previous regime of president Bakiev. The alleged political collusion was formalized when 'Ata-Meken' party and president Atambayev's SDPK party had formed a consecutive ruling coalition in late 2012 shortly after the expulsion of two notable members. In turn, the near absence of an internal dissent within 'Ata-Meken' party subsequently enabled its leader to steer the party against that same president Atambayev's regime, which it supported in the early stages of consolidation.

⁴⁶⁶ 'Ata-Meken Isklyuchil Dvuh Deputatov iz Svoih Ryadov', Kloop.kg., March, 19, 2012 available at: <https://kloop.kg/blog/2012/03/19/ata-meken-isklyuchil-dvuh-deputatov-iz-svoih-ryadov/>.

The tendency of party leaders to maintain a substantive decisional autonomy over coalition formation and political positioning was furthermore reflected in strategic decisions of parties on the merger with other political parties or political forces for electoral purposes. Viewed in the context of party organizational change and party coalition theories, theoretical explanations of the party merger phenomenon usually explained it with the need to adapt parties in response to a declining popularity and the weakening of parties due to internal splits and individual defections⁴⁶⁷. The likelihood of a political merger as part of party change and adaptation processes also increases with the relative power of the party leadership capable of 'overcom[ing] internal resistance against the proposed party merger'⁴⁶⁸. As the prevailing explanation further posits, the merger with other parties is expected to occur when parties intend on gaining electoral votes in the face of fading public image, internal party splits and individual defections⁴⁶⁹.

The merger between two legislative parties 'Respublika' and 'Ata-Jurt' in 2014 clearly illustrated the cogency of theoretical explanations emphasizing vote-seeking incentives embedded in a party merger phenomenon and the centrality of party leadership in party change and adaptation processes. For both parties, merger negotiations have been preceded by formal and informal defections by notable members that previously managed to garner much electoral support for respective parties. In 2013, for instance, a group of parliament members defected en masse from legislative factions represented by 'Respublika' and 'Ata-Jurt' parties and formed independent legislative groups ('For reforms', 'Onuguu-Progress' and 'Unity and Consent') following the approval of a corresponding law on 'outside of legislative faction' groups signed by the president.

⁴⁶⁷ Coffe Hilde and Rene Torenlvied, 'Explanatory Factors for the Merger of Political Parties' (UC Irvine CSD Working Papers, 2008):1.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

The prevalent view amongst local experts and politicians held that widespread defections occurred following an alleged collusion between legislative defectors and the president over executive appointments and other assurances in return for political support⁴⁷⁰. Shortly afterwards, the leader of the third legislative group ‘Unity and Consent’, and previously a senior member of ‘Respublika’ party, was appointed as the Representative of the Government, an equivalent of a provincial governor position, in Chui province⁴⁷¹. In the meantime, the underlying rationale for the legislative ‘Ata-Jurt’ party, the other party of the merger agreement, was in turn grounded in the fact that its core senior leaders faced corruption charges, further weakening the party’s opposition capabilities and electoral prospects ahead of parliamentary elections in 2015.

Despite some divergence in factors that weakened the two parties, the commonness of opposition statuses in the parliament, as held at least across core leaders, and leader’s visible dominance over party affairs also increased the plausibility of combining efforts to pursue common electoral purposes. In this regard, the shared expert views suggested that the merger of two legislative parties in opposition into a new united ‘Respublika-Ata-Jurt’ party would compensate the declining popularity and preceding internal splits within parties by employing campaign (financial) resources of ‘Respublika’ party’s charismatic leader Omurbek Babanov, a prominent business figure in the past, and the electoral support base of ‘Ata-Jurt’ party in the southern provinces owing to the popularity of its leader Kamchybek Tashiev⁴⁷².

Overall, as with other similar party mergers, there existed a common perception that the merger occurred primarily between the two party leaders, instead of party organizations, as

⁴⁷⁰ Shairbek Juraev in discussion with author, May, 2015.

⁴⁷¹ ‘Kanat Isaev Naznachen Polnomochnym Predstavitelem Pravitel’sstva v Chuiskoi Oblasti’, Argumenti.kg, Feb., 20, 2014, available at: <http://argumenti.kg/novosti/politika/5721-kanat-isaev-naznachen-polnomochnym-predstavitelem-pravitelstva-v-chuyskoy-oblasti.html>.

⁴⁷² ‘Oslablennye “Respublika” i “Ata-Jurt” Prevrashauytsya v Poltikorporatsiyu’, Vb.kg, Oct., 08, 2014, available at: https://www.vb.kg/doc/289040_oslablennye_respyblika_i_ata_jyrt_prevrashautsia_v_politkorporaciu.html

evidenced in the personalized manner of endorsements made by politicians during the inaugural session of the new party and the individualized analysis of merger incentives and political prospects of party leaders provided by local experts. In particular, a local expert Bakyt Baketaev characterized the two leaders as highly 'energetic' and experienced politicians with extensive political background and a combined potential to mobilize broader political forces, whilst also warning of the possibility of a conflict over party leadership⁴⁷³.

In a joint press-conference, 'Respublika' party's leader Babanov in a rather corroborative way admitted in turn that he has been meeting with leaders of other ruling parties to discuss the possibility of a party merger and that the merger with 'Ata-Jurt' party was the most optimal decision for the party 'given its ideological stance and political objectives'⁴⁷⁴. The plausibility and frequency of negotiations over party merger or temporary electoral blocks, both amongst legislative and less popular parties, also imply that party leaders usually manage to sustain a centralized leadership structure that tends to be inimical to a more inclusive and democratic mechanisms of decision-making. The claim made relatedly by Back regarding the reduced likelihood of coalition formation in the context of a 'decentralized authority' and intra-party factionalism seems to equally hold true for other strategic party decisions, including specifically those pertaining to merger with other parties.

Owing to a similar dominance of party leadership and the ability to negotiate with notable members over candidate nominations, the less (non-legislative) popular parties tend to enter into political and electoral alliances along party lines in a more efficient manner. However, for legislative and ruling parties the possibility to preserve political flexibility in terms of political positioning toward the extant regime and negotiations over coalition formation and a potential merger for

⁴⁷³ 'Ob'edinenie "Respubliki" i "Ata-Jurt" - Eto Tolchok Dlya Drugih Partiy, Schitaet Politolog', For.kg, Oct., 20, 2014, available at: <http://for.kg/news-290622-ru.html>.

⁴⁷⁴ 'Video: "Ata-Jurt" I "Respublika" Offitsial'no Ob'yavili ob Ob'edinenii', Kloop.kg, Oct.20, 2014, available at: <https://kloop.kg/blog/2014/10/20/video-ata-zhurt-i-respublika-ofitsialno-ob-yavili-ob-obedinenii/>

electoral purposes emerges in the process of gradual concentration of power within the party leadership in the public office and at the expense of individual or group defections on the part of notable legislative party members.

5.3. Party organization and uncertainty

Based on the previous discussion, and as the recent dynamics of party politics and political competition in Kyrgyzstan attest, the strategic decisions made by party elites regarding party organizational structures and internal decision-making models are made mainly on the basis of immediate political and electoral incentives, rather than broader context of 'political and institutional uncertainty'. Though the concept of uncertainty was operationalized for analytic purposes to connote a more specific timeframe associated with significant political and institutional reforms following the popular uprising and ensuing regime change in 2010, the subsequent reduction of its parameters has not led to substantive changes in the party organizational strategies, as initially hypothesized. In other words, the prevalence of 'non-organizational' strategies across ruling parties for political and electoral purposes has remained largely intact despite gradual re-consolidation of an authoritarian rule by then president Atambayev. In effect, this authoritarian reversal has revitalized the previously practiced patterns of elite competition and voter mobilization, rendering party organizations a sheer formality. As in the past, even within party framework, political and electoral competition continued featuring a high level of personalism and inherently unstable political alliances that have obscured the possibility of building more viable and institutionalized party organizations.

In the meantime, the intensive interviews on the ground conducted in the wake of parliamentary election campaigns in 2015 (prior to this, the emerging authoritarian regime of Atambayev has managed to eliminate major political opposition forces) tend to suggest that despite

the prevailing distrust of parties, there exists a concurrent opinion amongst local party activists that, in principle, parties would remain as crucial instruments of democratic governance⁴⁷⁵. This prevailing view stressing the indispensability or preferability of parties could in practical terms be attributed to a negative experience with presidentialism and associated with it the single-member majority system that arguably contributed to the formation of ‘family-clan’ based governance and served as institutional precursors to past democratic uprisings.

At a fundamental level, these particular empirical observations seem in a way to disconfirm the underlying assumption of political and institutional uncertainty model that the authoritarian reversal correlates with the high likelihood of institutional changes. Implicit in this particular assumption is a teleological presupposition that developing democracies would at some point transition into full-fledged functioning democracies. Based on recurring patterns of regime dynamics in Kyrgyzstan and other post-Soviet countries, and following the logic of Carothers’ critique of ‘transition’ paradigm⁴⁷⁶, however, it can be claimed that so-called developing democracies may in essence represent a distinctive type of political regime, akin to ‘competitive authoritarian regimes’, based on a combination of democratic façade and inherently authoritarian practices.

In the context of party development, this implies that parties as instruments of electing representatives could potentially be employed to formalize the previously operating practices of elite competition and re-structuring and voter mobilization. In practice, parties have demonstrated that the old patterns of personalistic politics and changing political preferences across individual prominent politicians can comply with modern trends in political campaigning in an attempt to accomplish political and electoral objectives. The logic of voter mobilization as emphasizing the

⁴⁷⁵ Anonymous respondent in discussion with the author, June, 2015.

⁴⁷⁶ Thomas Carothers, ‘The End of the Transition Paradigm’, *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.1 (2002).

personality of candidates, marketing and PR strategies and the tendency to change political (party) affiliations driven by vote and office-seeking incentives induce in turn party elites to opt for shorter term political strategies potentially impeding the institutionalization of party organizations.

Meanwhile, the difficulty in building party organizations, based on decentralized coordination structures, extensive regional networks and efficient mechanisms and norms of democratic decision-making (i.e. intra-party democracy), could additionally stem from an exogenous effect of structural and institutional factors conditioning the uneasy context for broader processes of party system institutionalization. The legacy of the communist past, or the 'Leninist' legacy in the post-Soviet region, clearly has had a longer-term and deleterious effect on the subsequent non-existence of social and class-based cleavages that would serve as underlying ideological bases for the stabilization of party systems and inter-party competition following the break-up of former Soviet republics in 1991. In a practical setting, this legacy has been reflected in a uniformly obscure and generalized nature of public (and voter) preferences regarding specific policy issues and a shared expectation of significant social support from the government.

Relatedly, there seems to be also little inclination amongst local business communities to articulate political demands necessitating the need to create a more favorable taxation and business environment. The latter could be in large part attributed to the low levels of broad political (non-electoral) engagement and policy efficacy, both viewed as resultant features of the communist legacy, and the intricate interdependence between public and business sectors affecting the high-level of tolerance across business circles toward the extant corrupt system. The pervasiveness of rampant corruption, combined with the weak rule of law, further appears to reinforce the inimical effect of the communist legacy contributing to a deep distrust of both civic participation and political institutions, including parties.

With the adoption of a revised constitution in 2010 that was popularly claimed to strengthen parliamentarism, there has, however, been a growing distrust and skepticism amongst the general public over the necessity of parties for effective and democratic governance. It was claimed particularly that of late public appointments, including non-political administrative posts, are made primarily on the basis of party affiliations or closeness to party leaders, though in effect that could be a standard subject matter of coalition agreements, and that parties usually pursue particularistic interests by obscuring ideologically-driven issues and campaign platforms. Despite common distrust toward parties, however, the overwhelming public view still stresses the preferability of parties due to past negative experiences with presidentialism and alternative voting systems, though populist statements by notable candidates calling to adopt an alternative 'non-party list' system as part of broader shift toward presidential form government are made infrequently.

Beyond broader structural precursors, or lack thereof, for the formation of weaker and un-institutionalized party organizations, such as the absence of cleavage structures and the persistent effect of the communist legacy for political behavior, the institutional context of party formation, as stressed and expounded by van Biezen, additionally seems to provide a complementary explanation for the types of organizational strategies adopted by parties in developing democracies. It was argued that the institutional environment within which parties in developing democracies originated and began to operate contrasted the sequencing of organizational evolution and development of party organizations in Western Europe⁴⁷⁷. In particular, the contention held that the evolution of Western European parties was preceded by the necessity for the newly emerging parties to

⁴⁷⁷ Ingrid Van Biezen, *Political Parties in New Democracies: Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003):18.

establish extra-parliamentary organizations in the context of formerly exclusive and still highly contestable political system favoring broad public engagement in order to mobilize the new enfranchised masses following the extension of suffrage⁴⁷⁸.

Conversely, developing democracies across Southern and Eastern Europe supposedly took a somewhat divergent evolutionary trajectory of party formation and development, whereby inchoate parties sought and acquired 'parliamentary representation' and public offices prior to building extra-parliamentary party organizations⁴⁷⁹. The sequencing of organizational development of parties furthermore explains the prioritization of retaining the party's 'public face' at the expense of building extensive party organizations based on stable party-voter linkages and the relative dominance of senior party leaders holding public offices within party structures⁴⁸⁰. In a political setting, and against the backdrop of nascent social cleavages and owing to a peculiarity of political processes unfolding during early stages of post-communist democratic transition, the emergent debates amongst political actors, typically centered on institutional and constitutional designs, featured high on the political agenda⁴⁸¹.

The underlying assumptions and theoretical claims made by van Biezen and generally emphasizing an institutional nature of party formation in developing democracies clearly provide a compelling contextual basis for the analysis of organization-building and party formation in Kyrgyzstan. Initially, the first parties, including 'Ata-Meken', SDPK, and 'Erkin' (Free) Kyrgyzstan, indeed emerged out of a broader pro-democracy movement that following the independence in 1991 provided an alternative political platform with the goal of dissociating itself from the local

⁴⁷⁸ Ingrid Van Biezen, *Political Parties in New Democracies: Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003):29.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, 31.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, 33.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

Communist party and regime, though with less fierce and polarized political confrontation, characteristically observed in Central Europe. Meanwhile, as in other post-communist regions, the newly emerging parties at the time typically featured party leaders, who previously held public offices as legislators or soon after obtained individual legislative seats based on a single-member district voting system.

With the gradual shift toward a full party-list proportional representation system in 2007, the tendency for party leaders to employ party organizations to retain the public offices and prioritize personalized agenda to improve political prospects by withholding from building extra-parliamentary party organizations still remained strong. In the face of broader structural and institutional factors, such as the absence of politicized social cleavages and the particular sequencing of organizational development of ruling parties, and given the logic of modern campaigning trends, ruling parties pragmatically seek to maintain organizational flexibility, based on loose intra-party coordination structures and 'un-democratic' mechanisms of decision-making, for both political and electoral purposes. In effect, there remains a possibility for office-seeking party elites and aspiring politicians to gain or maximize electoral votes by merging with other parties and political forces without investing in extensive party organizations and if office-seeking incentives take primacy then there is a way to accomplish it without party channels and elections.

Conclusion

In general, the ways in which ruling parties in Kyrgyzstan evolved and developed over time both institutionally and organizationally prove to conform to the prevailing empirical patterns of party formation and organizational development across emerging democracies. Substantively, as the analysis of empirical findings suggest, party elites do not tend to prioritize investments in the formation of extensive extra-parliamentary organizations and internal democratic structures associated with higher levels of party institutionalization. In practical terms, this has been particularly reflected in inadequate or obscure mechanisms of coordination and communication across party levels and the limited character of participation amongst broader selectorate in party activities and internal decision-making processes. As interviews with party activists on the ground reveal, both local and regional party branches, whilst exhibiting some variation in local party presence intensified during elections, typically operate without direct oversight and coordination from the central party offices over local party affairs. Though in effect this also should provide a certain degree of decisional autonomy for local party activists, the near absence of intra-party coordination and formalized mechanisms of communication with party leaders evidently serves as an impediment to building a strong grassroots activist base and further establishing stable party-voter linkages.

The organizational difficulties facing the party branches on the ground clearly contribute to a negative reputation of parties as serving particularistic interests of party leaders and also reflect the formal and generalized character of legal regulations of party activities envisaged in both party laws and individual party statutes. In substantive terms, the Law on political parties appears to provide extended details and requirements on formal registration and party financing, whilst prescribing no explicit rules and regulations ensuring that democratic principles of leadership

accountability, transparency and inclusive participation are embedded in party's internal governance structures and decision-making procedures. In reality, and in a way reflecting this in practice, ruling parties seem to be increasingly organized based on a nationally centralized organizational structure with party leaders exercising decisive control and authority, both formally and informally, over candidate selection and externally oriented political decisions, including on coalition formation, political positioning toward the ruling regime and a merger with other parties.

The willingness of party leaders to maintain centralized authority comes at the expense of obscuring investments in building viable party organizations and internal democratic structures viewed as critical measures of high level of party institutionalization. However, this organizational strategy commonly prioritized by party elites seems to comply with set political and electoral objectives. For both legislative and inchoate parties, strategic considerations and choices regarding party organization building need to be thus viewed in the context of predominantly office seeking, and hence vote-maximization, incentives and the possibility for leaders of governing parties to influence executive appointments and increase bargaining power in elite political competition. The resultant political maneuverability, accomplished by disinvesting in extra-parliamentary organizations and that serves as an intermediary condition for pursuing political and electoral purposes, was further strengthened by the possibility for party leaders to attract candidate members, represented predominantly by prominent business figures or former senior public servants, with less pronounced ideological convictions and tendencies to challenge the party leadership by adopting alternative issue positions.

Whilst the growing pattern of businesses to engage in politics, including in party politics, is indicative of a broader interwoven nexus between business and political interests characterizing amongst other features the current political system in the country, the tendency for party leaders to

trade candidate nominations for party campaign contributions made by business figures also enhances owing to modern trends in election campaigns, stressing the critical need for parties to raise substantial financial resources for organizing efficient marketing campaigns. The parliamentary election campaigns in Kyrgyzstan, particularly those conducted since adopting a full party-list voting system in 2007, demonstrated that successful party mobilization of voters for electoral gains can occur by efficiently utilizing campaign financial resources to increase media visibility of party leaders and notable candidates based on marketing and advertising strategies and resorting to infrequent clientelistic practices and irregular direct contacts with voters that may contrast with programmatic party-voter linkages.

In a broader context, the analysis of party elite strategies in emerging democracies on organization-building should also consider the relevance of longer term social and institutional factors affecting the observable patterns of party formation and organizational development. Though the uncertain context of transition, as posited by political and institutional uncertainty model, could certainly be viewed as a 'distal' contextual factor shaping the behavior of political actors in the early stages of democratic transition, observing and determining empirically its causal effect on weak party organizations proves a difficult task. On top of that, party elites generally seem to find efficient ways of adapting within the context of current political regime showing in turn no clear signs of moving toward consolidated versions of democracy or authoritarianism.

Instead, as evidenced through empirical findings and observations on leading parties in Kyrgyzstan, the behavior and strategic choices of party elites can be potentially explained by the logic of voter mobilization shaped by modern campaign trends and with reference to broader social and institutional framework. The external environment within which party organizations in post-Soviet countries operate owing to the communist legacy proves to further complicate the possibility

for the formation of institutionalized parties competing and organizing along politicized social cleavages. Finally, the fact that political elites in emerging democracies originally established parties with the intention of preserving the public office suggests that the institutional and genetic features of party formation could be treated as complementary factors influencing the party elite strategies for organizational development.

Chapter 6. Uncertainty and party mobilization in Kyrgyzstan.

Introduction

The strategic choices made by party elites with regard to party organizational models in both established and developing democracies are profoundly conditioned by the prevailing logic and patterns of voter mobilization. In consolidated democracies, parties characteristically build strong party-voter linkages and campaign on *programmatic* appeals to mobilize electoral support, whilst the pervasiveness of *political clientelism* predominantly practiced in developing democracies, tend to typify, or associate with, a low level of party institutionalization⁴⁸². In the meantime, a growing theoretical body of literature specifically addressing the patterns of party-voter linkages suggests based on modified variants of political clientelism theories that building a certain degree of democracy and party organization is essential before political actors can credibly commit to pre-electoral promises and ensure a sustainable operation of clientelistic practices⁴⁸³.

The rationale behind this proposition lies in the facts that contingency-based clientelistic exchanges usually involve allocating a substantial amount of public (and private) resources and services by political actors and maintaining a compact network of 'local operatives', or local party organizations, in charge of distributing, monitoring and enforcing 'clientelistic benefits' to voters and followers⁴⁸⁴. Relatedly, Kitschelt and Kselman further contend that the gradual shift from a low-income to a middle-income economy tends to contribute to the resilience of clientelistic practices of

⁴⁸² Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand, 'Party Institutionalization in New Democracies', *Party Politics* 8, no.1 (2002).

⁴⁸³ Herbert Kitschelt and Daniel M. Kselman, 'Economic Development, Democratic Experience, and Political Parties' Linkage Strategies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013); Wolfgang C. Muller, 'Political Institutions and Linkage Strategies', in *Patrons or Policies? Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, ed. by Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴⁸⁴ Kitschelt and Kselman, 'Economic Development, Democratic Experience and Political Parties' Linkage Strategies', 1456.

electoral mobilization as parties gain broader access to state resources and develop resistance to exogenous economic shocks, hitherto inhibiting the possibility for political actors to make long-term credible commitments⁴⁸⁵. In addition to linking the prevalence and stabilization of clientelistic networks to economic conditions, the overall argument also postulates that with democratic experience clientelistic practices will be replaced by commitments to programmatic party policies⁴⁸⁶.

Building on this purported effect of economic uncertainty and democratic experience on the ensuing patterns and strategies of party-voter linkages, Lupu and Riedl claim that positive changes in economic and democratic parameters will reduce the overall uncertainty over time, but that still some level of political uncertainty will tend to induce the establishment of both clientelistic and programmatic linkage mechanisms to consolidate electoral support⁴⁸⁷. Though the prevalence of clientelistic practices, and related political patronage systems involving in turn an exchange of 'public sector jobs for political and electoral support', broadly tends to be higher in low income economies distinguished by higher levels of economic inequality⁴⁸⁸ and poverty⁴⁸⁹, the theoretical model of party-based political clientelism offered by Kitschelt and Kselman provides a more nuanced explanation of the intricate, diverse and often inconsistent patterns of clientelistic networks in new and less economically developed democracies. More specifically, it posits that building credible and effective clientelistic networks would be contingent on both the growing level of economic development accompanied by reduced economic uncertainty and the conduct of repeat democratic

⁴⁸⁵ Herbert Kitschelt and Daniel M. Kselman, 'Economic Development, Democratic Experience, and Political Parties' Linkage Strategies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1453.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, 1454.

⁴⁸⁷ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1354.

⁴⁸⁸ Thomas Markussen, 'Inequality and Political Clientelism: Evidence from South India', *The Journal of Developmental Studies* 47, no.11 (2011).

⁴⁸⁹ Tina Hilgers, 'Causes and Consequences of Political Clientelism: Mexico's PRD in Comparative Perspective', *Latin American Politics and Society* 50, no.4 (2008).

elections⁴⁹⁰. In the latter case, it is presumed that owing to the newness and fluidity of party organizations, 'party system volatility', observed in younger democracies, and the resultant inability to make credible long-term commitments political actors will be disincentivized to invest in stable and credible clientelistic networks⁴⁹¹.

Though the model of political and institutional uncertainty draws heavily on Kitschelt and Kselman's theoretical model emphasizing the causal effect of political and economic determinants on party-linkage mechanisms, it further suggests, whilst disregarding the implications of reduced economic uncertainty, that some political uncertainty will prompt the usage of both clientelistic and programmatic linkage mechanisms⁴⁹². The analysis below, largely consistent with Kitschelt and Kselman's theoretical arguments, demonstrates that party mobilization in Kyrgyzstan, a country with low income economy and inchoate democracy, tends to occur based on the deployment of loosely organized, transient and ephemeral clientelistic networks and the application of diverse forms of clientelistic practices, including political patronage, direct vote-buying and sponsoring infrastructure development services.

Meanwhile, the variation in the extent of employing clientelistic and patronage practices, often involving one-time interactions and credible commitment problems, observed across parties was due to a combination of mainly endogenous factors, in particular the control of state resources by the ruling party or the perceived political affiliation with the ruling regime, the availability of campaign (clientelistic) resources to mobilize local brokers and voters and the perception of electoral prospects of parties viewed as a determinative factor in recruiting local notables.

Furthermore, in the absence of local party organizations across the country, parties, including

⁴⁹⁰ Herbert Kitschelt and Daniel M. Kselman, 'Economic Development, Democratic Experience, and Political Parties' Linkage Strategies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1467.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

noticeably the nascent parties with substantial campaign resources and long-term political ambitions, are evidently compelled to resort in systematic ways to clientelistic practices and strategies to mobilize electoral support. On the other hand, the perceived reduction of political and institutional uncertainty that coincided with the consolidation of an authoritarian rule by then president Atambayev has not seemingly produced any significant and observable effect on the prevailing patterns of clientelistic behavior, nor has it led to a combined use of both clientelistic practices and programmatic party appeals, as theoretically expected.

Beyond clientelistic strategies, however, and as corroborated by multiple interviews with local party activists and local commentators and an empirical analysis of parliamentary election campaigns in 2015, parties tend to concurrently, and presumably to a greater extent, emphasize campaign visibility and marketing strategies to mobilize electoral support. In effect, there seems to be a fairly robust correlation between marketing and media-related campaign expenses incurred by parties and election outcomes. Additionally, the efficiency of marketing and media campaign strategies for mobilization purposes, regarded as the prevailing feature of modern, and post-modern, political campaign trends, alongside professionalization and nationalization of election campaigns, explains the critical need for party elites to raise funding for campaign purposes and hence attract notable members for campaign contributions and the strategic inessentiality of alternatively building extensive party organizations.

The chapter consists of three substantive parts. The first part will delve into the practical operation of clientelistic practices commonly employed by parties in Kyrgyzstan for political and electoral mobilization purposes. In practical terms, it will be followed by an examination of select examples and incidences of clientelistic practices with the goal of evaluating the purported effect of political and institutional uncertainty on the prevalence of clientelistic strategies. The second part

will attempt to provide a more thorough illustration of political campaign processes and uncover the legal and broader institutional and social precursors to the efficiency and predominance of modern political campaign strategies. This part will end with a discussion of electoral campaigns and its effect on the strategic choices for party mobilization and organization-building models. The last part will situate the empirical findings and observations on party mobilization strategies in the context of broader argumentative framework and discuss both theoretical and practical implications of research findings and conclusions.

6.1. Theoretical perspectives on political clientelism

The normative claims of clientelism commonly rest on the assumption that it exerts a deleterious effect on the overall quality of democracy⁴⁹³ by eroding political accountability⁴⁹⁴, representation⁴⁹⁵ and genuine electoral competition⁴⁹⁶. Based on dyadic, or binary, contingent and asymmetrical relationship structures⁴⁹⁷, clientelistic practices, as they specifically relate to electoral mobilization, involve the distribution of both private and public goods and services by political actors (labeled for analytic purposes as ‘patrons’) and mediating local notables (‘brokers’) to prospective voters (‘clients’) in return for electoral and political support⁴⁹⁸. The resultant patron-client relationship, which also tends to be both iterative and continued, contrasts with programmatic party-voter

⁴⁹³ Susan C Stokes, ‘Political Clientelism’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, ed. by Robert E. Goodin (Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴⁹⁴ Clara Volintiru, ‘Clientelism and Democratic Accountability’, (a paper submitted to the PSA Graduate Network Conference, December, 2010).

⁴⁹⁵ Saska Ruth and Maria Spirova, ‘Political Clientelism and the Quality of Public Policy’ (ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, 2014).

⁴⁹⁶ Dirk Tomsa and Andreas Ufen, *Party Politics in Southeast Asia: Clientelism and Electoral Competition in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines* (Routledge, 2012).

⁴⁹⁷ Wolfgang Muno, ‘Conceptualizing and Measuring Clientelism’, (a paper presented at the workshop “Neopatrimonialism in Various World Regions”, GIGA German Institute of Global and Areas Studies, Hamburg. August 23, 2010).

⁴⁹⁸ Herbert Kitschelt, ‘Linkages Between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities’, *Comparative Political Studies* 33, no.6-7 (2000).

linkages ensuring that elected politicians are held accountable, based on the evaluation of largely credible campaign promises and past performance, and made responsive to voter preferences over public policies⁴⁹⁹. Ruth and Spirova explain this with reference to institutional mechanisms inherently embedded in programmatic linkages that structure electoral competition and determine the programmatic bases for evaluating the performance of politicians based on *accountability* and *responsiveness* criteria⁵⁰⁰. In contrast, 'clientelistic parties do not offer programmatic orientation to their voters nor do they provide for mechanisms of interest aggregation'⁵⁰¹, which would inform voter decisions.

The detrimental effect of persistent clientelistic networks, beyond democratic outcomes, also extends to public policy outputs as they typically entail, in an exclusive manner, allocating clientelistic benefits, acquired predominantly from public resources, to an exclusive group of 'clients' (party followers and voters), rather than distributing or re-distributing 'public goods to a broader set of constituents'⁵⁰². In this regard, and given the relative advantage due to the access or control over public (state) resources gained by virtue of holding public offices, incumbent candidates and ruling parties also tend to be more prone and capable to establish durable and efficient clientelistic networks, further undermining efforts to promote genuine democratic competition. The latter effect proves to be particularly pronounced in newly emerging democracies, where 'old' clientelistic structures and relationships continue to persist despite the installment of formal democratic institutions designed to structure political competition.

⁴⁹⁹Herbert Kitschelt, 'Linkages Between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities', *Comparative Political Studies* 33, no.6-7 (2000):846.

⁵⁰⁰ Saska Ruth and Maria Spirova, 'Political Clientelism and the Quality of Public Policy' (ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, 2014):3.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Valeria Brusco, Marcelo Nazareno, Susan C. Stokes, 'Selective Incentives and Electoral Mobilization: Evidence from Argentina', (research project supported by Russell Sage Foundation, 2003).

On a related note, the prevalence and resilience of clientelistic practices, including in democratizing and prospering societies, seem to invalidate the previous presumptions based on developmental and cultural accounts that 'economic development and industrialization would undermine the saliency of clientelistic practices'⁵⁰³. Instead, the 'old' clientelistic structures have shown to remain resilient and re-surface, albeit in a more direct and personalized manner and based on increasingly material and long-term relationship patterns, by distorting or complementing formal institutions and further reinforcing the broader effect of 'informality' in emerging democracies⁵⁰⁴.

In the meantime, the sources and determinants of political clientelism in democratizing societies extend beyond socio-economic factors, such as inequality, corruption and poverty, and relatedly include political institutions and electoral rules that 'encourage clientelism' and hold important implications for party organizational structures⁵⁰⁵. As Stokes noted, electoral systems encouraging 'personalized' campaigns, conceived of as making personalistic appeals as opposed to personalized and direct contacts with voters, usually entail 'mass media appeals' and a 'highly centralized party structure'⁵⁰⁶. By contrast, campaigns prioritizing clientelistic orientations 'are at odds' with personalized campaign appeals and require building decentralized party structures to 'sustain an army of brokers' ensuring the compliance of clients, or voters⁵⁰⁷. In a more systematic way, the causal nexus between electoral rules and the prevalence of clientelistic practices relative to programmatic party appeals was examined by Pellicer and Wagner, who, based on the analysis of parliamentary elections and parties in Morocco, established that clientelistic parties, comprised of

⁵⁰³ Sabri Sayari, 'Clientelism and Patronage in Turkish Politics and Society', (2016):2, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291969602_Clientelism_and_Patronage_in_Turkish_Politics_and_Society.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Susan C Stokes, 'Political Clientelism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, ed. by Robert E. Goodin (Oxford University Press, 2011):16.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, 17.

prominent 'local notables', tend to be more efficient and prevalent in 'majoritarian systems than in proportional ones'⁵⁰⁸. On the other hand, parties emphasizing programmatic appeals could be more advantageous and competitive under proportional systems with large district magnitudes and closed party lists, reducing the incentives for 'local patrons' to mobilize own clients⁵⁰⁹.

The presumed effect of electoral institutions on the patterns of clientelistic behavior proves noteworthy as evidenced in the dynamics and evolution of electoral competition in Kyrgyzstan. The variation in the extent and pattern types of clientelistic practices, observed over the past two decades in the country, was clearly, and in part, due to changes in electoral systems and rules influencing the incentives of political actors as they consistently pursued to maximize electoral prospects. More specifically, the majority vote system, employed for parliamentary elections until 2007 and whereby candidates ran independently to represent constituencies, was generally associated with voter mobilization strategies involving media, through public television, banners, leaflets, newspaper ads etc., and personalistic appeals (charisma), rallies, direct contacts and meetings with potential voters, distribution of private goods and services and alleged practices of illicit vote buying. With the adoption of a full party-list proportional representation system since 2007 though, there has been a growing trend of exploiting so-called 'administrative' (or state) resources by ruling 'Ak-Jol (Bright Path) party, led by then president Bakiyev, for broader efforts to consolidate an authoritarian regime in the context of formal party framework.

On top of this pattern that remained fairly consistent ever since, the subsequent mobilization campaigns, particularly following 2010 parliamentary elections, demonstrated the growing efficiency of media and marketing strategies, the weakening nature of traditional and direct

⁵⁰⁸ M. Pellicer and E. Wegner, 'Electoral Rules and Clientelistic Parties: A Regression Discontinuity Approach', (A Southern Africa Labor and Development Research Unit Working Paper 76, Cape Town: SALDRU, University of Cape Town, 2012):2-3.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

ties with voters and the employment of a range of clientelistic practices, including infrastructure development services, alleged and direct vote buying and often hidden practices of political patronage. The non-direct character of prevalent and illicit practices, akin to clientelism, and involving one-time interactions, in turn suggests that clientelistic relationship structures emerge as largely transient and ephemeral, further contributing to credible commitment problems, inadequate internal accountability and the weakness of party organizational structures. Consistent with Stokes' theoretical expectations, loosely structured practices of electoral clientelism systematically employed by parties in Kyrgyzstan for voter mobilization purposes are invoked as part of broader electoral strategies, also accompanied by personalized party appeals and highly centralized party organizational structures. On the other hand, theoretical propositions made by Lupu and Riedl with reference to the implications of political and institutional uncertainty for party mobilization and competition, in particular that institutional uncertainty may induce political actors to 'pursue a mix of [clientelistic and programmatic] strategies'⁵¹⁰, seem implausible considering the absence of emerging conditions for political campaigns to be organized along programmatic appeals and policies.

6.2. The evolution of informal practices in Kyrgyzstan

The bulk of the literature on regime dynamics and purported 'democratic transition' in Kyrgyzstan and broadly Central Asian region typically underscores the analytic relevance of salient informal practices and institutions for theoretical understanding of political and elite competition in the region⁵¹¹. This prevailing trend in research over the past two decades reflects the shared consensus

⁵¹⁰ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1352.

⁵¹¹ Kathleen Collins, 'The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories', *World Politics* 56, no.2 (2004); Scott Radnitz, 'What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?', *Journal of Democracy* 17, no.2 (2006).

amongst scholars of Central Asian politics that informal practices and networks in the region remained largely pervasive and potent in a subversive way notwithstanding the alleged fact that ‘the Soviet state attempted to modernize Central Asia by eliminating clans’⁵¹². A model of ‘clan politics’ famously proposed by Collins, and that in many ways influenced subsequent research of the region, posited notably that the resurgence of pre-Soviet clan networks has been the most important factor in explaining the growing convergence of authoritarian regime trajectories taken in the region following the waves of independence in early 1990s⁵¹³.

Conceptually, the term ‘clans’ is defined as involving affective and kinship relations, and therefore, as the model proposes, needs to be contrasted with clientelism, whereby the exchanges of goods/services for political support are ‘based on need’⁵¹⁴. The defining feature of clan networks as based on imagined affective ties instead approximates clans to broader tribal groups, i.e. pre-modern and informal kin-based social organizations that in the past likened nomadic Kyrgyz and Kazakh. As Collins argues, clan networks that supposedly constituted broader tribes, survived through the Soviet rule by adapting to ‘repressive modern states’, in the context of late imposition of formal and modernizing (Soviet) state institutions, and gained prominence again as a result of weakening state capacity in the wake of Soviet Union’s collapse⁵¹⁵. Lastly, the model suggests that the consolidation of clan networks in modern times occurs in response to weak formal power institutions and serves as a determinative factor in ensuring regime durability based on patterned structures of ‘resource governance’⁵¹⁶.

⁵¹² Kathleen Collins, ‘The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories’, *World Politics* 56, no.2 (2004):225.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

In recent times, however, the ‘clan politics’ model has been increasingly problematized⁵¹⁷ or criticized for providing insufficient analytic leverage that would enable understanding the complex and multi-faceted patterns of political competition and regime dynamics across the region⁵¹⁸. Based on an examination of kinship networks in Kyrgyzstan, and stressing the limitations of ‘ethnographic considerations’ that informed in important ways the construction of original ‘clans politics’ model, Gullette finds, whilst also operationalizing the concept of clans as based on tribal identities and perceived genealogical bonds, that ‘tribalism’ in Kyrgyzstan ‘...does not describe political factions, rather, is a discursive tactic’⁵¹⁹. As noted specifically, the term ‘tribalism’ has turned into a ‘a catch-all’ reference term, often implying derogatory forms of providing particularistic services, such ‘favoritism, nepotism and personal connections’, invoked to build connections to further personal goals and establish genealogical ‘relatedness’⁵²⁰. In political and daily life, the genealogical or other non-kinship-based connections, as further admitted, do not seem to have practical significance as tribal or ‘clan’ groups do not frequently figure as sources of economic support⁵²¹. The latter in turn supports the empirical findings of McMann on the prevalence of common practices in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan of ‘seeking help from government officials’⁵²² and the employment of ‘an array of informal techniques, including bribes, personal connections, and promises of political support’⁵²³.

⁵¹⁷ Edward Schatz, ‘Reconceptualizing clans: Kinship networks and statehood in Kazakhstan’, *Nationalities Papers* 33, no.2 (2005).

⁵¹⁸ F.M. Sjoberg, ‘Competitive Elections in Authoritarian States: Weak States, Strong Elites, and Fractional Societies in Central Asia and Beyond’, (a PhD thesis submitted to the Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, Uppsala, 2011); David Gullette, ‘Chapter 3: The Problems of the “Clan” Politics Model of Central Asian Statehood: A Call for Alternative Pathways for Research’, in *Stable Outside, Fragile Inside?*, ed. by Emilian Kavalski (Routledge, 2010).

⁵¹⁹ Gullette, ‘Chapter 3: The Problems of the “Clan” Politics Model of Central Asian Statehood’, 55.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵²² Kelly M McMann, ‘Bribery, Favoritism, and Clientelism; Evidence from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan’, in *Corruption as a Last Resort: Adapting to the Market in Central Asia*, ed. by Kelly M. McMann (Cornell University Press, 2014):36.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*

In addition, and whilst validly underscoring the salience of informal social and political practices against the backdrop of institutional weaknesses, the 'clans politics' model also tends to overemphasize the possibilities to observably define 'ethnographic' characteristics of 'clans' and hence subsume under informal institutions, or organizations, based on patterned interaction and relationship structures. In effect, as with clientelism, the prevailing informal practices demonstrated that informal relationships underpinning political competition could be multi-layered and based on changing and transient patterns, shaped in part by interactions with formal institutions, including electoral systems and rules, and political configuration.

Furthermore, in both the social and political realm, the regional north-south divide appears to be a significant factor fostering social 'relatedness', more than tribal identities suggested by Gullette, and shaping political landscape. Reflecting long-time traditional differences in cultural and socio-economic peculiarities, the north-south cleavage has consistently exerted a considerable effect on election outcomes, notably during presidential elections, served as a political leverage in crisis times for elite consolidation and popular mobilization purposes, and affected the recent surge in the formation of regional parties, such as southern-based 'Ata-Jurt' party. In the meantime, the presumed effect of 'regionalism' on political competition, albeit with a potential to resurge in times of intense power struggle, should be viewed with caution.

Though the regional factor evidently shapes the dynamics of elite competition and political (party) attachments, informal practices and relationships in politics speculatively implicated with regional, tribal or provincial identities often tend to be reified and conflated with political loyalty, especially as applied to the ruling regime or clan. In higher power echelons, the primacy of political loyalty in distributing state resources and reinforcing the authoritarian regime was evident in past presidencies, though there was a widespread allegation at the time that president Akayev's, as well

as Bakiyev's, close relatives also influenced political and economic decision-making. In other words, it is plausible to assert that instead of clan networks, or tribal groups, based supposedly on similar bargaining power, patterned interactions and structures and perceived kinship ties, competing for state resources, there was a tendency to establish a ruling political clan by past presidents with significant state resources (for example, 'Bakiyev's clan') in an effort to consolidate authoritarian regimes. The ruling clans, led by presidents, clearly resorted to informal practices and deals to co-opt, and contain, political opposition, but providing access to state resources or other regime favors (e.g. protection from legal persecution) was primarily conditional on maintaining political loyalty and continued political support to the ruling regime.

Meanwhile, a new wave of research highlighting the centrality of informal networks in politics of Kyrgyzstan has emerged following the popular mobilization in 2005 that successfully brought down the incumbent president Akayev⁵²⁴. Whilst previous research underscored the need to examine informal practices and networks, such as clans, for the purpose of tracing the dynamics and patterns of national elite competition for state resources, there also emerged complementary arguments viewing informal local networks as crucial factors in causing the outbreak of mass mobilization, dubbed as 'Tulip Revolution'. Radnitz argued in this regard that mass mobilization was the culminating outcome of local protests instigated by 'the compatriots (*zemlyaki*) of the disaffected candidates'⁵²⁵, who protested against allegedly rampant electoral fraud and manipulation in favor of pro-incumbent candidates from 'Alga-Kyrgyzstan' party⁵²⁶. In the meantime, the fragmentation of local protests was further explained based on the variation in the

⁵²⁴ Azamat Temirkulov, 'Informal actors and institutions in mobilization: the periphery in the 'Tulip Revolution'', in 'Domestic and International Perspectives on Kyrgyzstan's 'Tulip Revolution': Motives, Mobilization and Meanings', ed. by Sally N. Cummings, *Central Asian Survey* 27, no.3-4 (2008); Scott Radnitz, 'What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?', *Journal of Democracy* 17, no.2 (2006).

⁵²⁵ Radnitz, 'What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?', 137.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

extent of 'informal interpersonal ties' that mobilized close and extended relatives and acquaintances in support of candidates and patronage-based material goods and services provided by candidates 'while in office' to local compatriots in return for electoral support⁵²⁷.

Drawing upon the literature on the interaction between formal and informal institutions in new democracies, Temirkulov contends, in a similar vein, that informal actors and traditional institutions 'played a significant role' in mass mobilization, more so than other factors, including public discontent over the electoral fraud and repressive authoritarian regime of then president Akayev⁵²⁸. It was argued that losing candidates mobilized local 'patronage' networks and related *aksakals*, or local influential elders, and women by distributing (promises of) material benefits and solidary incentives for broad participation⁵²⁹. The theoretical argument further integrates an explanation modeling the dynamics of mobilization and variations in specific types of incentives for participation, which substantively demonstrate that losing candidates usually elicited participation in local protests by distributing material incentives and, as protests grew to regional and national level, unifying opposition forces, represented by prominent opposition candidates as well as regime defectors, increasingly emphasized largely intangible solidary and 'purposive' (i.e. regime change etc.) incentives.

Though informal interpersonal networks at local level certainly proved instrumental in the early stages of protest mobilization, theoretical claims regarding the centrality of informal networks and organizations fall short of determining explanatory factors triggering mass mobilization and the effect of contextual political environment conditioning the success of mass protest outcomes. In

⁵²⁷ Scott Radnitz, 'What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?', *Journal of Democracy* 17, no.2 (2006):137.

⁵²⁸ Azamat Temirkulov, 'Informal actors and institutions in mobilization: the periphery in the 'Tulip Revolution'', in 'Domestic and International Perspectives on Kyrgyzstan's 'Tulip Revolution': Motives, Mobilization and Meanings', ed.by Sally N. Cummings, *Central Asian Survey* 27, no.3-4 (2008):332.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid*, 326.

2000, a leading opposition figure at the time Felix Kulov, former Vice President and Minister of Internal Affairs, was defeated, despite leading in the first round, in single mandate elections in Kara-Buura constituency (Talas province), an election outcome that, as OSCE/ODIRH Election Observation Mission reported, was due to 'systematic fraud, committed by state and election authorities'⁵³⁰. Soon after, a group of Kara-Buura constituency voters and residents took to the streets to stage continued protests and then hunger strikes against alleged electoral fraud and later the detention of Kulov on corruption charges. Meanwhile, similar voting irregularities committed against other opposition figures, including de-registration of prominent opposition candidates before the first round of elections, have not led to mass protests resonating across the country. In an interview, Emil Aliyev, the deputy leader and campaign manager of 'Ar-Namys' party, founded by Felix Kulov, shared that the choice of that particular constituency was made based on its high protest potential, contributed by severe grievances against the regime, and the initial expectation that local protests might turn into a broader political opposition movement⁵³¹.

In other words, and despite forming relatively strong cliental ties at the time between local notables and constituencies, local informal networks proved in systematic ways to produce causal effects on political processes and outcomes, including voting choices, protest and electoral mobilization and elite competition, only when other related contextual and institutional factors are at play. More specifically, in the context of mass mobilization in 2005 that led to the downfall of president Akayev, an in-depth analysis of causal factors explaining the outbreak of local and then nationwide protests needs to involve examining the triggering effect of *rampant* electoral fraud in

⁵³⁰ 'Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 20 February and 12 March, 2000', Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/117852>.

⁵³¹ Emil Aliev in discussion with the author, April, 2015.

causing mass mobilization⁵³². In substantive terms, the mobilizing effect of manipulated elections tend to be efficient owing to the potential of 'stolen', or manipulated, elections to create a 'community of robbed voters' and provide a conducive platform for opposition unity and mobilization⁵³³. Beyond overcoming collective action problems and generating mobilizational conditions for a revolutionary situation, manipulated elections further could lead to successful protest outcomes in new democracies, conditioned to varying degrees by the severity of public grievances against the regime, the competitiveness and closeness of elections and the availability of limited media and political space for opposition forces⁵³⁴.

In the meantime, the effect of hitherto adopted constitutional changes, envisaging the formation of a unicameral parliament with 75 members elected from single mandate constituencies, in triggering the facilitating role of local informal networks in protest mobilization was equally noteworthy. However, unlike previously, when 15% of the lower house of parliament (or 8 members out of 105 members in both houses) was filled by candidates from the party list, this time the candidates 'competed on a majority system' using single member constituencies and enabling to run independently⁵³⁵. Most importantly, the mobilizing effect of informal networks was reinforced by highly intense competition for legislative seats (7 to 1), and hence the triggering effect of rampant electoral fraud, growing political opposition toward the ruling regime (manifested also in regime defections) and the wider context of social discontent over systemic corruption and poverty.

⁵³² Emir Kulov, 'March 2005: parliamentary elections as a catalyst of protests', in *Domestic and International Perspectives on Kyrgyzstan's 'Tulip Revolution': Motives, Mobilization and Meanings*, ed. by Sally N. Cummings, *Central Asian Survey* 27, no.3-4 (2008).

⁵³³ Philipp Kuntz, and Mark R. Thompson. 'More than Just the Final Straw: Stolen Elections as Revolutionary Triggers', *Comparative Politics* 41, no.3 (2009).

⁵³⁴ Kulov, 'March 2005: parliamentary elections as a catalyst of protests', 343.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

The discussion above suggests thus that the presumed political implications of informal practices and power networks in Kyrgyzstan are not straightforward given the complex and contingent interactions with other causal and contextual factors. Though the pervasiveness of informal practices and power relationships is evident across political, economic and social dimensions, a recurring pattern influenced by both the communist legacy and the weakness of formal institutional frameworks, they also still tend to manifest in both predictable and unpredictable ways whilst interacting with related contextual factors and involve largely fluid, unstable and dynamic patterns of contingent intra-network relationships. This implies that, similarly to other informal practices in politics, clientelistic practices in Kyrgyzstan employed for party mobilization purposes need to be viewed in the wider political and institutional context and as a non-institutional and fluid strategy that constitutes a part of broader voter mobilization efforts. Meanwhile, the variation in the extent and forms of clientelistic practices for electoral mobilization could be traced to both exogenous, such as electoral systems and legal provisions on patronage and vote-buying, and endogenous factors, suggesting that new parties with campaign resources would be inclined to resort to vote-buying and offer clientelistic goods and services, whilst an incumbent or a ruling party would be favorably positioned to misuse administrative state resources to garner political and electoral support.

6.3. Clientelistic practices and voter mobilization in Kyrgyzstan (1995-2010)

The effect of informal clientelistic practices in mobilizing voter support in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan has not been systematically investigated to date, despite the presumed saliency of informal institutions and relationships in politics. Owing in part to the relative newness of political reality shaping emergent electoral and voter mobilization patterns in mid-1990s, the reason underpinning this was also related to methodological difficulties associated with measuring the extent of informal and

illicit practices in securing electoral gains. Meanwhile, the reports produced by local and international organizations⁵³⁶ on the conduct of parliamentary elections held since 2000 found, and discussed in rather broad terms, that the practice of vote-buying was systematically detected across both presidential and parliamentary elections as part of mobilization strategies, that also involved the misuse of administrative state resources and mass media marketing campaigns. The reported claims of vote-buying incidences tend to be specifically based on both the criminal charges of illegal vote-buying and findings from election and on-site monitoring. In contrast, the incidences of clientelistic distribution of selective goods, typically consumer food and product, and services by independent candidates to prospective voters remained insufficiently reported, a fact that could be explained partly with reference to the hidden nature of clientelistic practices and presumably a high degree of tolerance (comparing to its extreme form of vote-buying), though in both popular and expert discourse at the time they figured as prominent mobilization strategies for candidates with business background.

The analysis of newspaper articles and online news stories on election campaigns in 2000 and 2005 as well as interviews with local experts and journalists, who also stressed the contentious and politicized character of electoral mobilization in 2005, provided insights into the nuanced ways in which clientelistic practices in the past manifested and varied across time, candidates and constituencies. A local expert and independent journalist based in the southern town of Osh, Nurlan Artykbayev noted particularly that amidst growing public resentment toward the ruling regime closer to 2005 parliamentary elections, a number prominent opposition candidates with strong support base and running in the 'southern' constituencies faced intense competition from pro-incumbent candidates nominated by 'Alga-Kyrgyzstan' (Forward) party⁵³⁷. Consequently, the

⁵³⁶ For example, Transparency-Kyrgyzstan and OSCE/ODIHR's Election Observations Mission reports.

⁵³⁷ Nurlan Artykbayev in discussion with the author, June, 2015.

campaign rhetoric across highly competitive constituencies was based on growing accusations of misusing administrative state resources against opposition candidates and collusion between pro-incumbent, but relatively less prominent, candidates and the ruling regime. The most notable example of this contention that attracted wide media attention was the deployment of administrative state ‘hurdles’, including blocking the main highway leading to the constituency to prevent meetings with voters, against then prominent opposition figure Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who after overthrowing the incumbent president took over the positions of Prime Minister and interim President⁵³⁸.

Commenting on ‘non-politicized’ strategies of voter mobilization, Artykbayev noted that overall a large pool of candidates in 2005 parliamentary election, at least in southern constituencies, consisted of former parliament members, local public servants and some local business figures⁵³⁹. He brought the example of former ‘Kara-Suu’ bazaar (market) owner with alleged criminal ties, Bayaman Erkinbayev, presumably representing a more visible exception, who managed to gain popularity across his own and neighboring constituencies and secure consecutive electoral victories by systematically providing material support and resources to local communities in Kadamjai rayon, a region in southern Batken province⁵⁴⁰. Prior to 2005 parliamentary elections, Erkinbayev was largely neutral and politically indistinct, albeit capable of accommodating to the ruling regime, whilst serving in two parliamentary convocations. However, in light of electoral campaigns and political developments leading up to 2005 parliamentary elections, he emerged, alongside other opposition candidates in the south, where local and then regional protests over electoral fraud first erupted, as one of the key figures in mobilizing regional protests against the incumbent president⁵⁴¹.

⁵³⁸ Nurlan Artykbayev in discussion with the author, June, 2015.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

As revealed subsequently, a similar way of maintaining constituency ties based on distributing clientelistic benefits and providing favors by exploiting personal influences and local connections, was also evident amongst Uzbek ethnic minority candidates running in constituencies across southern Osh province, compactly populated by ethnic Uzbek minority groups⁵⁴². It appears that a sense of shared ethnic identity, as applied to Uzbek minority groups, as well as localism or nativism prevalent amongst titular Kyrgyz constituencies, popularly expressed as ‘own son or daughter’, significantly influenced the choice of candidates under the single-member majority vote system. In the meantime, the distribution of clientelistic benefits that also extended to non-material favors and services, such as patronage (public employment), charitable donations and events and particularistic favors, buttressed in a complementary way the reputation of local notables as preferred candidates.

On the other hand, the purported effect of tribal and clan-like identities, as evidenced in parliamentary elections held in 2000 and especially in 2005, and despite the localist rhetoric reinforced by the voting system, was relatively insignificant in shaping voter decisions. The emergent view holds that tribal (‘uruu’) and sub-tribal (‘uruk’) considerations, typically more salient in local elections, would follow to influence voting decisions when competing candidates in a given constituency are not distinctly popular or charismatic, tend to profess analogous political loyalty to the ruling regime and do not continuously employ clientelistic practices to sustain the electoral support base (e.g. the elections between two leading pro-incumbent candidates in Alai constituency in 2005 elections). In effect, the prevailing patterns of electoral mobilization, observed particularly at a local level, and also corroborated as plausible in interviews with local experts in northern Karakol town of Issyk-Kul province, demonstrate that previously the local and political reputation of

⁵⁴² Nurlan Artykbayev in discussion with the author, June, 2015.

a candidate maintaining by default strong links to the constituency often took precedence over other contributing factors associated with voting, though that, i.e. reputation, was in turn partly influenced by the extent of clientelistic links and services to the local communities⁵⁴³.

Overall, and based on author's past observations and experience in election observation gained in early 2000s, it was evident that in previous elections campaign strategies involved a varying combination of conventional media marketing campaign, such as the usage of banners and platform leaflets, frequent compact meetings with prospective voters and provision of material goods and services, ranging from consumer food and products – sugar, wheat etc., to infrastructure improvement and renovation services. The relative prevalence of distributing some basic goods (e.g. food products) in the past election campaigns was also reckoned to be explained with reference to economic context and high rates of poverty marked in 1990s and early 2000s. The economic rationale for electoral clientelism further provides a basis for understanding the variation in the extent and types of clientelistic practices employed across the capital city and provincial constituencies.

In the capital city Bishkek there was thus a common tendency amongst candidates with business background and resorting to clientelistic benefits at the time to offer basic goods, such as food items, for predominantly retired voters, who tend to vote regularly and reliably owing to Soviet legacy of 'mobilized participation', and fund city neighborhood projects, such as renovating playgrounds and city amenities⁵⁴⁴. Meanwhile, in provincial constituencies candidates who figured as local notables usually maintained closer ties with the constituency voters, and, as in the southern regions, distributed a range of both material and non-material benefits to maintain a stable electoral

⁵⁴³ Kamil Ruziyev in discussion with the author, May, 2015.

⁵⁴⁴ 'Fabula: Shin Odaril Starikov Prosochennymi Vaflyami i Makaronami', Vb.kg, Oct.21, 2014, available at: https://www.vb.kg/doc/290555_fabyla:shin_odaril_starikov_prosochennymi_vaflyami_i_makaronami.html.

support base. Given the problematic nature and inaccessibility of basic social infrastructure (clean and irrigation water, electricity, canals, schools etc.) in some remote constituencies, resource-rich candidates often in close coordination with local authorities sponsored or contributed to small infrastructure projects, seen as an investment for local notables in eliciting both electoral and political participation. Alongside material benefits, provincial candidates gained increasing prominence through organizing commemorative and celebratory events involving sport competitions, including notably so-called 'Kok-Boru' or 'Grey Wolf', a traditional Central Asian nomadic horse game, with substantial prize funds. The organization of all day festive events combined with sporting activities dates back to pre-Soviet times and traditionally served among other things to pay respect to the host, typically a tribal or sub-tribal leader, and ascertain his social and power position within a given tribe or a tribal confederation.

Whilst the relative pervasiveness and variety of clientelistic practices observable in provincial constituencies in early 2000s could be potentially attributed to closer ties between candidates and the constituency voters under a majority single-member district system, persistent economic and infrastructure problems, and greater traditionalism, the difference between local and general (national) elections in terms of influencing the extent of clientelistic practices was equally pronounced. A local 'Jangy Agym' (A new wave) newspaper published a story in 2012 on a prominent businessman and long-time member of Bishkek city council Sergei Shin, who reportedly distributed school supplies to pupils and offered food products, '...sugar, wheat, cooking oil, and tea' to elderly residents registered in his own constituency⁵⁴⁵. The story also noted in a somewhat

⁵⁴⁵ 'Sergey Shin Vspomnil Svoi Elektorat I Nachal Odarivat' ih Podarkami', Vb.kg, Sept.,14 2012, available at: https://www.vb.kg/doc/199488_serгей_shin_vspomnil_svoy_elektorat_i_nachal_odarivat_ih_podarkami.htm

negative way that Shin has previously made multiple campaign promises that remained unfulfilled and has done little thus far to 'help' his own constituency⁵⁴⁶.

The other incident illustrating the distribution of clientelistic services for electoral votes was observed by author in the wake of 2006 local elections to Bishkek city council and that evidently was representative of most clientelistic practices at the time was the renovation of a small playground in a neighborhood paid for by a candidate Soyuzbek Saliev from Asanbai constituency. Clearly, and as the head of Saliev's campaign team then shared, the campaign strategy was not confined to implementing specific 'constituency projects' and extended to numerous meetings with voters as well as political ads and attracting paid campaign volunteers. In the meantime, based on observations and findings on the varying practices of clientelism as they specifically applied to local elections held prior to 2010, it is plausible to uncover a number of shared patterns on both the extent and operation of clientelistic practices in the country.

Firstly, clientelistic practices tend to be more prevalent and efficient as a campaign strategy for local elections as compared to parliamentary elections, owing conceivably to a smaller size of electoral constituencies and hence the possibility to monitor and enforce clientelistic deals. As a rule, local candidates, especially those nominated by or associated with the incumbent government or ruling party, turn to 'household supervisors' (brokers), exercising significant administrative power at household level by 'Soviet inertia', to facilitate clientelistic transactions. On the other hand, the feasibility and likelihood of clientelistic strategies to mobilize local support tend to increase further owing to the fact that local elections traditionally do not get much attention, including from media, politicians and local and international observers.

⁵⁴⁶ 'Sergey Shin Vspomnil Svoi Elektorat I Nachal Odarivat' ih Podarkami', Vb.kg, Sept.,14 2012, available at: https://www.vb.kg/doc/199488_serгей_shin_vspomnil_svoy_elektorat_i_nachal_odarivat_ih_podarkami.htm
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Secondly, the observable clientelistic strategies employed during campaigns for local elections commonly involved irregular or often one-time clientelistic benefits in exchange for votes, further undermining the ability of politicians to make credible policy commitments to voters based on programmatic or campaign appeals. It suggests thus that in the absence of programmatic and issue-based campaigns and intense competition for voters (clients), candidates (patrons) with asymmetric power manage to secure electoral votes by deploying clientelistic practices that frequently prove unsystematic and fragmented. This in turn contrasts a more regularized pattern of interaction underpinning clientelistic relationships between candidates (local notable figures) and voters (compatriots) in provincial constituencies, whereby a majority single-member district system that has been in place prior to 2007 parliamentary elections reinforced the traditional patterns of linkages based on localism/nativism, influence and, for resource-rich candidates, systematic distribution of both material and non-material clientelistic benefits.

In a broader sense, the extent and varied manifestation of clientelistic practices invoked as a strategy of electoral mobilization, as with the purported effect of informal power networks on political participation and mobilization, are evidently conditioned by the combined effect of both contextual (political and social) and formal institutional and rules and factors. As evidenced across voter mobilization campaigns for both local and parliamentary elections held before 2010, and despite perceived variations in the degree of political and institutional uncertainty, clientelistic practices commonly emerged as a popular strategy of electoral mobilization, alongside media marketing strategies, for resource-rich candidates with relatively strong constituency ties.

That said, an inspection of the final list of candidates elected to Jogorku Kenesh (national parliament) in 1995, 2000 and 2005 as well as intensive interviews with local experts reveal likewise that candidates with business background, who often resorted to 'traditional' practices of

clientelism, such as the distribution of material goods, for electoral support, constituted a small part of elected legislators, though it has expanded over time. Rather, the majority of legislators was evidently elected based on own popularity and political experience, with some candidates rising to prominence ever since 1990s as part of pro-democracy movement and managing to win two or three elections in a row, without maintaining stable constituency ties based on clientelistic relationships. The last group of elected legislators that similarly to prominent politicians has not systematically engaged in clientelistic practices, and used as a dominant strategy, included former or acting public servants employed in local government entities, who by virtue of exploiting public office, gained influence in local affairs. In the latter case, the campaign strategy was based predominantly on a combination of media campaigns, sporadic distribution of clientelistic (material) benefits and in a characteristic manner mobilizing local connections and resources and promising to provide patronage in the form of potential public employment or provision of exclusive public resources.

Whilst the previously observed emphasis on political patronage for electoral mobilization has remained consistent over time, the incidences and viability of clientelistic practices involving both resource-rich local notables and in part local public servants seem to be markedly influenced by electoral institutions. In particular, the underlying feature of a majority single-member district system, which has been used for parliamentary elections from 1995 to 2007, as inducing candidate-centered voting proves to generate greater incentives of both the demand and supply sides for sporadic electoral clientelistic behavior. In the previous elections, owing to the voting system there was thus a strong propensity amongst self-nominated candidates toward cultivating personal and direct ties with voters and prioritizing provisions of constituency services. In practical terms, and against the backdrop of built-in electoral incentive structures, candidates sought to varying degrees to build personal reputations and local electoral support base by adopting a more distinctive and

outspoken political stance, involving in clientelistic practices and once elected raising specific constituency issues and engaging in 'pork and barrel' politics as a variant of political patronage. The overall degree of highly personalized and direct constituency-centered campaigning strategies, however, has gradually decreased, albeit not drastically, following the adoption of a party-list proportional representation system in 2007.

Despite the notable conditioning effect of single-member district system in promoting clientelistic behavior, it is noteworthy to mention for argumentative purposes that in effect campaign strategies employed in 1990s and early 2000s involved the usage of clientelistic practices, contrasting clientelistic networks based on a set of patterned interactions and regularized exchanges. This pattern largely corroborates Kitschelt and Kselman's assertion that 'politicians in new democracies...will generally not have had the time to create such networks, and will not be able to credibly commit to the provision of continuing benefits over a series of exchanges'⁵⁴⁷. In other words, the ability of politicians to offer credible clientelistic benefits and promises of patronage would be thus contingent on the establishment of durable candidate-voter linkage networks involving strong organizational capabilities and intermediary brokers to monitor and enforce the compliance of 'clienteles' voters⁵⁴⁸. As the empirical analysis of campaigns for elections held from 1995 to 2005 demonstrates, candidates in new democracies are still tempted to resort to clientelistic practices, though in largely sporadic and more direct manner, as part of broader voter mobilization strategy. Meanwhile, the extent and types of clientelistic practices in new democracies also seem to be determined, in addition to the voting system in place, by the immediate political context affecting the election campaigns.

⁵⁴⁷Herbert Kitschelt and Daniel M. Kselman, 'Economic Development, Democratic Experience, and Political Parties' Linkage Strategies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):6.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

The parliamentary elections held in 2005, the reported manipulation of which caused the outbreak of mass protests leading to the downfall of an incumbent president, illustrated specifically that prominent candidates can efficiently campaign based on highly 'politicized' mobilization appeals for both electoral and political support. By tapping into the growing public resentment and adapting to changing political opportunity structures, candidates took on an increasingly anti-incumbent or anti-regime rhetoric reflected in frequent public criticisms regarding rampant corruption, stagnant economy, political persecutions and electoral manipulation. It was notable that the first contentious protests over electoral fraud erupted across provincial constituencies supporting prominent candidates or candidates with local stronghold competing against pro-incumbent candidates. In the meantime, in less competitive and politicized constituencies, campaigns usually revolved around pro-incumbent candidates using a combination of media marketing strategies, targeted meetings with prospective voters and sporadic distribution of clientelistic, both material and non-material, benefits. The latter findings suggest, in a way consistent with Kitschelt and Kselman's claims regarding the socio-economic preconditions for the establishment of clientelistic networks, that in new democracies with varying degrees of political and institutional uncertainty clientelistic practices will not only prove fluid, transient and sporadic, but also that the extent and types of electoral clientelism will vary depending on both the political and formal institutional frameworks.

6.4. Clientelistic practices and voter mobilization since 2010

Comparing to previously held parliamentary elections based on a single-member district system and accompanied by sporadic clientelistic appeals, there has been of late a growing trend in resorting to vote-buying practices of clientelism across some parties for electoral mobilization. As the last parliamentary elections of 2015 and a series of local elections held 2016-2018 demonstrated

notably, parties find ways to engage in illegal practices of vote-buying, along with financing infrastructure development projects, with impunity and driven by credible-commitment problems and the near absence of issue-based campaigns. Echoing the scale of this issue was the joint statement by civic activists and local election observers shortly following 2015 parliamentary elections and addressed to both the president and Jogorku Kenesh (parliament) reporting that ‘there has been a large number of incidences of vote-buying, but no proper action was taken by law enforcement agencies and judicial bodies to curb them in a timely manner’⁵⁴⁹.

Prior to this, a group of civic activists, active voters as well as competing parties made concurrent allegations that few parties that secured legislative seats in the end resorted to vote-buying practices in relatively systematic ways undermining the overall credibility of elections. In an interview on party organizations and 2015 election campaigns, a Bishkek-based party official, who requested to remain anonymous, told specifically that as a party that targets ‘voters in need’ they campaigned predominantly in poorer constituencies located in suburban areas (‘novostroiki’ or ‘new residential areas’) of the capital city and noted repeated claims made by ‘sympathetic’ voters and party-affiliated volunteers on the ground that some particular parties made similar vote-buying offers leading up to an election day⁵⁵⁰. This appears to be consistent with allegations and observations made then by civic activists and election observers that in general vote-buying incidences took place in mostly poor suburban constituencies settled by a growing number of internal migrants and lacking basic infrastructure amenities.

In the meantime, and sharing the results of on-site monitoring conducted by party-affiliated observers, the interviewee explained particularly that in several remote suburban constituencies

⁵⁴⁹ ‘Podkup Izbiratelei Stanovitsya Glavnoi Ugrozoi dlya Kyrgyzstana, Schitayut Aktivisty’, Knews, Apr., 12, 2016, available at: <https://knews.kg/2016/04/12/podkup-izbiratelej-stanovitsya-glavnoj-ugrozoi-dlya-kyrgyzstana-schitayut-aktivisty/>.

⁵⁵⁰ Anonymous respondent in discussion with the author, October, 2015. .

(names omitted), there was a range of reportedly suspicious activities around polling stations associated with illegal campaigning and an arranged voter transport on election day. It was reckoned that the vote-buying transactions (each vote allegedly cost 1000 KGS or 15 USD reaching 2000 KGS or 30 USD closer to the end of voting day) took place a few days prior to the election day and that the free transport of voters to the polling stations was organized to ensure the compliance of 'vote-selling' voters. The latter exemplifies the range of concurrent and evidence-based incidence reports, based on photo and short video clips), made available for public access and broadcast on public TV channels implicating 'suspicious' campaigners, also referred to as 'agitatory', with illicit activities as they seemingly held unidentifiable check-lists and ID cards and communicated with voters leaving the polling station after voting. In turn, the vote-buying transaction also implied for compliance purposes that upon receiving a vote payment voters would leave ID documents, such as national passports or an internal ID card, to the campaigner and would be able to return them only after taking a photo of a marked ballot paper using smartphones as an evidence of vote. This last practice has consequently been prohibited by law in an attempt to curb vote-buying incidences.

Despite growing concerns and public calls to end vote-buying as part of broader reforms in electoral administration, however, the practice of vote-buying continued to be pervasive as evidenced by campaigns for a series of local elections held shortly afterwards. Though the vote-buying practice was in similar ways utilized alongside other campaign strategies, it evidently appears that it was also more systematic and at times reportedly decisive in determining electoral outcomes. The head of local 'Taza Shailoo' (Clean elections) association working in the domain of electoral observation and assistance, Tagir Osmonaliev, admitted that the election administration bodies have made significant progress in deploying biometric technology and improving the voter lists, but the issue of vote-buying still remained critical and 'disturbing' as it 'influenced the election results in a number of constituencies' and '...generally, those voters that entered into [vote-buying]

transactions treated the voting process as an ‘auction sale’⁵⁵¹. Based on observations of local elections to city councils held 27 March, 2016, the association reported particularly to have received numerous ‘messages’ from ‘observers, party representatives and citizens’ regarding the illegal campaigning and vote-buying activities observed on an election day in a few electoral constituencies located in major cities of Tokmok and Osh⁵⁵².

Commenting on the same local elections, the representative of ‘Demokrat’ (Democrat) party claimed likewise that the:

‘...party has not been able to collect a strong evidence of vote-buying, but we saw that vote-buying has played a substantial role in Osh city elections. All parties that have been involved in vote-buying secured second or third places. They did not campaign, nor did they worked with voters and presented programs, but still received a significant number of votes’⁵⁵³.

Perhaps, the most controversial party that ostensibly exploited administrative state resources and engaged in vote-buying was ‘Mekenim-Kyrgyzstan’ (My land-Kyrgyzstan) party, associated notably with the former head of presidential office Ikramzhan Ilmiyanov and hence the pro-incumbent regime, that also throughout 2016-2017 local elections secured surprising electoral gains for a newly established party. Whilst similarly new, but local parties managed to obtain council seats in local city elections (notably ‘Tabyлга’ - Finding party that in Karakol city finished first), ‘Mekenim-Kyrgyzstan’ has nominated it’s candidates to compete across a range of constituencies and secured a substantial number of electoral votes in southern provinces, including Batken, Osh and Jalal-Abad, owing in part to its leaders southern background and quite unpredictably in the capital city of Bishkek, where it

⁵⁵¹ ‘Chto za Napadkami na Biometriku i Avtomaticheskie Schityvaushie Urny’, Akipress, Dec., 13. 2016, available at: http://mnenie.akipress.org/unews/un_post:8245.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ ‘S Podkupom Golosov na Vyborah My Bistro Pridem k Oligarhii’, Azattyk, March, 28, 2016, available at: <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27639411.html>.

finished fourth by defeating other popular and long-standing parties. At this point, expert views and explanations for the plausible causes of electoral success of this party remain highly speculative, but it was clear that given the conditions in Kyrgyzstan these days ‘Mekenim-Kyrgyzstan’ party would be not able to succeed electorally without significant political support acquired due to an alleged link to its informal leader Ilmiyanov, a close ally of then president Atambayev, and the ability to use campaign and financial resources effectively for the purposes of electoral mobilization.

The obscure manner in which ‘Mekenim-Kyrgyzstan’ party has secured electoral gains in recent local elections reflects the broader difficulties in detecting and prosecuting concrete incidents of vote-buying. In an article 140, the Criminal Code specifies that buying votes by candidates, including by their spouses, relatives and representatives, to elected public offices by offering material benefits and distributing public jobs will be fined or sentenced for up to three years in prison⁵⁵⁴. Tagir Osmonaliev, the head of ‘Taza-Shailoo’ association, said in a press-conference that ‘according to the current legislation, a person, who received money from a candidate or party must file a formal complaint in order for law enforcement agencies to initiate criminal proceedings’⁵⁵⁵. The problem with this legal provision is that the criminal investigation can be launched only following the formal complaint by a person, who was offered a vote payment, which in effect proves a rare possibility given the growing ability of candidates and parties to target voters who are more likely to engage in vote-selling⁵⁵⁶. As an alternative, the association recommended that criminal proceedings relating to vote-buying cases should be based on private-public prosecution, not private prosecution as currently envisaged, to enable any person to file a

⁵⁵⁴ ‘Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic’, article 140, section 1.

⁵⁵⁵ ‘V Kyrgyzstane Startuet Informatsionnaya Kampaniya po Protivodeistviyu Podkupa Golosov’, For.kg, Sept., 14, 2017, available at: <http://for.kg/news-447734-ru.html>.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

complaint reporting suspicion of vote-buying as well as law enforcement agencies to independently instigate criminal charges⁵⁵⁷.

Beyond legal deficiencies, significant problems remain with ensuring that legal regulations relating to vote-buying incidents are implemented and enforced effectively. As Osmonaliev stressed following the observation of local elections across the country in March 2016, ‘the association has not recorded any single attempt on the part of members of precinct election commissions and law enforcement officers alike to curb illegal campaigns and vote-buying activities’⁵⁵⁸. The overall concern here is that by following the ‘legal formalism’ in a strict manner, and requiring formal complaints and the demonstration of robust evidence of vote-buying activities, the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in preventing and prosecuting vote-buying practices could be considerably diminished. As an evidence, a member of the Central Election Commission, Kairat Osmonaliev, said in an interview on ‘electoral corruption’ that ‘there is almost no single criminal prosecution invoking a vote-buying article 140 that led to conviction’, a persistent pattern in the past that he also explained with reference to the ‘hidden character’ of vote-buying transactions and the fact that ‘no party is interested in disclosing the act’⁵⁵⁹.

In the meantime, and despite the growing tendency for parties to resort to vote-buying, in both general and local elections, tracing the extent to which vote-buying strategies affected electoral outcomes in a decisive manner still proves difficult. A local expert Medet Tiulegenov

⁵⁵⁷ ‘V Kyrgyzstane Startuet Informatsionnaya Kampaniya po Protivodeistviyu Podkupa Golosov’, For.kg, Sept., 14, 2017, available at: <http://for.kg/news-447734-ru.html>.

⁵⁵⁸ ‘Podkup Golosov I 200 Nablyudatelei. Ozvucheny ProblemY Budushih Vyborov’, Vb.kg, Dec., 07, 2016, available at: https://www.vb.kg/doc/351664_podkyp_izbirateley_i_200_nabludateley_ozvucheny_problemy_bydysih_vyborov.html.

⁵⁵⁹ ‘Kairat Osmonaliev: Stat’yu o Podkupe Golosov Izbiratelei Voobshe Neobhodimo Perevesti v Razdel Publichnyh’, Kabar news, Nov., 16, 2016, available at: <http://old.kabar.kg/rus/society/full/113921/kabar.kg/rus/society/function.file-put-contents>.

admitted, commenting on parliamentary elections of 2015, that the ‘...illicit character of vote-buying incidents explains the difficulty of determining the effect of vote-buying on election results’⁵⁶⁰. As reported by local observers and civic activists, the frequency of vote-buying incidents still tends to be considerably higher in local elections and in turn the observed variation in the extent of vote-buying and its overall effect on local electoral outcomes could be traced to both the evolutionary path and dominant campaign strategies of individual parties as well as the local political dynamics of electoral constituencies. In a news analysis of the dynamics of both general and local elections held 2015 and 2016, a local expert Asel Doolotkeldieva highlighted the increasing importance of financial resources for electoral mobilization, as opposed to the salience of administrative state resources traditionally exploited by the ruling party, and noted that given the context, whereby gaining an access to ‘...a narrow political space’ is contingent on the possession of both ‘administrative and financial capital’, conditions the intensity of inter-party competition⁵⁶¹. In her view, this particularly accounts for the electoral loss of a new liberal ‘Demokrat’ (Democrat) party, formed by pro-Western young entrepreneurs and professionals, that ‘opted to refrain from vote-buying’ activities in 2016 elections to Osh city council⁵⁶². In other words, and as the emergent ‘ground rules’ and patterns of electoral competition dictate, parties need to possess a substantial amount of campaign and financial resources or a combination of both administrative and financial resources in order to accomplish set electoral goals⁵⁶³.

The latter view was clearly validated by the results from three consecutive elections to a number of city councils across the country held during 2016 and demonstrating a fairly consistent

⁵⁶⁰ Medet Tiulegenov in discussion with the author, October, 2015.

⁵⁶¹ ‘Asel Doolotkeldieva: Mestnye Vybery v Kyrgyzstane: k Bolee Zakrytoi i Kommercheskoi Politike?’. CabarAsia, Apr., 29, 2016, available at: <https://cabar.asia/ru/asel-doolotkeldieva-mestnye-vybory-v-kyrgyzstane-k-bolee-zakrytoj-i-kommercheskoj-politike/>.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

and solid electoral performance of some major parties, including SPDK, ‘Respublika-Ata-Jurt’, ‘Onuguu-Progress’ and ‘Kyrgyzstan’ parties⁵⁶⁴. Whilst a pro-incumbent SDPK party has expectedly secured the highest number of votes, between 20-40%, across most electoral constituencies⁵⁶⁵ owing to its association with the ruling regime and significant reliance on administrative state resources, the remaining parties additionally competed against local and regional parties, with some allegedly resorting to illicit vote-buying, which also indicates a high degree of localism and regionalism (i.e. north-south) in electoral politics as well as a persistently low level of party institutionalization. In the meantime, the relative electoral success of four leading parties, mentioned above, that also earlier secured a close number of legislative seats in 2015 parliamentary elections, was potentially linked to the ability of party leaders to win the support of local notables and politicians that traditionally figured as instrumental in mobilizing electoral votes. That in turn was based on whether the party has previously managed to build a viable electoral support base led by party activists or affiliated notables exerting significant influence on local politics or has been able, by virtue of holding legislative seats, to provide promises of political patronage or financial support.

The emphasis on media marketing strategies to promote visibility and party organizational investments, such as establishing temporary local offices and mobilizing party activists and paid local volunteers, additionally strengthened the tactical support provided by local notables and contributed to mobilizing critical votes. In the meantime, the smaller size of constituencies also incentivized leading parties to compete against a pro-incumbent party in a more intense fashion by mobilizing political and financial resources and prompted sporadically some regional and newly

⁵⁶⁴ ‘Vybory-2016. Rezul’taty Golosovaniya po Gorodam (Tablitsa)’, Azattyk, Dec., 12, 2016, available at: <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/28171243.html>.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

emerging parties, namely 'Mekenim-Kyrgyzstan, to engage in vote-buying activities in the absence of local support base and endorsements from local notable politicians. However, the overall results of local elections, held between 2016-2018 across a number of electoral constituencies, demonstrate that effective and successful election campaigns commonly tended to be based a mix of some organizational investments, media marketing strategies and political strategies based on recruiting local notables and capitalizing on previously established local support bases and party's overall reputation and electoral prospects.

Though the practice of vote-buying as an extreme form of electoral clientelism has increased over time as notably evidenced by recent campaigns for local elections, the extent to which it has turned into a dominant campaign strategy for major parties in the country and decisively shaped the outcomes of recent elections still proves insignificant. In election campaigns, evidently, parties that sporadically resort to vote-buying do so as part of other clientelistic strategies, including infrastructure development and renovation services, and broader party mobilization strategies prioritizing media visibility and for local elections building local support base and winning the support of local notable politicians. Relatedly, the observed propensity for some inchoate parties to engage in vote-buying practices (for example, allegedly 'Kyrgyzstan' party in 2015 parliamentary elections and 'Mekenim-Kyrgyzstan' in 2016-2017 local elections), was evidently linked to the facts that new parties still lacked substantive local support base and strong 'party brands' and faced significant problems with making credible policy commitments in the absence of divisive and programmatic issue-based campaigns.

At the same time, the empirical analysis of election campaigns conducted particularly since 2007 shows, there may be some causal relationship between the closed-list proportional representation system and the relative prevalence of clientelistic vote-buying practices. A potential

explanation could suggest that, whilst isolating high poverty rates as a control variable, under single-member district system, independent candidates would run higher reputational risks by engaging in vote-buying activities, which in turn tend to be highly discernible due to the smaller size of electoral constituencies and closeness of candidates to voters. This contrasts a more distant and non-personalized character of party-voters linkages observed under closed-list PR system, whereby parties are sporadically tempted to utilize illicit vote-buying tactics for voter mobilization purposes in often tight, small-sized and relatively poor constituencies, as part of broader campaign strategies.

However, the causal effect of the PR voting system on increased rates of vote-buying, particularly across new and resource-rich parties, is contingent on the facilitating influence of an emergent political system. This implies that political processes, associated with 2010 post-revolutionary period following the toppling of an authoritarian incumbent Bakiyev and subsequent adoption of a new version of constitution strengthening legislative powers, laid the groundwork for the emergence of multiple competing political forces and groups formalized further as legislative parties. Though the authoritarian tendency has resurfaced gradually under a new president Atambayev, elected following a political crisis in 2010, the viability of major parties efficiently employing both media marketing strategies and campaign and financial resources for electoral mobilization, albeit with some increased political loyalty to the ruling regime, has remained fairly consistent. Conversely, in 2007 parliamentary elections, opposition parties, SDPK and 'Ata-Meken' in particular, competing under similarly closed-list PR system, but facing substantial political and administrative pressure from the ruling regime, relied extensively on making 'politicized' appeals and mobilizing local opposition support base, by discounting clientelistic appeals for fear of further political persecution.

6.5. The misuse of administrative resources for election campaigns

In addition to sporadic practices of electoral clientelism, the advantageous possibility to access and make an extensive use of administrative state resources has traditionally provided ruling parties and incumbent (presidential) candidates with a considerable leverage in containing political opposition and securing significant electoral votes. However, based on observations of 2015 parliamentary elections⁵⁶⁶ as well as local expert opinions, the overall tendency has allegedly declined comparing to past parliamentary elections associated with the growing institutionalization of incumbent authoritarian regimes. The trend was particularly observable during the last parliamentary elections of 2010 and 2015, in which the ruling SDPK party has repeatedly failed to secure a clear majority vote at the national level, as was commonly practiced by previous authoritarian incumbent regimes, despite sporadic efforts to exploit administrative resources for both political and electoral goals. In the meantime, the main types of administrative resources - institutional, human and media, remain consistent across electoral cycles, suggesting in a way that if employed in an excessive and rampant manner, they could, as was evidenced by 2017 presidential elections, emerge as critical, if not decisive, factors influencing the concurrent patterns of voter mobilization and overall election results.

In practical terms, the most prevalent misuse of broad institutional resources by incumbent regimes and parties usually entailed an extensive mobilization of public officials, including most controversially public school teachers, university lecturers and students, staff members of local state administrations for both election campaign and voting purposes, illegal campaigning by high-ranking officials and public servants, including government members, and providing access to public

⁵⁶⁶ 'Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 4 October, 2015', Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/177111>.

premises to pro-incumbent candidates and ruling parties⁵⁶⁷. It was widely reported at the time that the misuse of institutional resources in the form of pressuring students to ‘vote for particular candidates’ by university officials and forcing local public employees to campaign for particular incumbent candidates on the ground, has caused much controversy fueling a growing public discontent and ensuing revolutionary protests of 2005⁵⁶⁸.

As Transparency Kyrgyzstan reported, the misuse of an ‘...institutional resource was most visibly demonstrated by candidates standing from a university constituency number 1, located in Bishkek city⁵⁶⁹, viewed as critically competitive due to the participation of prominent candidates, including the daughter of then president (Akayev) Bermet Akayeva and opposition figure Roza Otunbayeva. Basing the overall analysis on mainly newspaper stories and local observation reports, the organization has specified that officials of the largest Kyrgyz State University campaigned *en masse* in favor of Akayeva and organized a series of meeting with students, whilst disregarding the meeting requests made by rival candidates in violation of article 34 of the Election Code guaranteeing an equal access to public premises⁵⁷⁰. As OSCE/ODHIR similarly noted in its final report, lecturers and students across other universities faced systematic pressures to vote for favored candidates for fear of losing teaching posts or expulsion accordingly⁵⁷¹. In turn, the heightened media attention that Bishkek-based ‘university constituency’ has attracted owing largely to the participation of president’s daughter and rival opposition figure Otunbayeva and the extended scope of electoral malpractices prompted a small group of student activists to form a

⁵⁶⁷ ‘Monitoring Zloupotrebleniy Administrativnym Resursom vo Vremya Provedeniya Vyborov v Jogorku Kenesh Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki: Fevral-Mart 2005 Goda’, Transparency International –Kyrgyzstan, 2005, available at: <https://www.transparency.kg/files/monitoring.pdf>.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ ‘Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 4 October, 2015’, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/177111>.

youth movement 'Kel-Kel' (Return) to protest broadly over electoral fraud and figure as a significant organizational force in igniting successful mass protests in March 2005.

The tendency to misuse institutional state resources for electoral purposes has similarly extended to high-ranking public officials, including the government members and provincial governors. As Transparency-Kyrgyzstan further noted, referring to an opposition newspaper article from 2005, the prime-minister at the time, Nikolay Tanayev, has allegedly held meetings with both the government members and provincial governors to 'discuss electoral strategies' for the second round of 2005 parliamentary elections and 'instructed to ensure that candidates supporting the regime should get elected to the parliament and warned that failure to do this will lead to the loss of public posts'⁵⁷². Following this episode, public officials in the local constituencies, including provincial governors (*gubernatorlor*) and heads (*akimder*) of regional governments, further and in an informal setting called on affiliated subordinates and local public employees to campaign and vote for favored candidates. In response, a number of public officials across some constituencies resisted the pressure in the wake of growing public discontent over electoral fraud by refusing to campaign and vote for incumbent candidates. The head of Toktogul rayon, a region in Jalal-Abad province, department for education reportedly wrote in his article that he was pressured to campaign for a candidate related to the head of presidential administration and lost his position after refusing to follow the 'instructions'⁵⁷³. In that same constituency it was revealed based on the request letter by a group of 160 residents regarding an unfair dismissal of a number of local public officials, including

⁵⁷² 'Monitoring Zloupotrebleniy Administrativnym Resursom vo Vremya Provedeniya Vyborov v Jogorku Kenesh Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki: Fevral-Mart 2005 Goda', Transparency International –Kyrgyzstan, 2005, available at: <https://www.transparency.kg/files/monitoring.pdf>.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

the regional heads of electricity services department, internal affairs, and statistical committee, and subsequent replacement with loyal officials supporting the incumbent candidate⁵⁷⁴.

The practice of high-ranking officials campaigning voluntarily or involuntarily in favor of incumbent candidates has evidently endured, as seen in 2017 presidential elections and across local elections held 2016-2018. In a highly controversial incident, the vice prime-minister Duishenbek Zilaliyev stated in a meeting with local public officials in Batken province that he would vote for an incumbent candidate Sooronbai Jeenbekov, who was elected president as a result, and requested to vote for him to ensure 'continuity'. Faced with a growing pressure from civic activists and independent media stressing the unacceptability of high-level officials campaigning for either candidates, he was soon released from his duties as a government-nominated 'coordinator' of electoral processes and received a severe reprimand, whilst retaining his main post in the government. Though the latter incident demonstrates the continued viability of misusing institutional resources for election campaign, it also shows, as with the rampant usage of administrative resources in 2005, that excessive forms of misusing administrative resources could lead to severe political repercussions as well as the growing intolerance, as with vote-buying, toward similar illegal practices.

6.5.1. Media administrative resources

In similar ways, the misuse of state-owned media outlets for election campaigns has been a considerable, and yet controversial, part of campaign strategies for incumbent candidates and ruling parties in mobilizing voters and shaping public opinion. Previously, in the absence of independent media that was kept under tighter control and the persistent popularity of television, the Kyrgyz

⁵⁷⁴ 'Monitoring Zloupotrebleniy Administrativnym Resursom vo Vremya Provedeniya Vyborov v Jogorku Kenesh Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki: Fevral-Mart 2005 Goda', Transparency International –Kyrgyzstan, 2005, available at: <https://www.transparency.kg/files/monitoring.pdf>.

national public television in particular, and traditional newspapers for political news and stories, the incumbent governments frequently resorted to media administrative resources by ensuring extensive coverages of favored candidates and discrediting opposition forces at all stages of electoral cycles. Since the political changes in 2010, the misuse of public media resources for electoral mobilization has arguably fallen to a slight degree as seen in the widened possibility for ‘non-ruling’ parties and opposing presidential candidates to display paid political and issue ads on public television channels and the gradual growth of alternative media sources, including private cable TV channels, Internet and social media. Despite this, however, systematic efforts to exploit media resources for the purposes of manipulating public opinion and providing intensely negative coverages of opposition politicians during election campaigns continued.

As OSCE/ODIHR noted, ‘television (TV) is the main source of political information for the overwhelming majority of population, with the Public TV and Radio Company (KTRK) holding the leading position in terms of territorial coverage and viewership’⁵⁷⁵. By enhancing the overall streaming quality and content platform and deploying modern technologies, KTRK has managed of late to retain its position as the dominant (at 98% of popularity) media outlet, in particular across provincial constituencies traditionally demonstrating higher turnouts. Additionally, a high concentration of traditional newspaper publishers as well as emerging independent and digital media outlets, including private cable TV and Internet, in the capital city Bishkek has partially conditioned the national popularity of KTRK, followed by Russian news channels, in the provinces. In terms of content, the channel continues offering highly positive coverages of incumbent president and government performance, notwithstanding systemic efforts made following 2010 political changes to institutionally reform it as a ‘public’ channel that provides information and news analysis

⁵⁷⁵ ‘Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 4 October, 2015’, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/177111>.

in a balanced fashion. The unbalanced character of campaign coverages biased in favor of incumbent candidates and a ruling regime has reportedly, alongside widespread misuses of institutional and human resources, led to a public dissatisfaction with both the state of public media and the ruling regime that was toppled following rampant manipulation of parliamentary elections of 2005⁵⁷⁶.

In the meantime, the critical effect of exploiting this media outlet on the dynamics of election campaign and voting behavior was most evident in the last presidential elections, wherein it consistently favored the incumbent candidate Sooronbai Jeenbekov's campaign, whilst directing a highly negative content toward the second leading candidate Omurbek Babanov that closer to the election day and based on a notorious 'political stability' rhetoric significantly undermined his reputation as a credible candidate. It was quite notable that six months prior to the election day a meta-analysis of three local election polls showed that the opposing candidate Babanov was initially way ahead with 37-47 per cent of potential votes as opposed to 3-5,8 percent of votes in favor of incumbent candidate Jeenbekov, who eventually after contentious and intense campaign period secured a largely surprising win in the first round. The final results highlighted the significant effect of campaign strategies, based chiefly on the misuse of a broad set of available administrative resources and media marketing strategies, on the dynamic patterns of electoral behavior that observably extended to both presidential and parliamentary elections.

6.6. Media visibility and party mobilization

Whilst the privileged access to administrative resources has enabled the incumbent parties and candidates to garner significant electoral support, particularly in the past parliamentary elections

⁵⁷⁶ Emir Kulov, 'March 2005: parliamentary elections as a catalyst of protests', in *Domestic and International Perspectives on Kyrgyzstan's 'Tulip Revolution': Motives, Mobilization and Meanings*, ed. by Sally Cummings, *Central Asian Survey* 27, no.3-4 (2008).

associated with the institutionalization of incumbent authoritarian regimes, an emergent campaign strategy for non-incumbent leading parties in Kyrgyzstan was built based on a varying combination of sporadic clientelistic practices, such as practices of vote-buying and infrastructure development service provisions, and marketing strategies enhancing campaign visibility in the media. The empirical analysis corroborating this notion emanated from the observed patterns of the past 2010 and 2015 parliamentary elections and a series of local elections held 2016-2018 and slightly contrasted theoretical claims made by Lupu and Riedl suggesting that high levels of political and institutional uncertainty induce parties in new democracies to resort to both programmatic and clientelistic strategies for electoral mobilization⁵⁷⁷.

As evidenced here, in the wider context of near absence of social cleavages and related institutional (communist) legacies, campaigning based on programmatic appeals and credible policy commitments proves implausible for parties in new democracies. In the meantime, the logic of mobilization as well as the broader context of un-consolidated democracy dictate that the practices of electoral clientelism, employed sporadically as part of broader campaign strategies, are usually based on one-time and non-structured interactions (e.g. vote-buying) contrasting robust clientelistic networks and clientelistic accountability, as predicted by Kitschelt and Kselman. It was further determined that the extent and types of clientelistic practices are also conditioned by the effect of the voting system in place, as is the relative significance of modern campaign strategies in mobilizing electoral support.

In effect, the national party-list proportional representation system, combined with the lower level of political repression observed following electoral protests and ensuing regime change in

⁵⁷⁷ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013).

2010, has evidently raised the critical significance of campaign and financial resources for non-incumbent parties in running efficient campaigns and in part accounted for the relative surge in the number of prominent business figures fielded as top-listed party candidates for fundraising purposes. This tendency, however, was significantly strengthened by both the new emergent political conditions conducive to intense multi-party competition as well as the absence of campaigning along divisive policy issues and established party reputations for most newly competing parties. Meanwhile, as OSCE/ODIHR noted, ‘some parties raise a significant portion of their campaign funds from candidates’, with candidate campaign contributions accounting for 20-46 per cent of total election funds across four leading parties, ‘Respublika-Ata-Jurt’, ‘Bir-Bol’, ‘Onuguu-Progress’, SDPK and ‘Ata-Meken’ parties, that also managed to get into the parliament⁵⁷⁸.

In the meantime, a significant portion of party election funds was reportedly spent on financing advertising campaigns, political ads on TV in particular, used extensively by parties throughout the campaign period⁵⁷⁹. Whilst the CEC has not publicized an illustrative list of campaign finance expenditures for both 2010 and 2015 parliamentary elections, it was evident then that parties for campaign visibility purposes prioritized displaying often highly expensive political ads on the public TV channel (KTRK) and public radio with higher viewership and audience rates, especially in the provincial constituencies. As the Director of KTRK, Ilim Karypbekov, stated, the traditional TV ad spending is declining gradually, but this trend does not extend to ‘political elections, during which time [one month] advertising revenues can amount to 120 million KGS [about 2 million USD]’ comparing to 100 million KGS (1,5 million USD) that the company earns in a year time⁵⁸⁰. Based on

⁵⁷⁸ ‘Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 4 October, 2015’, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/177111>.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid, p.2.

⁵⁸⁰ ‘Reklamniy Rynok Teleradioorganizatsiy Kyrgyzstana Sostavlyayet \$8-10 mln. v God, - I. Karypbekov’, Komitet.kg, Feb., 07, 2017, available at: <http://komitet.kg/2017/02/07/reklamnyi-rynok-teleradioorganizacii-kyrgyzstana-sostavlyayet-8-10-mln-v-god-i-karypbekov/>.

media monitoring of 2015 election campaigns, OSCE/ODIHR reported also that 79 per cent of information provided by KTRK regarding campaign processes was based on the coverage of paid political ads, whilst the remaining portion was confined to providing general news on election campaigns and was not accompanied much by a follow-up analysis based on balanced and informed commentaries⁵⁸¹. Given the continuing popularity of KTRK as the main source of political information and the limitedness of a specified campaign period that lasts a month and intensifies two weeks before the election day, incurring considerable costs associated with displaying political ads in video formats on both public and private channels has proven quite efficient in promoting the campaign visibility of contending parties.

In addition to political ads, parties similarly looked to invest in operating temporary campaign offices across provincial constituencies for local visibility purposes, campaigning activities and meetings with potential voters. As field trips to select regions conducted both prior to and during 2015 parliamentary election campaign period showed, maintaining some local party presence during the campaign period could potentially compensate for the low level of party reputation, or its lack thereof, by reinforcing public perceptions of party's increased electoral prospects. The organizational investment in enhancing local visibility has evidently improved the electoral performance of newly established parties, including, for example, 'Onuguu-Progress' party that, by prioritizing developing the agriculture sector as its main campaign platform and running campaign offices across all provincial constituencies, succeeded in gaining 13 legislative seats (120 seats in total) during 2015 parliamentary elections, despite the prevailing image as a southern-based regional party. Conversely, a long-standing 'Ar-Namys' party that held 25 seats in the previous parliament, but that had largely limited media visibility and virtually no party offices in the regions

⁵⁸¹ 'Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 4 October, 2015', Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/177111>.

throughout 2015 election campaign has failed to get re-elected, an outcome that was in part also traced to internal disagreements over the party's strategic future as well as the shortage of campaign and financial resources.

Having that said, the establishment of temporary campaign offices in the regions also enabled local party coordinators and activists to hold public meetings and rallies involving potential voters and senior party leaders and organize billboard campaigns along the main streets. Whilst the visited party offices on the ground remained largely deserted in the early days of the campaign period, the party offices, including that of 'Zamandash' and 'Onuguu-Progress' visibly maintained a more frequent communication with voters. In an interview, the coordinator of 'Zamandash' party in Naryn province shared that 'pre-election' contacts and party-voter communications additionally serve the purposes of recruiting new members, liaising with coordinators of primary party organizations on campaigning tactics at the local constituency level, and 'collecting' requests from potential voters relating to constituency or personal issues. By positioning similarly as a party that can deliver concrete clientelistic promises in exchange for electoral votes, 'Onuguu-Progress' party has meanwhile pledged as part of its campaign platform to launch a large number of Soviet-type MTS (machine and tractor stations for agricultural work) across the country and seemingly utilized the local party office platform to discuss ways of developing concrete plans with stakeholders (i.e. voters) that could be implemented once the party would get into the parliament. The majority of local party offices still seemed to focus predominantly on organizing campaign-related marketing activities to promote the party visibility, communicate party platforms and recruiting new activists and members as well as reaching out to local notables and politicians for political and electoral support.

Despite traditionally higher levels of electoral activism in the provincial constituencies, parties further developed the tendency to organize campaign activities, including billboard campaigns, concert-type rallies and distribution of campaign materials, more visibly in the capital city, involving a large group of temporary 'paid volunteers', who 'were employed by most parties to carry out campaign activities and to observe election-day proceedings'⁵⁸². As noted by Reed, the trending recruitment of professionals, and paid volunteers alike, has been the defining feature of modern election campaigns from the 1970s onwards affected significantly by the growing availability of campaign-related resources, such as 'money, access to labor/volunteers, organization and infrastructure, and technology'⁵⁸³. The electoral mobilization defined by modern campaign trends has concurrently entailed a considerable loss of grassroots party activists hitherto acting as campaign volunteers involved in the traditional practices of door-to-door 'party canvassing' and related campaign activities assisted by an extensive network of local party organizations⁵⁸⁴. As evidenced by parliamentary election campaigns in 2010 and 2015, there has been a recurring trend in recruiting paid 'party activists', that as OSCE/ODHR reported has '...increased the level of cash transactions taking place during the elections'⁵⁸⁵, and done primarily for promotional and marketing campaigns that clearly overshadowed less observable interpersonal party-voter contacts and issue or message-based canvassing across electoral constituencies at both local and national level. It is noteworthy though that in the context of party politics in Kyrgyzstan, the purported effect of modern campaign trends on voter party mobilization strategies and electoral performance, in effect determined by the extent and specific ways of employing available resources, such as money and

⁵⁸² 'Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 4 October, 2015', Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/177111>.

⁵⁸³ Daniel C. Reed, 'The Strategy of Voter Mobilization', (a PhD dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia, 2008):6.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ 'Kyrgyzstan Parliamentary Elections, 4 October, 2015', Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/177111>.

technology, is further conditioned by the facilitating effect of both the political environment enabling a certain degree of meaningful inter-party competition and the social context of near absent or largely fluid cleavage structures.

Conclusion

The overall analysis of empirical findings on both the endogenous and exogenous determinants of electoral mobilization as it evolved and manifested over the past two decades in Kyrgyzstan indicates that party-based campaign strategies tend to entail a varying combination of sporadic practices of electoral clientelism and salient media and marketing strategies. On a fundamental level, this slightly contrasts the initial theoretical propositions put forward by Lupu and Riedl and stressing the contextual effect of political and institutional uncertainty on the tendency amongst parties in developing democracies to employ a mix of both programmatic and clientelistic strategies to garner electoral support. Whilst theoretical insights into the relationship between democratic experience, economic development and party mobilization strategies, as developed by Kitschelt and Kselman, and raising the problems of credibility and clientelistic accountability in new democracies, proved fairly cogent, the emergent campaign strategies in Kyrgyzstan additionally reflected a growing emphasis by competing parties on media marketing strategies to enhance campaign visibility. In effect, and despite the observed variation in the perceived degree of political and regime uncertainty, the proclivity of party elites to prioritize sporadic clientelistic practices for electoral mobilization, including extreme forms of illicit vote-buying, defined by short-lived and transient interactions and fundamental credible commitment problems, remained consistent, alongside the tendency to evade party programmatic commitments and misuse administrative resources by incumbents and ruling parties.

In the meantime, and as the overview of parliamentary election campaigns observed from 1995 onwards has demonstrated, the extent and manifestation of electoral clientelism exemplifying

broader practices of informal politics in the region are not evidently straightforward, as famously contended in a dominant 'clans politics' model. The purported effect of informal practices on elite re-structuring and competition and protest and electoral mobilization tends to be rather conditioned by a robust effect of both electoral institutions and the broader political environment. As such, in previous elections and, owing to the single-member voting system and presumably a poor economy, independent candidates mostly pursued to foster closer interpersonal ties with local constituencies by providing clientelistic benefits and hidden political patronage, exploit personal reputations and occasionally target media marketing campaigns. It was further evident, for example, that the outbreak of mass protests of 2005 that led consequently to the overthrow of an incumbent regime was arguably traced to the causal effect of the single-member voting system, which prompted the mobilization of protesters based on informal constituency ties in the broader context of severe social and political discontent.

In a similar vein, the prevailing campaign strategies prioritized by leading parties for voter mobilization purposes, following the shift to a closed-list proportional representation system in 2007 and significant political changes associated with 2010 popular uprising and ensuing regime change, observably involved a varying combination of infrequent practices of electoral clientelism, including most notably vote-buying, media marketing strategies, some organizational investments and misuse of administrative resources favoring the incumbent party. Mitigated by the presumed effect of a national party list voting system, there has been a growing tendency amongst some newly established parties to resort systematically to vote-buying practices, especially during local election campaigns, or alternatively invest in some organizational infrastructure such as operating temporary regional party offices that similarly to illicit practices of vote-buying and infrastructure development services proved quite effective in accomplishing electoral goals given the absence of party brands and low reputations. That said, building successful party-based campaign strategies evidently, and

as a matter of emergent pattern influenced considerably by the PR voting system, tend to correlate with considerable investments of campaign resources to enhance party visibility by displaying high-cost political ads on TV, radio and newspaper outlets, organizing billboard campaigns and distributing campaign materials. On a contextual level, the surge in modern campaign trends characterized by a growing professionalization and nationalization of election campaigns also seems to be affected by the absence of divisive social cleavages that would induce inter-party competition along issues-based and ideological lines and the broader conducive political environment. The latter has provided the possibility for both established and newly formed parties to gain legislative seats by employing a combination of both clientelistic and media marketing strategies that contrasted the traditional misuse of administrative resources by the incumbent party.

Chapter 7. Uncertainty and frequent party switching and defection in Kyrgyzstan.

Introduction

It is widely held that in addition to the critical dimensions of internal organization and electoral mobilization, the degree of party institutionalization is determined in important ways by the extent of internal coherence manifested by the 'prevalence of floor-crossing and/or defections from the parliament group during the legislative period'⁵⁸⁶ and the party's ability to 'act as a unified organization'⁵⁸⁷. As a general rule, high frequencies of party switching or legislative defections, observable features across most inchoate democracies, are presumed to correlate with low levels of party institutionalization reflecting in effect weak intra-party unity and discipline and diminishing the overall quality of democratic accountability. Given the centrality of internal dynamics as it applies to factionalist tendencies and the patterns of intra-party unity and stability, providing a systematic contextual analysis of the causes of party defections and switching would potentially shed light on the disaggregation of a causal mechanism explaining the low level of party institutionalization in developing democracies.

Based on this premise, this chapter seeks to explore the underlying causes and motivations for legislative party defections, a recent trend in Kyrgyzstan widely associated with parliamentarism adopted following a popular uprising of 2010. In 2013, shortly after rescinding an 'anti-defection' law⁵⁸⁸, a group of legislators, affiliated with predominantly opposition factions, defected to independent legislative groups, concurrently forming new extra-legislative parties or expressing

⁵⁸⁶ Matthias Basedau and Alexander Stroh, 'Measuring Party Institutionalization in Developing Countries: A New Research Instrument Applied to 28 African Political Parties' (GIGA Research Program, 2008):14.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ 'Deputatam Parlamenta Zapretili Vyhodit' iz Fraksiy', Kloop, July 31, 2015, available at:

<https://kloop.kg/blog/2015/07/31/kyrgyzstan-deputatam-parlamenta-zapretili-vyhodit-iz-fraktsij/>

political support for the ruling coalition. The incidences of both party defections and intra-party conflicts, observed recurrently across all legislative parties at the time, combined to indicate weakly institutionalized and incohesive party systems.

Consistent with scholarly assumptions that party switching undermines the internal party cohesion, this chapter suggests that party defections and intra-party conflicts occur on a particularly larger scale in the conditions of heightened political and institutional uncertainty, consequently undermining the broader process of party institutionalization. Uncertainty over the regime and institutions particularly induce party elites to pursue short-term gains associated with holding office. At the same time, as this chapter will demonstrate, the frequency of party switching incidences was attributed to longer-term vote-maximizing incentives sought by ambitious politicians as they formed new extra-legislative parties to contest the parliamentary election. It was finally observed that party switching occurs amongst long-standing politicians with largely unpronounced political ambitions, who defect to the ruling coalition and the incumbent regime in order to further particularistic and business interests.

7.1. Theoretical perspectives on party switching

Much of the scholarly literature on party switching in both established and emerging democracies conventionally emphasizes the primacy of rational calculations and ambition of individual

legislators⁵⁸⁹, vote-seeking incentives⁵⁹⁰, electoral institutions⁵⁹¹ or party labels⁵⁹² in evaluating the frequency and patterns of party defections. Premised on the assumption that legislators are driven by political ambition, Heller and Mershon's theoretical model in particular treats party switching as a 'tool of ambition' for seeking re-election and holding office, followed by less pronounced incentives to influence policy-making⁵⁹³. It also suggests that ambiguous party labels, combined with the lack of consistency in policy agendas and enduring ideological orientations, tend to correlate with higher rates of party switching, as evidenced by Italian Chamber of Legislators⁵⁹⁴.

Contrary to initial expectations, however, Heller and Mershon 'observed little difference in [party switching] behavior between party-list and single-member-district legislators'⁵⁹⁵. The latter finding contrasts with concurrent empirical studies determining the causal nexus between electoral institutions and party switching behavior of legislators. McLaughlin in particular uncovered suggestive evidence that across South African parliament's party switching rates typically tend to be higher amongst legislators elected under proportional representation, than those elected under single-member district voting system⁵⁹⁶. It was noted that the logic behind switching parties was

⁵⁸⁹ William B. Heller and Carol Mershon, 'Party Switching in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, 1996-2001', *The Journal of Politics* 67, no.2 (2005).

⁵⁹⁰ William B. Heller and Carol Mershon, 'Party Switching in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, 1996-2001', *The Journal of Politics* 67, no.2 (2005); Iain McMenamin and Anna Gwiazda, 'Three Roads to Institutionalization: Vote-, Office- and Policy-Seeking Explanations of Party Switching in Poland', *European Journal of Political Research* 50, no.6 (2010); Scott W. Desposato, 'Parties for Rent? Ambition, Ideology, and Party Switching in Brazil's Chamber of Deputies', *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no.1 (2005).

⁵⁹¹ Csaba Nikolenyi, 'Political Institutions and Party Switching in Post-Communist Legislatures' (ANU Centre for European Studies Briefing Paper Series 4 (6), 2013); Alex C.H. Chang, 'Reelection Incentives and Defection: Party Switching in the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party', (Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica, 2011).

⁵⁹² William B. Heller and Carol Mershon, 'Party Switching in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, 1996-2001', *The Journal of Politics* 67, no.2 (2005).

⁵⁹³ *Ibid*, 538.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 556.

⁵⁹⁶ Eric McLaughlin, 'Electoral regimes and party switching', *Party Politics* 18, no.4 (2012):563.

embedded into inherently differing structures of electoral connection and degrees of accountability of legislators⁵⁹⁷. PR systems, for example, do not formally stipulate assigning elected legislators to constituencies, hereby blurring the lines of accountability and allowing legislators to obviate potential (non-election) risks associated with party switching⁵⁹⁸.

In a similar vein, Nikolenyi in his analysis of party switching in post-Communist legislatures provides evidence for a causal effect of political institutions, including electoral rules and anti-defection laws, on party (in) stability⁵⁹⁹. In effect, countries exhibiting highest rates of party switching also had relatively higher district magnitudes and lower thresholds (minimum number of legislators) to form legislative groups and employed an open list PR system⁶⁰⁰. That variants of PR system matter in accounting for legislative party (in)stability represents a curious finding considering that an open list PR system involves a more personalized voting and thus expectedly could ensure greater control and accountability of legislators. However, Nikolenyi's model does not compellingly explain why an open list PR system can be considered a condition favorable for party switching. Electoral rules and institutions, as multiple lines of evidence suggest, certainly favor or constrain individual calculations of legislators to switch parties: however, the degree of correlation between electoral rules and party switching and the patterns of party switching, especially pronounced in emerging democracies, need to be explored within the broader context of democratization and political certainty or uncertainty.

Heller and Mershon's findings on party switching in Italy attest to the salience of uncertainty in accentuating the pursuit of ambition by individual legislators to switch parties also in established

⁵⁹⁷ Eric McLaughlin, 'Electoral regimes and party switching', *Party Politics* 18, no.4 (2012):564.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 567.

⁵⁹⁹ Csaba Nikolenyi, 'Political Institutions and Party Switching in Post-Communist Legislatures' (ANU Centre for European Studies Briefing Paper Series 4, no.6, 2013).

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

democracies with highly volatile political systems⁶⁰¹. Thus, higher rates of party switching observed in early 1990's coincided with the 1993 reforms of the electoral laws and 'the fading of longstanding cleavages, the corruption scandal [and] increased volatility in voter opinion'⁶⁰². Heller and Mershon stress relatedly that party switching rates increased not as a response to these electoral reforms, but as a result of 'uncertainty about the new system'⁶⁰³. Implicit in this account is also an assumption that under heightened uncertainty party switchers as well as other legislators do not always clearly understand 'how best to further their own interests'⁶⁰⁴. Furthermore, individual legislators who ultimately opt for switching parties typically tend to represent the losing bloc, first-time legislators and newly formed parties with hazy party labels, a set of patterns of party switching shaped by both ambition and uncertainty⁶⁰⁵. Heller and Mershon's emphasis on both individual and contextual determinants of party switching justifiably brings the concepts of ambition and uncertainty to the fore. However, it is not followed by an extended explanation of (vote, office or policy) incentives driving party switching behavior and how uncertainty arising from extra-legislative political developments informs the strategic decisions of individual party switchers.

The gap in understanding the effect of uncertainty on party development generally and party switching in particular is addressed in more systematic ways in a theoretical framework put forward by Lupu and Riedl⁶⁰⁶. Focusing on puzzling empirical patterns of party development and mobilization across developing democracies, they particularly argue that uncertainty incentivizes party elites to 'switch parties to maximize office rewards at the expense of future votes'⁶⁰⁷. In developing

⁶⁰¹ William B. Heller and Carol Mershon, 'Party Switching in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, 1996-2001', *The Journal of Politics* 67, no.2 (2005).

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 555.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁶ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013).

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 1352.

democracies, the likelihood of ‘an authoritarian reversal’ remains potent and consequently leads to heightened political competition, prompting individual legislators to focus on short-term rewards and evince ‘unexpected behaviors...such as bandwagoning and party switching’⁶⁰⁸. It also elucidates the rationale behind the formation of ‘ideologically incoherent party coalitions’ in legislative settings with fluid and fragmented party systems⁶⁰⁹. In this case, legislative parties, uncertain about expected future benefits of holding office, enter into inclusive power-sharing agreements with the intention of holding office and controlling resources, but not for the purposes of ‘maximizing votes’⁶¹⁰. The same behavioral logic applies to individual legislators from losing or opposition parties, whose decisions to switch parties, defect or presumably join the ruling coalition and bandwagon reflect an emphasis on prioritizing short-term gains from office over long-term vote-seeking or vote-maximizing strategies.

Clearly, uncertain political and institutional context, typically higher in developing democracies, proved to affect the strategic choices and decisions of individual legislators to abandon parties and search for alternatives to further political, and perhaps business, interests. However, Lupu and Riedl’s conception of ‘short-term gains’ as involving office benefits may not necessarily be viewed separately from re-election prospects. In developing democracies, the two can be inexorably linked with elections serving instrumentally to secure hitherto accrued office benefits, which could also potentially improve re-election prospects. Oftentimes, the state of political instability and fragility of democratic institutions prompt individual legislators to engage in a heightened competition for office perquisites as well as seek re-election to sustain resources. Lupu and Riedl’s theoretical model furthermore provides little explanation for why most individual

⁶⁰⁸ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, ‘Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies’, *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1352.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*

legislators refrain from switching or abandoning parties and why, given the limitedness of resources associated with holding office, party switching tends to occur in large numbers and following post-coalition formation period.

Consistent with Lupu and Riedl's underlying propositions regarding the effect of uncertainty on party development in developing democracies, this chapter further suggests that uncertainty induces individual legislators to pursue both office-seeking and vote-maximization strategies for political survival. In the latter case, individual legislators defect to parties with 'easier electoral quotas'⁶¹¹, or parties, with which defectors expect to improve chances for re-election given limited certainty and information over re-election prospects. Uncertainty also contributes to maintaining blurred party labels, for parties, in the absence of a coordinated authority, tend to avoid capitalizing on positional issues and potentially keep party reputations intact. Combined with a closed list PR system, this substantially reduces the stakes of defection for individual legislators.

In the meantime, the propensity to defect from legislative factions and broader party organizations by party activists also reflects the organizational strategies prioritizing centralized and 'hegemonic' leadership authority structures and adopted by party elites in developing democracies for both political and electoral purposes, including maximizing electoral gains. The strategic behavior of party elites in developing democracies clearly extend beyond strategic considerations of mobilizing electoral support to include strategic choices and decisions of political nature relating to legislative coalition formation, party merger and the positioning toward the ruling regime that are made with the ultimate view to influence the elite distribution of political resources. In a slightly deviated manner, for party activists vote-maximizing goals, also prioritized by party elites, are

⁶¹¹ Scott W. Desposato, 'Parties for Rent? Ambition, Ideology, and Party Switching in Brazil's Chamber of Deputies', *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no.1 (2005).

conversely accompanied by strategic incentives to hold office and as applied to ambitious politicians to gain organizational power within party structures.

In a related vein, Kselman said that, 'vote-maximization requires introducing new actors into a party organization's activist and leadership ranks, actors whose fidelity to the current leadership may be doubtful'⁶¹². Consistent with the empirical findings, this suggests crucially that under conditions of heightened political uncertainty associated with the newness of competitive elections and multi-party politics and largely absent party labels, party elites would be tempted to recruit a range of ambitious party-nominated candidates with extensive prior reputations or campaign resources for the purposes of maximizing electoral support. Meanwhile, whilst political ambitions of new high-ranking and party activists could be initially compromised in favor of a closed and centralized party authority developed among other things for vote-maximization purposes, the tendency to vest party leaders with substantial organizational power could be derailed once electoral goals are secured, potentially leading to both individual and group defections of some ambitious party activists elected to the parliament. It a broader perspective, it is thus presumed that pursuing vote-maximizing goals prioritized by both party elites and activists in developing democracies will conduce to frequent party defections and continued intra-party conflicts.

As will be further demonstrated, the decisions to defect from legislative factions also reflected a political dissatisfaction that was prevalent amongst some ambitious legislators over the unwillingness, or inability as it were, of party leaders to join the ruling coalition, viewed as an opportunity for legislators to further business and political interests or provide low-level political patronage, or secure government posts for new rank-and-file members as part of ruling coalition's

⁶¹² Daniel M. Kselman, 'Electoral Institutions, Party Organizations, and Political Instability', (a PhD dissertation submitted to the Department of Political Science in the Graduate School of Duke University, 2009):169.

agreement. In other words, there was a vivid proclivity demonstrated by a significant group of legislative defectors at the time to offer political loyalty to the incumbent regime and ruling party in exchange for potential perks and office benefits. In effect, owing to the limitedness of potential benefits that continuous political support would entail, whilst also contributing to the consolidation of an incumbent authoritarian regime, and some political and personal differences with the incumbency, the larger group of legislative defectors shifted over time toward establishing new extra-legislative parties and streamlining campaign platforms enabling to pursue more ambitious political and electoral objectives.

In the meantime, the highly politicized character of legislative debates questioning the feasibility of anti-defection laws served as an indication of sustained efforts by a growing incumbent regime, led by president, to garner political support from few defecting legislators for the purposes of regime consolidation. The incumbent-led initiative to ban legislative defections was initially supported by a Constitutional Chamber as reflected in its ruling deeming legislative defections as unconstitutional and that was later formalized in a Law on the status of legislators⁶¹³. It also coincided with the formation of several legislative groups, supporting the incumbent regime or maintaining political neutrality, and regime consolidation associated with the surge of politically motivated persecutions of prominent opposition politicians and legislators. That said, the anti-defection law adopted in the wake of upcoming parliamentary elections clearly moderated the practice of legislative defections and prompted party leaders to recruit more loyal party activists, though instances of extra-legislative party switching as evidenced by election campaigns of 2015 have continued, nonetheless.

⁶¹³ 'Deputatam Parlamenta Zapretili Vyhodit' iz Fraksiy', Kloop, July 31, 2015, available at: <https://kloop.kg/blog/2015/07/31/kyrgyzstan-deputatam-parlamenta-zapretili-vyhodit-iz-fraktsij/>.

7.2. Party defection and office-seeking incentives

Politics in Kyrgyzstan in the past two decades has been widely described as featuring unstable and heightened patterns of competition amongst political elites. Reflected more visibly in the past two popular uprisings of 2005 and 2010, both accompanied by mass protests culminating in the overthrow of incumbent presidents, political competition has also proven to foster uncertainty in times of regime or government breakdowns. As a recurrent pattern, the so-called 'post-revolutionary period' epitomized the relative weakness of incoming power-holders and created an atmosphere of uncertainty over regime configuration and institutional frameworks. In both instances, the initial discussions regarding the changes to the Constitution envisaging significant limits on the presidential powers and future configuration of political forces dominated much of the political debate. In this uncertain context, political actors concurrently engaged in regroupings into pro or anti-new incumbent blocks, leaving the possibility of another popular mobilization and probable regime breakdown an open question.

Political regroupings following 2005 popular uprising largely preceded presidential elections and parliamentary elections, held in 2005 and 2007 accordingly, and resulted in a landslide victory for the Interim Prime Minister Bakiyev and his newly formed 'Ak-Jol' party. However, in post-2010 revolutionary period, they continued through to parliamentary elections of 2010 and manifested in the form of widespread party defections and recurrent intra-party conflicts. In the former case, Bakiyev has managed to steadily consolidate power ahead of 2007 parliamentary elections and retain presidential competencies. Conversely, 2010 popular uprising resulted in significant changes to the Constitution formally establishing a parliamentary form of government and markedly strengthening the role of the parliament and political parties. As a result, the current president Atambayev, elected in 2011, faced the need to perform a difficult task of maneuvering across four

other legislative parties, holding seats alongside his own SDPK party. Combined with the possibility of ‘an authoritarian reversal’ and institutional changes, a fluid interaction between major political actors meant that a state of political uncertainty, undermining intra-party cohesion, would remain high.

Against this backdrop, in April 2011, fifteen legislators from ‘Ar-Namys’ (Dignity) opposition faction defected to join the ruling coalition, consisting of three parties – nationalist ‘Ata-Jurt’ (Fatherland), ‘Respublika’ and president-led SDPK party⁶¹⁴. In a joint letter, circulated shortly after announcing the defection, the legislators formally expressed political support for the ruling coalition, a decision that was allegedly made based on a prior analysis of challenges ahead for the ruling government and the need to maintain a viable ‘legislative coalition’⁶¹⁵. The letter also noted that joining the ruling coalition would enable ‘Ar-Namys’ party to pursue platform policies, matching the preferences of its electorate, in a more efficient manner⁶¹⁶. In response to this decision, the party’s parliamentary press service stated that ‘a decision of its members to join the ruling majority in parliament is illegal’, for legislators cannot concurrently be parts of the ruling coalition and retain memberships with an opposition faction⁶¹⁷.

In a fairly similar way, Omurbek Tekebayev, leader of ‘Ata-Meken’ socialist then-opposition faction and referred popularly to as an ‘author’ of the current Constitution, commented shortly afterwards that defecting to a ruling coalition was at odds with the constitutional provisions requiring that ruling coalitions comprise legislative factions, as opposed to individual legislators,

⁶¹⁴ ‘Vozmojno, vo Fraksii “Ar-Namys” Ostanetsya Vesgo 10 Deputatov’, Knews.kg, Sept., 13, 2011, available at: <https://knews.kg/2011/09/13/vozmojno-vo-fraktsii-ar-namys-ostanetsya-vsego-10-deputatov/>.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid

⁶¹⁷ ‘Ar-Namys: Zayavlenie 10 deputatov o Tom, Chto Oni, ne Vyhodyat iz Fraksii, Reshili Voiti v Koalitsiyu Parlamentskoho Bol’shinstva Kyrgyzstana, Protivorechit Zdravomu Smyslu’, 24.kg, Apr., 28, 2011, available at: <https://24.kg/archive/ru/parlament/98011-laquoar-namysraquo-zayavlenie-10-deputatov-o-tom.html/>.

only⁶¹⁸. He further clarified that a potential decision by 'Ar-Namys' party to expel its defecting legislators could result in the termination of their legislative mandates provided also that expelled legislators 'accept' them, otherwise they would remain as 'party-less' legislators without the right to join any other factions⁶¹⁹. Though the legal conundrum that ensued as a result has withheld the process of formalizing the defection of a legislative group to a ruling coalition, subsequent comments made by defecting legislators exposed the profound disagreements with the party leadership over a range of issue positions that extended beyond expressing political support to the ruling coalition.

As Anvar Artykov noted, whilst refuting the claim that they returned to the opposition faction made formerly by its leader Felix Kulov, the legislative faction led by Kulov was recurrently ignoring the political views and suggestions offered by defecting legislators regarding high-level faction-led nominations for legislative committees or the judicial selection council and expressing criticism over legislative votes that diverged from the party line⁶²⁰. More importantly, it was implied that there has been a continued tendency by Kulov and his 'advisors' to establish a monopolizing power over decision-making within the faction and that this has impeded the possibility to 'fulfill campaign promises'⁶²¹. It was noticeable then that the intra-party conflicts that observably occurred between 2011-2014 across mainly non-ruling legislative parties served as a political basis for an emergent incumbent regime to both weaken intra-party unity and cohesion within otherwise

⁶¹⁸ 'Fraksiya "Ar-Namys" Raskololas' na Sobesedovanii', Azattyk, Apr., 19, 2011, available at: https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_arnamys_conflict/9497656.html.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ 'Parlamentskie Fraksii Kirgizii Tryaset iz-za Vnutrennih Rasprei: "Perebejchiki" iz Ar-Namysa Obvinili Svoego Lidera vo Lji', Sayasat.kg, June, 29, 2011, available at: http://www.sayasat.kg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2614

⁶²¹ Ibid.

opposition factions by reinforcing the factionalist tendencies and colluding with defecting legislators and consequently secure political support for consolidating its authoritarian grip on power.

In the meantime, as the instance of mass defection from 'Ar-Namys' faction has initially demonstrated, intra-party conflicts involving prominent legislators with pronounced political ambitions, and previously recruited for vote-maximization purposes, could potentially damage the party's reputation as a highly dis-united organization incapable of accommodating alternative or competing viewpoints. In combination with the overall absence of systematic efforts to compete for political resources by adopting a principled stance against or in support of the incumbent regime and demonstrate pre-electoral commitments to make organizational and financial investments to run efficient campaigns ahead of parliamentary elections, this has also proven to contribute to extra-legislative defections to other parties with which defectors would perceptibly face higher re-election prospects. The electoral loss, i.e. less than 1% of votes, that 'Ar-Namys' party has faced in the next 2015 parliamentary election, despite its long-standing history and some organizational infrastructure, was arguably due to the defection of the large pool of its prominent legislators witnessed during the election campaign period, and replaced subsequently by less prominent candidates with dubious reputations, and the critical shortage of organizational and financial resources.

Meanwhile, the third ruling coalition formed in December 2011 following the 'unfulfilled' intention of legislators to join the previous ruling coalition, has included 'Ar-Namys' legislative faction with all its 25 legislators, indicating that former defectors retained factional memberships. Additionally, under the new coalition agreement, three out of ten legislators formerly intending to defect to the ruling coalition, assumed executive offices, presumably in exchange for retaining loyalty to the party. The fact that the party has further managed to secure executive appointments

for its affiliate supporters, notably the chairman of the state agency for registration, suggests that there has been an informal deal entailing political support of the emergent ruling regime by its core leaders, seen as fairly critical in curtailing concurrent opposition tendencies within the parliament. In the meantime, the fourth and fifth ruling coalitions, formed consecutively, similarly included 'Ar-Namys' legislative faction as part of the pro-incumbent government, evidently obscuring internal tensions between the party's core leaders and defecting legislators.

In substantive terms, this implies that party defections clearly tend to occur under heightened degrees of political uncertainty, as reflected in the relative weakness of the incumbent regime and an uncertain political positioning of the party, and that short-term office-seeking incentives tend to outweigh those relating to vote-maximization or pursuance of valence issues against the backdrop of declining or low party reputation, intra-party conflict potential and diminished electoral prospects as evidenced by consecutive electoral losses in local elections held 2012-2014. The relative emphasis on office-seeking goals at the expense of pursuing longer-term re-election objectives could be also justified, in addition to party's lowering reputation, on the grounds that holding office and expressing political loyalty to the incumbent regime would bring additional perks and benefits associated with extended possibilities to provide low level political patronage, evade political persecution, further business interests and influence government decision-making.

The tendency to pursue short-term benefits from holding office was likewise evident amongst prominent legislators as they continually sought to dissociate from the party's uncertain or weakening stance vis-à-vis the ruling regime. In May 2012, a group of legislators from 'Respublika' legislative faction, including notably a prominent business figure Sharshenbek Abdykerimov and a former public servant Kanatbek Isaev, formed a legislative group 'Yntymak' (Peace), that shortly expanded by incorporating a number of defecting legislators, including from a similar opposition

faction 'Ata-Jurt'⁶²². The group has emerged in the wake of a growing criticism of government, formed by a 'grand' ruling coalition of four legislative factions and led by a leader of 'Respublika' faction Omurbek Babanov, over recurring government reshuffles and the inability to accomplish the ambitious economic goals set initially. Babanov was widely considered then as a compromised figure who would be capable of accommodating a range of divergent political forces, including legislative factions popularly associated with the new 'post-revolutionary' nascent regime as well as prominent politicians affiliated with the former president Bakiyev's regime toppled as a result of revolutionary protests in 2010.

Reflecting this political compromise was the fact that the new 'Babanov government', particularly vice ministers, was composed of politicians drawn from close allies linked to former Bakiyev's regime as well as professionals nominated predominantly by a legislative faction 'Ata-Meken', led by a long-time politician Tekebayev, who was regarded as a highly influential figure in the legislature with alleged collusive links to the incumbent president Atambayev. In the meantime, presumably owing to the initial logic of coalition as based on a compromised deal shaped in large part by the enduring potency of political forces formerly supporting the toppled Bakiyev's regime, there has not been any high-level nominations for government posts on behalf of Babanov's own 'Respublika' faction, which was represented by ambitious and resource-rich legislators that also contributed to the party's electoral success. It was, furthermore, conceivable that the willingness to concede government nominations of his own fellow party or faction affiliates in the legislature was indicative of Babanov's ambition to assume the position of prime minister and his long-time commitment to progressive economic reforms, which in effect proved implausible given profound

⁶²² 'Deputatskaya Gruppya "Yntymak" v Jogorku Keneshe Namerena Sotrudnichat' s Koalitsiiey Bol'shinstva', Azattyk, April, 08, 2014, available at: <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/25324945.html>.

structural and institutional problems, divergent political positions held by government ministers and growing attempts to reduce his political influence vis-à-vis the ruling regime.

The consequent resignation of Babanov's government has meanwhile led to the loss of his legislative seat and formal position as a leader of 'Respublika' legislative faction, perceptibly resulting in a weakening of intra-factional unity and cohesion and, combined with the centrality of individual party leadership, conducing to factionalist and defection tendencies. The political consequences of this also prompted the faction to adopt a passive position on highly politicized issues and developments despite its formal status as the main opposition force in the legislature. Whilst it has retained political neutrality through to the dissolution of the consecutive ruling coalition, a group of influential legislators consisting of eight members from opposition 'Respublika' and 'Ata-Jurt' factions later joined the new ruling coalition as part of a legislative group 'Yntymak' that alongside other legislative groups gained legal force following the adoption of changes to a corresponding law⁶²³. In the meantime, a few weeks prior to the formation of the ruling coalition, the 'political' leader of this legislative group Kanatbek Isaev has been appointed Representative of the Government, an equivalent of Governor, in Chui province⁶²⁴, considered by far the most industrial and affluent region, suggesting that the gubernatorial appointment was part of a political deal reached in exchange for much-needed political and legislative support for the ruling regime and its continual move toward political consolidation.

The examination of potentially causal patterns across specific cases of party defection discussed above thus demonstrates that individual-level calculations to defect to new legislative groups reflect the prioritization of expected (short-term) benefits from holding political office, as

⁶²³ 'Deputatskaya Gruppa "Yntymak" v Jogorku Keneshe Namerena Sotrudnichat' s Koalitsiiey Bol'shinstva', Azattyk, April, 08, 2014, available at: <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/25324945.html>.

⁶²⁴ 'Polnomochny Predstavitelem Pravitel'stva v Chuiskoi Oblasti Naznachen Kanat Isaev', Akipress, Feb.,22, 2014, available at: <https://www.turmush.kg/ru/news:49194>.

predicted by the model of political and institutional uncertainty. In general, the broader context of political uncertainty that extends beyond regime uncertainty to include the ambiguity of party positions and uncertain electoral prospects prove quite significant in informing the strategic decisions of individual legislators to defect or switch party allegiances. In the meantime, and given similar organizational features, such as centralized leadership structures and low levels of intra-party unity and discipline, converged in part by the logic of electoral mobilization and the need to recruit prominent and resource-rich candidates in the context of newness of multi-party competition, a more nuanced explanation would involve highlighting the relevance of internal party dynamics as well as divergent political stances toward the ruling regime. It was noted relatedly that an uncertain political position, as manifested specifically in the absence of political intentions by factional leaders to coalesce with the ruling coalition and trade loyalty for political offices, urges some ambitious legislators to opt for a defection strategy. In combination with a subsequent demonstration of political allegiance and support to the incumbent regime, the strategy further proved to entail potentially high-level office appointments and generate additional 'loyalty' perks and benefits.

In terms of internal organizational dynamics, and driven by originally shared vote-maximizing incentives, the phenomenon of defection and similar manifestations of internal party conflicts and tensions was viewed as being largely acceptable despite public criticisms of sporadic party scandals implicating individual legislators and leaders from 'Ata-Meken' and 'Ar-Namys' legislative factions. The relative tolerance, also extended toward defecting groups and individual legislators prioritizing re-election incentives, was most likely linked to the fact that the majority of leading parties, which eventually managed to obtain legislative seats, emerged and competed under highly turbulent political conditions following mass protests and ensuring regime change in April 2010. The latter was associated with the formation of an environment necessitating the strategic

merger of prominent politicians, with unpronounced or absent long-term commitments into political groups based on personal closeness and pragmatic considerations and formalized as parties for electoral mobilization purposes.

In other words, and given the political context, wherein an emerging incumbency and pro-revolutionary political forces remained diffused and fragile, and the absence of issue-based or principled political positions, there has been an implicit understanding amongst new party actors as well as party leaders that this political collaboration within party platforms occurred primarily for the purposes of electoral mobilization and that long-term political objectives and strategies would be reviewed after electoral goals are accomplished. As evidenced by the next elected parliament, which has overall faced fewer political scandals emanating from intra-party conflicts and tensions, legislative parties under lower levels of political uncertainty would be inclined to organize around political forces sharing closer political and personal ties and committed to maintaining a party line on political matters, conditioned in turn by the increasing consolidation of an incumbent authoritarian regime.

7.3. Party defection, ambition and ideological differences

Though political office-holding incentives, combined with internal disputes over the party's political stance toward the incumbent regime, tend to clearly prompt legislative defections in larger groups, as observed between 2011 and 2014, it was also noted that the abandonment of parties by individual legislators could result from a combination of political ambition extending beyond observable office-seeking incentives as well as some principal ideological and political disagreements with the party leadership. In March 2012, a member of a newly formed ruling coalition, 'Ata-Meken' socialist faction expelled two of its prominent legislators, Ravshan Jeenbekov and Omurbek Abdrakhmanov, for allegedly 'undermining the party's political, moral and financial

integrity'⁶²⁵. The central party leadership claimed specifically that Jeenbekov had been systematically failing to attend meetings with voters in his 'assigned' constituency and that the issue of expelling Abdrakhmanov was initially raised in mid-2011 following the 'insulting statements' that he had allegedly made by comparing an epic Kyrgyz hero 'Manas' to a crime lord⁶²⁶.

The formal grounds for expulsion have not resulted in the suspension of legislative mandates, but they clearly indicated and followed after continued internal tensions in the faction as the two expelled legislators formerly sought to establish a concurrent political platform to further own political and ideological goals. In the meantime, the fact that Jeenbekov has been vainly attempting to compete for the position of prime minister as part of a new ruling coalition that also included his own 'Ata-Meken' faction and has not been allocated a government post by subsequent coalitions, despite a significant influence on the composition of governments exerted by faction's leader Omurbek Tekebayev, suggest in a sense that personal and political disagreements could take primacy over office-seeking incentives. As previously described, facing similar internal tensions arising from political and strategic differences, 'Ar-Namys' legislative faction managed over time to retain loyalty of its prominent legislators hitherto intending to defect from the faction by joining the subsequent ruling coalition and securing high-level political offices.

At the same time, the effect of political ambition of legislators on short-term defection tendencies as well as the outbreak of intra-party conflicts arising from the interaction with leaders proves quite pronounced, including across long-standing parties, such as a socialist 'Ata-Meken' party, placing relatively greater emphasis on party organization-building and discipline owing to its

⁶²⁵ "'Ata-Meken" Isklyuchil Dvuh Deputatov iz Svoih Ryadov', Kloop. March, 19, 2012, available at: <https://kloop.kg/blog/2012/03/19/ata-meken-isklyuchil-dvuh-deputatov-iz-svoih-ryadov/>.

⁶²⁶ 'Partiya "Ata-Meken" Isklyuchila Omurbeka Abdrakhmanova I Ravshana Jeenbekova za Prichinenie Usherba Reputatsii', Knews.kg, March 20, 2012, available at: <https://knews.kg/2012/03/20/partiya-ata-meken-isklyuchila-omurbeka-abdrakhmanova-i-ravshana-jeenbekova-za-prichinenie-usherba-reputatsii/>.

charismatic leader Tekebayev. Similarly to most parties competing in the 'first' parliamentary elections following the political crisis and heightened uncertainty in 2010, the party has also faced the strategic necessity to recruit 'new party actors into the organization' capable of campaigning on personal reputation and visibility and providing considerable campaign contributions. This, however, was seemingly accomplished at the expense of obscuring political, personal and ideological differences that consequently contributed to the outbreak of an internal dissent on the part of two expelled legislators.

On the surface, Jeenbekov's initial criticism was raised on the grounds of a centralized and exclusive authority structure maintained in the form of individual decisions, adopted by Tekebayev, and pertaining to party's political strategy and governance. It was further claimed that as a result of a 'warlord' type of leadership style, Tekebayev has continually managed to nominate and appoint his own 'cadres' and single-handedly define political strategies relating to joining or opposing the ruling coalitions without consideration of alternative and competing viewpoints in the party⁶²⁷. After a while, and by acquiring the status of a 'faction-less' independent legislator, Jeenbekov has, however, gradually turned into a highly vocal critic of an emergent authoritarian regime fostered by then president Atambayev, also supported then by 'Ata-Meken' party's leader Tekebayev, claiming there has not been a meaningful progress in ensuring economic growth, improving the legal system and curbing systemic corruption. In a political setting, Jeenbekov also emerged as a leading opposition figure as he shortly assumed leadership of the new 'National' opposition movement, comprising a wide range of non-legislative parties and prominent opposition politicians, established

⁶²⁷ "'Demokraticheskiy Alyans" Sostavit Konkurensiuy', Azattyk, March, 20. 2012, available at: https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_ata_meken_jeenbekov_parliament/24521580.html.

mainly to ‘prevent the growing usurpation of power’⁶²⁸. In substantive terms, this, to a degree, corroborates the notion that the likelihood of legislative defections or other manifestations of intra-party disputes could potentially increase when highly pronounced political ambitions of legislators extend beyond mere short-term office-seeking incentives to further include ideologically-informed political goals.

It thus appears that aside from personal disagreements with Tekebayev over party’s political strategies and internal governance, both Jeenbekov and Abdrakhmanov also held diametrically opposed ideological positions, varying from economic liberalism to libertarianism and based on preferences for progressive liberal reforms, incompatible with the party’s left-wing socialist agenda. In particular, during negotiations over the formation of a new ruling coalition in December 2011, or three months prior to the expulsion from the party, Jeenbekov has openly expressed, in a meeting with university students, his aspirations to be the next prime minister and presented a ‘New Direction’ program in support of free-market democratic reforms. Given specific configuration of political forces in the parliament, with legislators and politicians affiliated with former president Bakiyev’s regime still retaining political influence, and extreme views on economic and foreign policies and fairly low reputation and elite support maintained by Jeenbekov, the possibility that he would be named a compromised figure to lead a new ruling coalition looked bleak. At minimum though, this statement of political aspirations also served as a platform to mobilize like-minded politicians and civic activists sharing similar political and ideological positions.

Driven less by political ambition for seeking political office and mobilizing politicians and political organizations, Abdrakhmanov, analogously expelled from ‘Ata-Meken’ legislative faction,

⁶²⁸ ‘Tashiev Stal Vtorym Liderom Natsional’nogo Oppozitsionnoho Dvijeniya’, Vb.kg, April, 03, 2014, available at: https://www.vb.kg/doc/267843_tashiev_stal_vtorym_liderom_nacionalnogo_oppozicionnogo_dvijeniia.html.

has continually and in a more emphatic manner voiced his preferences for a liberal market economy and support for an enhanced political cooperation with western countries. In effect though, the latter views differed markedly from mainstream preferences toward government support for welfare and continued partnership with Russia as a priority 'direction' in foreign policy. At the time, and especially in the early stages of the post-electoral period, 'Ata-Meken' party has earned a reputation of a distinctive party favoring generally unpopular 'pro-western values', in part due to the personal images of said legislators as 'pro-western' politicians, and which has been exceedingly exploited by competing parties for electoral and political purposes. With the expulsion of two prominent legislators and as the faction, and its leader particularly, emerged as a significant legislative source of political support for the incumbent pro-Russian regime of former president Atambayev, the usage of this label has waned over time. Meanwhile, the ideological orientations and issue-based positions held by both Jeenbekov and Abdrakhmanov, remained quite consistent as evidenced by multiple statements made publicly against joining the Russian-steered Eurasian Customs Union⁶²⁹.

In the meantime, and in the wake of 'mass legislative defections' observed in 2014, the two expelled legislators formed a new legislative group 'A group of democrats', joined shortly by two prominent legislators from 'Ar-Namys' faction. The strategic program that they presented shortly afterwards explicating the underlying ideological positions, based on promoting liberal market economy, strengthening democratic institutions and parliamentarism and limiting presidential powers, clearly served as a basis for mobilizing like-minded political forces, notably with oppositional tendencies, as well as emphasized the primacy of ideological value-based orientations,

⁶²⁹ 'Omurbek Abdrakhmanov: Budem Jit', Tseplays' za Drugih', Gezitter.org, Oct., 10, 2014, available at: https://m.gezitter.org/interviews/33967_omurbek_abdrakhmanov_budem_jit_tseplyayas_za_drugih/.

considered generally a rare feature of local politics⁶³⁰. This suggests that in addition to purely pragmatic considerations underpinning the logic of office-seeking and benefit, party defections and similar manifestations of intra-party disputes, resulting, as with two former legislators from 'Ata-Meken' faction, in an expulsion from the party, could potentially occur as a result of significant ideological and political differences and highly pronounced political and 'organizational' ambitions of legislators, incompatible with centralized and autonomous leadership structures employed by party leadership.

7.4. Party defection and vote-maximizing incentives

Though politico-ideological differences could significantly heighten intra-party tensions contributing to broader instances of legislative defections (or expulsions), albeit with lower frequencies, the observed patterns of party defections in developing democracies could also be determined by re-election or vote-maximizing incentives. This invalidates moderately the fundamental theoretical propositions pertaining to the conditioning effect of political uncertainty on the behavior of party elites and politicians in developing democracies, manifested in prioritization of 'short-term gains from holding office over longer-term preferences for maximizing votes'⁶³¹ consequently leading to frequent party switching and bandwagoning⁶³². As will be further demonstrated, in the context of heightened political and electoral uncertainty prominent legislators and individual politicians would be tempted to switch party affiliations or lead new extra-legislative parties with the view to maximize electoral, or re-election, prospects.

⁶³⁰ 'Alyans Ravshana Jeenbekova', Gezitter.org, May, 10, 2012, available at: https://www.gezitter.org/politic/11057_alyans_ravshana_jeenbekova/.

⁶³¹ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1352.

⁶³² Ibid.

The tendency for individual legislators to defect to independent legislative groups and further affiliate with new parties additionally indicates that politicians with notably higher levels of political ambition tend to emphasize longer-term electoral incentives that are as a minimum linked to future benefits from holding office and the potential capacity to influence political decision-making by monopolizing organizational power in new party structures. In the meantime, it was equally evident that the strategic emphasis on electoral incentives as an optimal decision following group defections was shaped by the availability of both political and financial resources to mobilize electoral support as well as the expected political considerations associated with an increased possibility of political collaboration with the incumbent regime. As the configurations of ruling coalitions formed following the parliamentary elections of 2015 demonstrate, the incumbent-led SDPK party has been consistently able to form governing coalitions along with legislative factions, in particular, with 'Kyrgyzstan', 'Onuguu-Progress' and 'Bir Bol', that originally grew out of core legislative groups defected en masse from two formerly leading legislative parties and viewed as parties comprising business figures and prominent politicians with predominantly loyal stances toward the incumbent regime and absent principled political and ideological positions.

7.4.1. Mass legislative defections in 2013-2014

The possibility that newly established parties, elected to the parliament in 2015, would be prone to collaborating with an incumbent regime as 'critical' parts of ruling coalitions was previously evident in a series of legislative defections that occurred in large clusters and involved individual legislators from mainly two leading then-opposition factions, including 'Respublika' and 'Ata-Jurt'. In effect, the defections followed after the adoption of changes and addenda to the 'Law on the status of legislators of Jogorku Kenesh' (Parliament), enabling individual legislators to remain independent

without the need to join legislative factions⁶³³. The law further introduced a legal norm allowing individual legislators who hold ‘different political views’ to coalesce into legislative groups, both within and outside of existing legislative factions⁶³⁴.

Subsequently, a group of four legislators from ‘Respublika’ opposition faction, formed shortly before 2010 parliamentary election and led by a prominent businessman Omurbek Babanov, established a legislative group ‘Onuguu’ (Development) ‘with the view of bringing together like-minded legislators to pursue party platform policies in an effective manner’⁶³⁵. The new group stated that it formally remained affiliated with the legislative ‘Respublika’ faction and continues to support its campaign program, but shortly declared its affiliation with a new extra-legislative ‘Onuguu-Progress’ party⁶³⁶. In terms of membership, the group consisted of predominantly young and ambitious legislators with an electoral support base in the southern provinces and evidently with political plans for re-election based on maintaining a neutral stance toward the incumbent regime.

At the time, and contrasting with similar group and individual defections driven primarily by expected benefits from holding office and supporting the incumbent regime, ‘Onuguu’ legislative group, led by an emerging and ambitious politician Bakyt Torobayev, has demonstrably spoken of its long-term political intentions to stand for both parliamentary and presidential elections⁶³⁷. In 2015 parliamentary election thus ‘Onuguu-Progress’ party, the core leadership of which comprised

⁶³³ ‘Kyrgyzstan: Depututam Razreshili Vyhodit’ iz Fraksiy’, Kloop. July 31, 2015, available at: <https://kloop.kg/blog/2015/07/31/kyrgyzstan-deputatam-parlamenta-zapretili-vyhodit-iz-fraktsij/>.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ ‘Novaya Deputatskaya Gruppy ne Namerena Vystupat’ Protiv Politiki Fraksii “Respublika”’, For.kg, Feb., 20, 2013, available at: <http://www.for.kg/news-215114-ru.html>.

⁶³⁶ ‘Partii Kyrgyzstana: “Onuguu-Progress”’, Sputnik, Aug., 08, 2015, available at: <https://ru.sputnik.kg/spravka/20150808/1017289155.html>.

⁶³⁷ ‘Kyrgyzstan. Vybery-215: Na Start Vyhodyat...’, Stanradar, May, 05, 2014, available at: <http://stanradar.com/news/full/10203-kyrgyzstan-vybory-2015-na-start-vyhodjat.html>.

defecting legislators led by Torobayev, has succeeded in gaining 13 seats in the parliament (120 seats in total), as the result of sustained campaigning to increase party visibility, some organizational investments, such as running temporary local party offices and recruiting paid volunteers, and emphasizing agricultural development as its core campaign policy.

In a similar vein, the party has nominated its leader Torobayev for president in 2017 and conducted organized and promising marketing activities in the early stages of the election campaign⁶³⁸. However, with the emergence of two favorite candidates closer to the Election Day, Torobayev has endorsed the candidacy of Babanov, the leader of 'Respublika' party, which he formerly defected from, and who was considered a viable opponent to an incumbent-backed candidate Jeenbekov with an unprecedented potential to win elections⁶³⁹. In campaign rallies, particularly in the southern provinces with his own bases of electoral support, Torobayev was recurrently promised the position of prime minister in the case of an election of Babanov as a president, though formally prime-ministers are chosen by ruling coalitions in the parliament⁶⁴⁰. Whilst the decision to accept an endorsement and run 'in tandem' was made by Babanov based on election closeness and electoral considerations to maximize votes in the southern constituencies, Torobayev's move in turn could be indicative of political ambition for higher political offices based on 'cautious opportunism'. This implies that parties, led by politicians with highly pronounced political ambitions, and emerging originally out of defecting legislative groups could potentially be

⁶³⁸ 'Partiya "Onuguu-Progress" Vydvinula Torobayeva Kandidatom v Prezidenty',Kabar. June, 27, 2017, available at:<http://kabar.kg/news/bakyt-torobaev-nameren-otkazat-sia-ot-kartezha-v-sluchai-izbraniia-prezidentom/>.

⁶³⁹ 'Babanov-President, Torobayev- Prem'er Ministr!',Knews, Sept., 17, 2017, available at: <https://knews.kg/2017/09/17/bakyt-torobaev-ofitsialno-obyavil-o-sozdanii-politicheskogo-tandema-s-omurbekom-babanovym/>.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

viewed as mere electoral vehicles providing the institutional bases for seeking and managing political power.

In other words, the observed party defections as well as ensuing organization-building patterns as they relate to new legislative parties could be also understood in terms of pursuance of high-level political offices by party elites, whereby the underlying vote-seeking incentives leading to party switching and defections serve to both increase the bargaining power in politics and vie for political offices in a more efficient manner. Reflecting in a way this tendency was the composition of the first coalition government created following the parliamentary elections of 2015 by a grand coalition of four parties, including Torobayev's 'Onuguu-Progress' party, and featuring mainly 'party-less' ministers demonstrating political loyalty to the incumbent regime and the affiliated ruling SDPK party. Unlike previous coalition governments, there has been a recurring pattern manifested in the growing agreeability of coalition parties over the distribution of ministerial posts, occupied predominantly by SDPK-affiliated politicians, rendering formation of governing coalitions a mere issue of formal political collaboration. The absence or shortage of government ministers nominated by non-incumbent legislative parties as part of coalition talks indicates the prioritization of higher level political offices by party elites as well as the need to coalesce with an incumbent regime to potentially further business interests or evade politically motivated persecutions, especially against the backdrop of growing consolidation of its power.

The controversy that some new legislative parties offer continued political support to the incumbent regime in exchange for the ability to pursue narrow particularistic interests has primarily surrounded 'Kyrgyzstan' party, which has had past experience cooperating with an incumbent regime. Viewed speculatively as a 'satellite' party created by an incumbent regime to split the votes of concurrent parties, it managed to secure the third place in the last 2015 parliamentary elections,

a rather unexpected result for a new party that was controversially attributed to significant campaign spending, including for media visibility and, as alleged, illicit practices of vote-buying and providing infrastructure development services. It was widely asserted at the time that a wealthy businessman with considerable stakes in the alcoholic beverage industry, Sharshenbek Abdykerimov, 'was a key financial backer' and behind the creation of the party alongside a former Governor of Chui province Kanatbek Isaev, who assumed the party leadership post and was formally in charge of political and organizational decision-making⁶⁴¹. Previously, the defection of Abdykerimov as a legislator from 'Respublika' legislative faction was linked to an initiation of corruption investigation into his business interests 'amid mounting pressure' on the faction's leader and then-prime minister Omurbek Babanov⁶⁴². With the subsequent formation of a legislative sub-faction group 'Yntymak' in 2012, later transformed into 'Kyrgyzstan' party, the corruption probe against Abdykerimov has apparently been suspended, whilst Isaev was offered the position of Governor of Chui province prior to signing an agreement on political cooperation with the ruling coalition and eight legislators, predominantly from 'Respublika' faction, comprising the group⁶⁴³.

Upon securing legislative seats following 2015 parliamentary elections, 'Kyrgyzstan' faction, similarly to 'Onuguu-Progress' faction, has continued cooperating with the ruling regime as part of consecutive ruling coalitions, steered as in the past by a president-led SDPK party. At the end of 2016, however, Isaev left his post as a leader of 'Kyrgyzstan' faction and the ruling coalition of four parties, presumably due to his growing criticism of the incumbent regime over the constitutional amendments strengthening the powers of government and prime minister shortly approved in a

⁶⁴¹ 'Broad Governing Coalition Formed in Kyrgyzstan', Eurasianet, Oct., 30, 2015, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/s/broad-governing-coalition-formed-in-kyrgyzstan>.

⁶⁴² Ibid

⁶⁴³ 'Deputatskaya Gruppa "Yntymak" Prisoedinilas' k Koalitsii Parlamentskogo Bol'shinstva', Knews.kg, April, 07, 2014, available at: <https://knews.kg/2014/04/08/deputatskaya-gruppa-yintymak-prisoedinilas-k-koalitsii-parlamentskogo-bolshinstva/>.

statewide referendum, and seen in turn as a political move by incumbent president to retain the political dominance of his SDPK party in the wake of scheduled presidential elections and potential political transition. Isaev's critical comments regarding the illegality of constitutional amendments evidently contrasted with the arguments of a legislative initiative group that he was initially leading as part of a broader political campaign in favor of a constitutional referendum. The controversy over constitutional changes, further expressed by Isaev in the legislature, reflected the prevailing concerns of both civic activists as well as weakened opposition forces, led notably by the leader of 'Ata-Meken' party Omurbek Tekebayev, that they seemingly contradicted the existing constitutional provision requiring that no changes to the 2010 constitution are to be made until 2020⁶⁴⁴.

Given that the incumbent regime, led by former president Atambayev, was broadly viewed then as moving toward complete consolidation of its power and showing strong authoritarian and repressive tendencies, Isaev's unexpected decision to take an oppositional stance given his continued political loyalty seemed concurrently to entail increased political risks. However, the variability of personal positions and subsequent political affiliations, also driven by political office-seeking motivations in the past, could be somewhat reflective of his long-term political ambitions associated with holding highest executive posts, including that of prime minister. In January 2017, a corruption charge was pressed against Isaev alleging that, back in 2008 and as a mayor of Tokmok town, he made an illegal transfer of municipal property to a private company, a charge viewed as politically motivated and intended to curb his support of potential opposition candidates ahead of

⁶⁴⁴ 'Odin Dopros. Kanat Isaev Svyazal Svoe Delo s Kritikoi Popravok v Konstitutsiyu', KaktusMedia, May 12, 2017, available at: https://kaktus.media/doc/357145_odin_dopros_kanat_isaev_svyazal_svoe_delo_s_kritikoy_popravok_v_konstitutsiyu.html.

scheduled presidential elections⁶⁴⁵. Whilst it was not certain whether his political endorsement of the incumbent's opponent and his former party leader Omurbek Babanov has preceded the instigation of corruption charges or whether the latter provoked him to join Babanov's campaign team shortly, the willingness demonstrated continuously by Isaev to potentially incur political risks in pursuit of highly ambitious political goals was quite evident. A few days prior to the election day, Isaev was arrested on suspicion of planning to organize '...mass riots attended by violence' and 'forcible seizure of power'⁶⁴⁶.

The subsequent conviction of Isaev to 12 years in prison was symptomatic of the intense character of continuing power struggle, visibly reflected during presidential elections, in which high-level politicians, presumably with prior business interests, and with noticeable political ambitions that are not congruent with offering political loyalty to the incumbent regime, could potentially face politically motivated corruption charges for adopting an oppositional stance toward the incumbent government⁶⁴⁷. In effect, this implies that politicians in developing democracies are often compelled to strike a delicate balance and vacillate between pursuing political ambitions, promoting business interests and supporting the incumbent regime. In turn, the ability to misuse administrative resources, further conditioned by the 'traditional' political dependency of the judicial system on the presidential administration, has consistently enabled the incumbent authoritarian regime to maintain its grip on power by 'co-opting' potential defecting legislators with predominantly business

⁶⁴⁵ 'Delo Kanata Isaeva: s Poslednim Slovom Vystupil Eks-vitse-mer Tokmoka Bolot Imamadiyev', Knews.kg, June 28, 2018, available at: <https://knews.kg/2018/06/28/delo-kanata-isaeva-s-poslednim-slovom-vystupil-eks-vitse-mer-tokmoka-bolot-imamadiyev/>.

⁶⁴⁶ 'Zaderzhanie Kanata Isaeva-Vse, Chto Izvestno Seichas', Sputnik, Sept., 30, 2017, available at: <https://ru.sputnik.kg/politics/20170930/1035485593/zaderzhanie-kanata-isaeva.html>.

⁶⁴⁷ 'Kanat Isaev Prigovoren k 12 Godam Tyur'my', ResPublica, Jan., 05, 2018, available at: <http://respub.kg/2018/01/05/kanat-isaev-prigovoren-k-12-godam-tyurmy/>.

background and formerly representing opposition factions in the legislature, consequently undermining the intra-party unity and discipline.

It was accordingly noted that for politicians with less pronounced ambitions, defecting to an independent legislative group could potentially stem from a combination of both re-election incentives as well as the particularistic motivations associated with protecting own business interests. The remaining two legislative groups 'Reforma uchun' (For reforms) and 'Bir Bol' (Unity) independently formed with 'outside of faction' statuses following the approval of permissive legal changes and the defection from two then-opposition factions, including 'Respublika' and 'Ata-Jurt', also emerged seemingly to pursue re-election strategies for political survival in the context of lowering party reputation, growing autonomy and centralization of decision-making structures sustained by party's core leaders, and increased likelihood of political persecution for continued political support of the party's opposition line. The defection of prominent legislators to both legislative groups occurred predominantly from 'Ata-Jurt' legislative faction, viewed discursively as a party comprising former allies of former president Bakiyev, toppled as a result of mass violent uprising in 2010 and accused widely of establishing a dictatorial regime based on tight control of both political and financial resources and intense persecution of political opposition groups, civic activists and independent journalists.

Despite the fact that 'Ata-Jurt' party consisted predominantly of former senior public servants affiliated with the former regime, no concerted effort was subsequently undertaken along party lines to present itself as a unified political force intended to pursue shared interests associated with the restoration of the former dictatorial regime. Instead, and in a way similarly to other concurrent parties, it featured a number of former prominent officials, including the former prime minister and vice-prime minister, who have though not figured as closest members of 'Bakiyev's clan', with the

intention to preserve own political and business interests. The fact that 'Ata-Jurt' has eventually managed to secure the highest number of legislative seats was somewhat unanticipated given its alleged political affiliation with the former regime, but, as local experts noted, that was conditioned primarily by the popularity of its leader Kamchybek Tashiev in the southern provinces, acquired by capitalizing on nationalistic sentiments generated in the wake of violent inter-ethnic clashes in June 2010, as well as the ability of former public servants to mobilize electoral support, particularly in more densely populated southern provinces. Following the relative success in parliamentary elections, the party has increasingly turned into a political force designed to serve the political ambitions of its charismatic leader Tashiev, especially as he stood for scheduled presidential elections in 2011, as well as his closest party fellows. After finishing as the second most favorite candidate with 15 per cent of the votes, and building on extant popular support, Tashiev continued challenging the incumbent 'revolutionary' government by resorting to non-institutional mechanisms of claim-making, including organizing 'opposition' protests⁶⁴⁸.

The latest protest that gathered about 500 protesters in favor of nationalizing the largest Canadian-led gold mining company 'Kumtor' following the government decision to retain the existing contract with minor revisions eventually resulted in an arrest of three leading legislators from 'Ata-Jurt' party, including Kamchybek Tashiev, Sadyr Japarov and Talant Mamytov⁶⁴⁹. It was alleged by the prosecution that they made 'public calls for the violent overthrow of the constitutional regime and the forcible retention of power' during the last protest that supposedly prompted an instant and '...a violent attempt to seize power' as about 50 protesters jumped over the fence around the government building and faced off with outnumbering police and security

⁶⁴⁸ 'Miting na Ploshadi v Bishkeke Nachalsya', Knews.kg, Oct., 17, 2012, available at: <https://knews.kg/2012/10/17/miting-na-ploshadi-v-bishkeke-nachalsya/>.

⁶⁴⁹ 'V Bishkeke Nachalsya Sud Nad Liderami "Ata-Jurta"', Azattyk, Jan., 10, 2013, available at: <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/24819832.html>.

officers⁶⁵⁰. Based on a continuous criminal trial, that also attracted media and political attention due to the popularity of Tashiev as the leading opposition figure and the high-level position of the third legislator Mamytov as the vice-speaker of the parliament, the court sentenced Tashiev and Japarov to 1,5 years in prison and Mamytov to 1 year in prison, the terms that shortly led to the release of politicians because of the previous trial custody. Given the severity of criminal charges, i.e. ‘a violent attempt to seize power’, that could formally lead to 12-20 years of imprisonment, Ikramidin Aitkulov, Tashiev’s lawyer, claimed that the resultant ‘mild’ punishment is both ‘illegal and illogical’ as it does not conform to the formal conviction which, as he insisted, should have been re-considered⁶⁵¹.

Legal nuances aside, the inherently political nature of criminal charges instigated then against prominent members of ‘Ata-Jurt’ party, formerly affiliated with Bakiyev’s regime, including former mayor of Bishkek city Nariman Tuleev and former minister of transportation Nurlan Sulaimanov was fairly noteworthy. The assertive strategy for a continual power struggle pursued by Tashiev against the backdrop of systematic and targeted legal persecutions against party fellows was based on presumed expectations that the extant popular support enjoyed in the southern provinces would be reinforced by proponents of prominent party fellows facing criminal charges and fuel the emergent protest mood in the country expressed by a range of concurrent political forces. In the most preferred scenario, the organization of continually rising protests would serve to pressure the incumbent government for a political compromise that would effectively involve stopping ‘political

⁶⁵⁰ ‘V Bishkeke Nachalsya Sud Nad Liderami “Ata-Jurta”’, Azattyk, Jan., 10, 2013, available at: <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/24819832.html>.

⁶⁵¹ ‘Prigovor Deputatam “Ata-Jurta”’: Tashievu i Japarovu – po Poltara Goda, Mamytovu-Odin God’, Kloop.kg, March, 29, 2013, available at: <https://kloop.kg/blog/2013/03/29/hronika-podsudimy-e-po-delu-ata-zhurtovtsev-govoryat-svoi-poslednie-slova/>.

persecution' of opposition forces, represented by 'Ata-Jurt' party, and potentially incorporating the core party leaders into the new power-sharing arrangements.

Whilst this strategy clearly reflected Tashiev's political ambitions associated with the obtainment of high-level government posts, including that of prime minister, in the light of enduring popularity, which also explained the mild character of punishment, it was also reckoned that the rationale for offering political support to him by some party fellows and individual politicians was an attempt to evade political persecution. A young civic activist, Mavlyan Askarbekov, stated relatedly that the co-leader of 'Ata-Jurt' party Sadyr Japarov was using opposition protests as a political pretext to 'eschew public attention from criminal charges pressed against him over the looting incidences during mass anti-government protests in April 2010'⁶⁵² and that this affected the decision of his own civic group not to join the opposition protests, though they supported the opposition demand regarding the nationalization of 'Kumtor' gold-mining company.

In the meantime, similar attempts to evade political persecution compelled the larger pool of prominent party fellows to defect to independent legislative groups, such as 'Reforma uchun', and further collude with the incumbent regime over the continued protection of business interests in exchange for political loyalty. The proclivity to abandon legislative parties with distinct oppositional stances, however, did not always guarantee an immunity from political persecution and was influenced by pragmatic concerns to prevent potential confrontation with the incumbent regime. Thus, in 2013, a former mayor of Bishkek city and businessman Nariman Tuleev has faced criminal charges and later penalty for overpricing a public transportation contract, despite defecting earlier to 'Reforma uchun' group and maintaining a largely neutral stance toward the ongoing power

⁶⁵² 'Byla li Aksiya Protesta po Povodu "Kumtora" Popytkoi Myateja?', Azattyk, Oct., 05, 2013, available at: <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/protests-in-kyrgyzstan-and-kumtor-gold-mine/24729710.html>.

struggle⁶⁵³. It was presumed that given his close proximity to former president Bakiyev and his considerable business assets of dubious nature, the criminal case instigated against Tuleev, a prominent figure in the past, was also used to showcase ‘significant’ progress in fighting political corruption. In similar ways, the general prosecution office has launched a series of criminal investigations against other prominent legislators from ‘Ata-Jurt’ party, formerly holding high-level government posts, widely seen then as politically motivated illustrating a systematic attempt by the incumbent regime to appease a potential challenge from a range of politicians, associated with the former regime, and possessing substantial political and financial resources.

Unlike Tuleev, however, who previously held an executive office, the core members of ‘Reforma uchun’ group, consisting of Moldobayev, Shin, Korkmazedev, Aidarov, and Sulaimanov, formerly served as legislators elected from ‘Ak-Jol’ party, notoriously affiliated with the former president Bakiyev, as a ruling ‘party of power’ in the legislature. Overall, and contrary to more ambitious party fellows, who held government posts and maintained closer ties with ‘Bakiyev’s clan’, the core defectors in this group seemed to be devoid of pronounced political ambitions to hold high-level executive offices or adopt principled ideological positions. Rather, political loyalty and predictability that they continually demonstrated in relation to previous incumbent authoritarian regimes was traded for an advancement of re-election prospects and potential business interests. The shared strategy to adopt a characteristically apolitical stance in the legislature by members of this group and defect to an independent group was further reflective of the prioritization of electoral incentives, that are not linked to either office-seeking or issue-promotion objectives, and, as a result, the preferability of retaining own personal reputations in

⁶⁵³ ‘Narimana Tuleeva Prigovorili k 11 Godam Lisheniya Svobody s Konfiskatsiey Imushestva’, Vb.kg, July 29, 2013, available at: https://www.vb.kg/doc/237819_narimana_tuleeva_prigovorili_k_11_godam_lisheniia_svobody_s_konfiskaciy_imushestva.html.

politics against the backdrop of declining party reputation maintained by 'Ata-Jurt' party's core leaders. As formerly noted, prominent legislators elected on behalf of this party, including its leaders Tashiev and Japarov, had faced a series of criminal charges with apparent political undertones and formally announced as part of broader anti-corruption campaign, further fueling the party's reputation as comprising former statesmen with significant and dubious business assets and supporting the former authoritarian and 'corrupt' regime fostered by former president Bakiyev.

In a more immediate political setting, meanwhile, the group defections occurred in an attempt to dissociate from the combined labeling of 'Ata-Jurt' party, owing to the political stances adopted by its core leaders, as promoting the nationalistic rhetoric, with a strong electoral and political support base in the southern provinces, and the readiness to resort to organizing continued protests for political purposes. The undermining effect of the latter feature on party's overall reputation was predicated on the fact that political protests, as forms of collective action, have come to be viewed as holding negative implications for maintaining a domestic political stability, consistently advanced as a discursive rhetoric by the incumbent regime to curb potential opposition protests. It was popularly held then, despite previous protest actions that led to successful regime changes, that political protests allegedly and often involving paid protesters serve the narrow particularistic interests of individual politicians. The latest incident that led to a formal conviction of core leaders for an allegedly 'violent attempt to seize power' certainly strengthened the emergent negative public perception of protest actions and in turn lowered the reputation of 'Ata-Jurt' party and consequently weakened its overall position in the legislature due to the subsequent loss of legislative seats.

Aside from reputational factors and party's political stance toward the incumbent regime, linked in a way to the likelihood of political persecution, personal disagreements with the party

leadership further proved to facilitate individual defections. In early 2011, and demonstrating the intensity of internal party disputes, a legislator from 'Ata-Jurt' faction Bahadyr Sulaimanov was reportedly beaten by party's core leaders, including Tashiev and his deputies, following his refusal to vacate his legislative seat⁶⁵⁴. In response to a formal request made by Sulaimanov to the general prosecution office to open a criminal investigation regarding the incident, Tashiev stated that disagreements and personal issues with Sulaimanov '...could have been resolved between themselves' and that 'politicizing it was linked to an attempt to prevent his participation in the presidential elections scheduled for Autumn'⁶⁵⁵. Whilst the alleged politicization of the incident has waned over time due to both the impossibility of pressing criminal charges against sitting legislator, protected by legislative immunity, for 'minor' offences, and growing signs from his own stronghold in the southern provinces to stage protests, there was a clear indication of the frequency of internal disagreements within this party.

As followed shortly, a similar internal dispute erupted between another prominent legislator and party fellow Khadjimurat Korkmazedev and Tashiev over the legality of joining the ruling coalition by 'faction-less' legislators⁶⁵⁶. Korkmazedev, elected earlier as a leader of a new legislative group 'Reforma uchun', claimed in particular that similarly to legislators that retained legislative seats despite the decisions to remain outside the ruling coalition, legislators from opposition factions can join the ruling coalitions, whilst formally remaining as factional members⁶⁵⁷. This last incident followed by similarly contentious discussions across other legislative parties was an apparent

⁶⁵⁴ 'V Kyrgyzstane Izbit Chlen Partii "Ata-Jurt" Bahadyr Sulaimanov', 24.kg, Apr., 04, 2011, available at: <https://24.kg/archive/ru/parlament/96902-v-kyrgyzstane-izbit-chlen-partii-laquoata.html/>.

⁶⁵⁵ 'K. Tashiyev: Na Menya Postupil Politicheskij Zakaz', Azattyk, June, 23, 2011, available at: <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/24243741.html>.

⁶⁵⁶ 'Fraksiya "Ata-Jurt": protivostoyanie Tashieva-Kledibekova'. 24.kg. Nov., 29, 2011. https://m.gezitter.org/politic/7042_fraksiya_ata-jurt_protivostoyanie_tashieva_keldibekova/.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

culmination of continued internal tensions that resulted in defecting to a separate legislative group and caused initially and in part by personalized interaction with the party's core leaders. As Sulaimanov hinted in his interview following the incident, and due to joining the party closer to the parliamentary elections, he barely had prior relationships with the core leaders, including Tashiev, and was not aware of nuanced aspects of the party's internal operation⁶⁵⁸.

This implies that the relative distance from the party's core leadership, maintained similarly by the rest of 'Reforma uchun' group, correlates with the increased likelihood of internal party disputes further facilitating both individual and group-level defections. In effect, the internal disagreements with Sulaimanov and the broader group of defectors heightened in the wake of growing political confrontation between the party, based on a highly centralized and domineering authority, and the emergent incumbent regime prompting core leaders to solidify internal party discipline. By attempting to replace potential defectors with alternative party members perceptibly demonstrating both personal loyalty and readiness to offer meaningful political support, the core leaders thus sought to strengthen the oppositional capacity of the affiliated faction in the legislature. As with 'Ar-Namys' party, and given fairly similar conditions, including the initial degree of intra-party unity and discipline, adopting a more pro-incumbent political stance, including in the form of joining the ruling coalition, however, has clearly proven to reduce the potential for intra-party tensions and ensuing party defections.

In the meantime, the practice of replacing new legislators elected by a closed party list with the candidates listed consecutively in the party list has turned into a massive phenomenon following the election of the new parliament in 2015. Viewed as a highly controversial move from both

⁶⁵⁸ 'Bahadyr Sulaimanov: Svouy Chest' Stavlyu Prevyshe Vsego', Azattyk, Apr., 29, 2011, available at: https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_human_suleimenov/16797258.html.

political and intra-party organizational perspectives, the political councils of three newly elected legislative parties, including ‘Respublika-Ata-Jurt’, ‘Kyrgyzstan’ and ‘Onuguu-Progress’, made decisions to expel 55, 44 and 11 new legislators accordingly, based on previously submitted letters expressing intentions to leave the party and hence the legislative mandate⁶⁵⁹. It was alleged that prior to an Election Day party leaders reached informal agreements with the broader party selectorate, by which fielded candidates ‘pledged’ in written form to vacate the legislative seat in the case of election and failure to collect a minimum number of votes from an assigned constituency⁶⁶⁰. Despite the fact that informal pledges made by party candidates could not be legally enforceable, which in effect resulted in a few legal proceedings, this has indicated that party leaders are willing to resort to feasible legal ways enabling to maintain a more efficient balance between recruiting new party members for electoral purposes, including for the purposes of complying with electoral gender and minority quota regulations, and attempting to maintain intra-party unity and discipline for political goals, by replacing with expectedly more loyal and resourceful candidates. In the longer run, however, it also implies that, absent legal amendments prohibiting post-electoral revisions to the party lists, the continued practice could be a potential source of future intra-party tensions and disagreements, further prompting extra-legislative defections and broadly inhibiting the organizational institutionalization of parties.

As previously suggested, the likelihood of legislative party defection was determined predominantly by both the dynamics of ongoing power struggle, with potential defectors developing

⁶⁵⁹ ‘Iz Spiskov Partiy “Respublika-Ata-Jurt”, “Kyrgyzstan” i “Onuguu-Porgress” Isklyuchili Nekotoryh Deputatov’, 24.kg, Oct., 15, 2015, available at:

https://24.kg/vybory/20856_iz_spiskov_partiy_respublika_ata_jurt_kyrgyzstan_i_onuguu-progress_isklyuchili_nekotoryih_kandidatov/.

⁶⁶⁰ ‘Sud Poschital Nezakonnym Isklyuchenie Kandidatov ot Partii “Respublika-Ata-Jurt”’, Vb.kg, Oct., 19, 2015, available at:

https://www.vb.kg/doc/326770_syd_poschital_zakonnym_iskluchenie_kandidatov_ot_partii_respyblika_ata_jurt.html.

centripetal tendencies toward supporting *en masse* the incumbent regime or maintaining political neutrality, as well as intra-party relational dynamics, further contributing to the outbreak of internal disputes and ensuing defections. Having said that, and whilst political ambition could induce prioritization of both office-seeking (e.g. defectors from 'Ar-Namys' party) and vote-seeking (e.g. 'Onuguu-Progress' party) goals, the propensity to emphasize electoral incentives was equally evident in massive shifts in party allegiances across both sitting legislators and former politicians and the formation of new electoral alliances and party mergers during electoral periods. Reflecting the massive character of party defections to independent legislative groups, which has promptly diminished following the adoption of anti-defection law in 2013, 54 legislators (in 120-seat parliament) decided to stand for other or new parties as party-list candidates, whereas 45 legislators, mostly from the ruling SDPK and socialist 'Ata-Meken' party exhibiting relatively stronger discipline and organizational capability, ran from own parties in the parliamentary election of 2015⁶⁶¹.

Similarly to the last parliamentary election, the list of party-nominated candidates was fielded primarily with the view to maximize electoral support and hence recruit well-known and visible politicians and prominent business figures as leading candidates to compensate for considerable campaign-related expenses. Whilst the latter has remained a persistent pattern, it was also noted that the strategic emphasis on re-election incentives by political actors was extended beyond short-term executive office-seeking goals to include concurrent benefits that holding a legislative seat would potentially entail, such as the expanded possibility to protect and further business interests, broaden the range of political networks and connections and pursue personal ambition and

⁶⁶¹ 'Vybory-2015: v Kakie Partii Ushli Desitsvuyushie DeputatyPparlamenta', KaktusMedia, Sept., 01, 2015, available at: https://kaktus.media/doc/323991_vybory_2015_v_kakie_partii_ushli_deystvyushie_depytaty_parlamenta.html.

recognition. It is thus noteworthy that both legislative defections and party 'restructuring' during an election period, certainly heightened in the context of political uncertainty defined by the newness of competitive elections and multipartyism, tend to correlate with opportunistic tendencies associated with both office-seeking and vote-maximizing incentives. Finally, as with mobilization and voting patterns, the prevalence of party switching and extra-legislative 'electoral' defections, notwithstanding the underlying incentives and motivations, could be further traced to the broader state of weak party identities, low levels of intra-party unity and discipline and the fact that at a fundamental level inter-party competition does not substantively revolve around ideologically-driven issues and considerations.

Conclusion

The frequency of mass party defection and extra-legislative shifts in party allegiances often indicates a low level of party institutionalization in new democracies and reinforces the intra-party organizational challenges of maintaining internal unity and discipline. Premised on the assumption that political actors act based on rational and strategic calculations of potential scenarios for political outcomes, the empirical analysis, discussed heretofore, demonstrated that party switching and group defection to new parties could occur in effect due to a range of reasons associated mainly with office-seeking and vote-maximizing incentives as well as less salient particularistic interests conditioning high level of 'political opportunism' in politics. As noted, there has been an unprecedented rate of legislative defections, typically to new independent legislative groups, following the election of the first 'post-revolutionary' Kyrgyz parliament in 2010, with six elected and a dozen smaller parties competing under highly intense and uncertain political conditions, based nonetheless on an electorally unseen level playing field.

Given the broader effect of the external environment on individual-level strategic decisions made by political actors, Lupu and Riedl proposed that political and institutional uncertainty prompt party elites to prioritize short-term benefits associated with holding political (executive) offices 'over longer-term preferences for maximizing votes'⁶⁶². The argument posited particularly that in view of the possibility of a regime reversal, uncertain and changing power configurations and the limitedness of resources, political actors would be continually inclined to change party affiliations whilst treating parties as heuristically instrumental organizations enabling to formally compete for political power. In slight contrast, the observed patterns of mass legislative defections, characterizing the first parliament elected following mass protests and ensuing 'regime change' in 2010, indicate that strategic decisions, which are also innately individual, to defect are made by political actors prioritizing both office and vote-seeking strategies.

It was specifically observed that the predisposition for both individual and group-level legislative defections, associated with pursuing shorter-term office-seeking incentives, was conditioned markedly by the underlying influence of political ambition and strategic considerations of own party's overall political positioning toward the incumbent regime and future electoral prospects. In the context of moderately authoritarian regimes systematically resorting to political persecution, the obtainment of political advantages and potential perks and benefits from holding (executive) office by ambitious politicians was contingent upon offering political support and loyalty to the incumbent regime or, as with vote-seeking incentives, maintaining political neutrality. It was further noted that the probability of pursuing office-motivated defection strategies by ambitious legislators increases with seemingly reduced electoral chances of affiliated parties, affected by

⁶⁶² Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1352.

obscure party leadership commitments to invest organizationally and run in both the parliamentary and local elections and declining party reputation, including due to ongoing internal tensions.

It was concurrently plausible that political actors, notably sitting legislators, driven by pronounced and longer-term political ambition could defect to form independent legislative groups in an attempt to get re-elected and potentially assume leadership positions entailing significant organizational and decision-making powers in new party structures. Consistent in a way with Kselman's propositions, the logic of electoral mobilization requires the recruitment of 'new actors', often with ambition, and the development of centralized and hierarchical leadership structures that after accomplishing set electoral goals prove to amplify the potential for internal tensions over party's political strategies and possible defections amongst ambitious party fellows⁶⁶³. As evidenced specifically by two legislative groups, 'Bir Bol' and 'Onuguu-Progress' that defected from 'Respublika' faction, the possibility to manage legislative groups and then new parties also involved, in a characteristic manner, maintaining a largely supportive or neutral stance toward the incumbent regime, including as parts of ruling coalitions. In turn, the extent to which subsequent political strategies are linked to acquiring resources and striving for higher political offices seems to be significantly shaped by given power configurations with a consolidated and domineering incumbent regime prompting the surge of a 'cautious opportunism' in politics.

Though political ambition serves as the primary motivating factor affecting the decisions of political actors to defect and change party allegiances in an effort to accomplish office-seeking and vote-maximizing goals or perhaps pursue ideologically-driven politics (e.g. former members of 'Ata-Meken' party – Jeenbekov and Abdrakhmanov), it was also evident that vote-driven legislative

⁶⁶³ Daniel M. Kselman, 'Electoral Institutions, Party Organizations, and Political Instability', (a PhD dissertation submitted to the Department of Political Science in the Graduate School of Duke University, 2009):169.

defections could occur, in effect, amongst experienced legislators with less pronounced political ambitions. In such instances, the rationale for seeking re-election and holding legislative seats was related to an array of particularistic considerations, including the efforts to evade political persecution in light of own party's growing oppositional activities, potentially cultivate business interests and expand political network and connections. Given the critical importance of personalism in politics, and owing to the strategic need for party elites to recruit 'new actors' to maximize electoral gains, the issue of intra-party relationships and the nature of personalized connections to core party leaders further emerged as equally important factors influencing the likelihood that affiliated party members would support the overall political stance adopted by core leaders or conversely abandon parties by prioritizing particularistic interests.

In a broader context, the logic of electoral mobilization and political maneuverability dictates that party elites opt for organizational strategies involving highly centralized, hierarchical and exclusive decision-making and coordination structures. In the early stages of electoral competition, such a strategy proves largely admissible and uncontentious, given the decisive role of core party leaders in candidate selection and campaigning processes, but with the accomplishment of electoral goals, it could seemingly prompt internal disputes and ensuing defections amongst more prominent and ambitious legislators pursuing office-seeking, vote-maximizing and particularistic incentives. The purported effect of political and institutional uncertainty on the frequency of observed defections further proves plausible given the newness of multi-party competition and the related possibility for inchoate parties to secure electoral support, including by recruiting prominent politicians with varying ambition and political goals.

Meanwhile, despite the fact that the overall rate of legislative defections has declined following the adoption of an anti-defection law, gradual consolidation of an incumbent authoritarian

regime and the growing tendency by party leaders to recruit more loyal and own party fellows as leading party-list candidates, similar incidences of extra-legislative defections, continued shifts in party allegiances and party-led expulsions still continue to occur as evidenced by the last parliamentary elections. This suggests in a broader sense that though the enduring patterns of electoral mobilization and ongoing elite competition clearly figure as causal factors affecting the increased likelihood of party defection, there still remain fundamental and structural challenges associated with the organizational institutionalization of parties, maintaining internal unity and discipline and generating strong party identities and loyalties.

Chapter 8. Discussion and analysis.

Introduction

The overall purpose of this study was to investigate potential causal determinants of low level of party institutionalization in Kyrgyzstan with an emphasis on distinctive patterns of party organization, mobilization and coherence. The cruciality of undertaking such a sustained inquiry stemmed from the fact that despite the availability of political and institutional precursors for party development, parties in Kyrgyzstan remained effectively un-institutionalized as reflected observably in the absence of elite investments in developing a) stronger local party organizations, b) programmatic strategies of voter mobilization and c) operative mechanisms for internal cohesion and decision-making. It was broadly established that despite displaying theoretical rigour and relevance, the model of political uncertainty fell short of offering a compelling causal explanation of observed patterns indicating low levels of party institutionalization in developing democracies as exemplified by the case of Kyrgyzstan. Rather, as the research findings hitherto presented indicate, each of the selected dimensions deemed crucial for party institutionalization has been shown to emanate from the complex interplay of overlapping factors that in some way tends to revolve around the impact of social-structural influences and the logic electoral mobilization.

8.1. Political and institutional uncertainty

Proposed as a theoretical framework that can be applied to elucidate peculiar patterns of party competition and development in developing democracies, the uncertainty model was based on the premise that the strategic choices made by political elites tend to be shaped under the influence of an inherently uncertain political environment. In effect, party elite strategies in relation to organization-building and electoral mobilization are identified as a crucial mediating factor conditioning the formation of party systems in developing democracies that, on the whole, 'appear more volatile', and in which 'voter attachments with parties seem weaker...and...parties are less

reliant on programmatic appeals⁶⁶⁴. At the same time, the uncertain context of party competition was believed to compel party actors to opt for building flexible and elusive organizational structures and resort to frequent party switching as they prioritize own political and electoral goals.

8.2. Uncertainty and party organization

The examination of research findings, provided in Chapter 5, has exposed a number of peculiar patterns associated with party's organizational life and indicating that internal party structures and decision-making practices are, above all, reflective of immediate political and electoral considerations, rather than broader context of political and institutional uncertainty. In line with van Biezen's theoretical claim regarding the prioritization of retaining the party's 'public face' in new democracies as opposed to developing extra-parliamentary organizations⁶⁶⁵, it was contended that the shared patterns in party organization-building need to be investigated and explained in terms of the logic of the electoral market and broad political goals prioritized by party elites in order to influence policy- and decision-making and expand own political influence. Relatedly, such reasoning appears to validate the prevalent assumption made by scholars of democratization that political and institutional outcomes in developing democracies tend to be shaped markedly by political incentive structures underpinning the strategic behaviour and actions of political actors.

In specific terms, the overall results of intensive interviews focusing on the organizational aspects of party institutionalization demonstrated that the party's organizational structures are intricately embedded into the dynamics and logic of electoral mobilization campaigns characterized by an emphasis on party leaders, or a handful number of prominent candidates, media marketing strategies for building a visibility campaign and personality as opposed to issue-based campaigning.

⁶⁶⁴ Noam Lupu and Rachel Beatty, 'Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013):1340.

⁶⁶⁵ Ingrid Van Biezen, *Political Parties in New Democracies: Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

This goes beyond the fundamental assumption of electoral incentive theories and necessitates a more profound understanding of idiosyncratic features of party organizations in terms of both endogenous and exogenous factors impinging on the electoral context and elite behaviour. For instance, the tendency to recruit prominent politicians as party-fielded candidates at both national and local level has been explained with reference to the dominant campaign strategy to share considerable campaign-related expenditures and foster party visibility. This, however, takes place at the expense of potential and considerable investments for operating local party units, maintaining loyalty amongst party activists and incorporating democratically inclusive mechanisms of intra-party coordination and decision-making.

At the same time, the absence of observable changes in the extent and strength of party organizations despite perceptible variation in political uncertainty implied the need to further invoke additional factors that conditioned the prevalence of media marketing strategies and personality-based campaigning as strategic considerations in avoiding building strong party organizations. In particular, and as multiple interviews with local experts indicated, the contextual specificity of the electoral market as favouring non-programmatic strategies has been conditioned in part by the weakness or inconspicuity of ideological and cleavage dimensions of electoral and party politics. In older democratic polities, salient cleavage dimensions proved to structure party competition and strengthen party-voter linkages, further maintained by dense and meaningful organizational networks. Following the same logic, the rationale behind the deficiency of elite investments in strong party organizations could be captured in the absence of societal demands for issue-based campaigning and competition along ideological lines, which further conditioned the efficiency of media marketing strategies in the electoral market.

The logic of the electoral market as underpinning the patterns of party organizations appears to be consistent with the principal argument advanced by Hellman and positing that ‘...the

organization of political parties is inseparably linked to strategies of voter mobilization⁶⁶⁶. The comparative analysis of party organizations in four East Asian countries, exemplified as new democracies, showed effectively that 'post-autocratic' electoral markets tend to favour clientelistic electoral strategies and a dominant type of party organization featuring weak internal coordination structures, centralized leadership authorities and formal party memberships⁶⁶⁷. It emerged that in the majority of cases, the electoral market continued to reflect the efficiency of autocratic practices of electoral clientelism as old elite actors managed to survive through transitions to democracy and income inequalities remained pronounced⁶⁶⁸. In the meantime, and owing to the 'post-autocratic' shift to the party-list proportional representation system, the majority of leading parties developed the tendency to target 'defined social groups through ideological platforms', including working class and low income voters, which was unseen under former autocratic settings⁶⁶⁹.

8.3. Party mobilization and uncertainty

Though Hellman's contention regarding the causal association between the logic of the electoral market and ensuing patterns of party organization in new democracies seemed plausible, the analysis of dominant electoral strategies in Kyrgyzstan, however, uncovered important differences in the manifestation of voter mobilization patterns. The latter also appeared to be at odds with theoretical expectations regarding the contextual influences of political and institutional uncertainty on the strategic proclivity in parties across new democracies to pursue both clientelistic and programmatic strategies of voter mobilization. Rather, the empirical findings on this front demonstrated that the evolving patterns of electoral mobilization in Kyrgyzstan tend to be associated with the deployment of loosely organized and unstable clientelistic networks varyingly

⁶⁶⁶ Olli Hellmann, *Political Parties and Electoral Strategy: The Development of Party Organization in East Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011):147.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid, 149.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid, 152.

resorting to divergent practices of electoral clientelism and an emphasis on media marketing strategies to enhance party visibility.

In effect, this dominant electoral strategy has remained largely intact in the face of both high and low levels of political uncertainty and as parties steadily refrained from pursuing programmatic linkage strategies. In the meantime, the transient character of clientelistic relationships seemed to validate a theoretical claim made by Kitschelt and Kselman regarding both the prevalence of clientelistic practices and an unwillingness of party actors in new democracies to make credible long-term policy commitments in an effort to efficiently cope with an uncertain political and economic environment⁶⁷⁰. It was relatedly maintained that faced with credible commitments problems, party actors would be disincentivized to invest in building stable and dense clientelistic networks, especially in the context of new democracies based on low income economies, limited democratic experience and inchoate party systems⁶⁷¹. In a certain sense, the latter explanation formed a part of the broader contextual influences that shaped the formation of the electoral market and conditioned both the prevalence of sporadic clientelistic practices and fluidity of clientelistic networks and relationships.

Beyond plausible exogenous factors, the analysis of electoral clientelism as it manifested itself in Kyrgyzstan further indicated that party-based electoral strategies commonly consisted of divergent clientelistic practices, such as (promises of) political patronage, direct vote-buying and sponsoring infrastructure development services, the combined extent of which was attributed to a set of mainly endogenous factors. This included predominantly the control of administrative state resources by the ruling party, the availability of campaign and clientelistic resources to mobilize local brokers and voters and the perception of enhanced electoral prospects of parties viewed as a crucial

⁶⁷⁰ Herbert Kitschelt and Daniel M. Kselman, 'Economic Development, Democratic Experience, and Political Parties' Linkage Strategies', *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no.11 (2013).

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

factor in recruiting local notables and hence promising to distribute political patronage. It was equally evident that in the absence of operative party organizations or identifiable party brands required to promote the efficiency of clientelistic strategies, newly emerging parties with substantial campaign resources and strong political ambitions, would be otherwise inclined to resort to extreme forms of electoral clientelism, such as direct vote-buying, in order to mobilize voter support. In a broader sense, it would follow that in the context of weak programmatic linkages, parties in new democracies are broadly compelled to engage in sporadic practices of electoral clientelism, the extent and efficiency of which would vary depending on the endogenous capacity to promise and offer political patronage and distribute clientelistic benefits.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis of voter mobilization campaigns across both national and local elections in Kyrgyzstan uncovered that the intensity and forms of clientelistic practices tend to be complementarily affected by electoral institutions. This extends beyond broad arguments regarding the intuitive nexus between voting systems, based on personal votes, and high levels of clientelism and suggests that a major replacement of the majority system with party-list PR system in new democracies could prompt parties to seek support from local notables as party intermediaries on the ground and sponsor high-cost infrastructure projects and services. On the other hand, and under the majority vote system, contending candidates routinely mobilized constituency voters based on continuous distribution of clientelistic goods, a strategy that was at times complemented with candidate's political reputation. Such a manifestation of clientelistic behaviour confirmed the validity of theoretical claims regarding the efficiency of clientelistic strategies for candidates competing in single-member constituencies and thus managing to monitor the compliance of clientelistic transactions and distribute clientelistic goods to a definable group of constituency voters.

It appears clearly that in the context of party-list based and national-level competition, parties are strategically induced to recruit local notable politicians as party-fielded candidates, as direct contacts with constituencies prove unfeasible, and engage in offering high-cost infrastructure development services. The propensity to recruit local notables was explained by the fact that leading parties are in an advantageous position to place local notables as top-listed candidates with real chances of securing legislative seats and a consequent capacity to distribute political patronage. In turn, and in the absence of actual patronage deals, local notables tend to act in a sense as 'brokers' on the ground mobilizing voters and organizing campaigning activities with the support of followers, or potential 'clients', seeking public employment or patronage-related benefits associated with gaining access to state resources and forging high-level political connections. It was relatedly established that the scale of clientelistic practices of providing infrastructure development and renovation services has expanded under party-list PR system, as parties growingly managed to mobilize substantial campaign and financial resources and enforce the compliance of voters, as clients, via own candidates, including local notables or 'household supervisors'.

The latter pattern associated with both the expansion and diversification of clientelistic services common to dominant electoral strategies under the party-list PR system, however, seemed to be at odds with the diverging findings made by Hellmann in relation to the enduring character of electoral clientelism in South East Asian countries despite major electoral changes⁶⁷². As Hellmann explained, the adoption of a party-list system facilitated the emergence of parties, albeit governed by old charismatic and resourceful politicians, that targeted specific social groups based on either left-wing ideological or religious platforms and the distribution of so-called 'club goods'⁶⁷³. In effect, the ability of party actors to protect old patron-client networks was reinforced by the '...claims to

⁶⁷² Olli Hellmann, *Political Parties and Electoral Strategy: The Development of Party Organization in East Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011):152.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

represent a certain social constituency...and mobilize across the dominant cleavages⁶⁷⁴, including along religious, sub-ethnic and class lines⁶⁷⁵. In other words, the identifiability of selected social groups implied the efficiency of both populist appeals and the likelihood to engage, as in the past, in direct forms of electoral clientelism via local notables acting as brokers to monitor and enforce clientelistic transactions⁶⁷⁶.

In contrast, the inconspicuity of salient cleavage dimensions of party competition in Kyrgyzstan conditioned the observed effect of formal electoral institutions on both the extent and varying manifestation of clientelistic practices underlying the logic of the electoral market. This presupposes the primacy of the profound social-structural context reflected in the nature and extent of ideological dimensions underpinning party competition in new democracies and affecting, albeit by interacting with complementary institutional factors, the dominant patterns of party organization and mobilization. This overarching finding appears to be somewhat consistent with early works on party development in the post-communist region attributing a 'catch-all' character of major parties to the '...competitive logic of the weakening/avoiding ideological positions in order to embrace a large constituency⁶⁷⁷. Along the same lines, Evans and Whitfield posited that the patterns and stability of party competition in new democracies of Eastern Europe would vary depending on the nature of social structures⁶⁷⁸ with existing '...constraints on the emergence of any clear bases or dimensions [inducing competition] centred on valence issues⁶⁷⁹, raised by all

⁶⁷⁴ Olli Hellmann, *Political Parties and Electoral Strategy: The Development of Party Organization in East Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011):126.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁷ Abby Innes, 'Party Competition in Post-Communist Europe: The Great Electoral Lottery' (Centre for European Studies, Central and Eastern Europe Working Paper Series 54, June, 2001):abstract.

⁶⁷⁸ Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield, 'Identifying the Bases of Party Competition in Eastern Europe', *British Journal of Political Science* 23, no.4 (October 1993).

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 521.

contending parties and 'over which candidates compete along lines of competence and charismatic appeal'⁶⁸⁰.

The analysis presented here extends the explanatory power of analogous arguments and posits a complex relationship between inconspicuous social divisions or cleavage dimensions and the resultant patterns of party organization and mobilization associated with weak party-society linkages and low levels of party institutionalization. Despite social disparity and inequality driven by rampant corruption, the notion of a distinctive middle-class in Kyrgyzstan remains obscure rendering class-based social divisions virtually irrelevant in terms of structuring political competition. In the context of poor socio-economic conditions and widespread poverty affecting the majority of population, parties tended to compete along vaguely articulated positions on 'valence issues', such as improving socio-economic conditions and tackling systemic corruption. In the meantime, the unobservability of political demands put forward by new and insignificant middle-class groups owning small and medium-sized businesses indicated that the broader electorate shares common preferences associated with the reliance on government for welfare support and politicians to articulate own political positions. This in large part could be attributed to the enduring legacy of the communist era inducing low levels of political participation and efficacy and a general distrust in political parties. As interviews with local experts relatedly suggested, the inconspicuity of profound social divisions in the country and concomitant absences of ideological preferences amongst the electorate can account for the continual inability of nationalist or libertarian parties, such as 'Asaba' and 'Demokrat', consisting of young reform-oriented activists, to secure a place in politics.

Rather, the electoral success of leading parties in Kyrgyzstan has proven to be determined by a varying application of diverse clientelistic practices and media marketing strategies requiring a

⁶⁸⁰ Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield, 'Identifying the Bases of Party Competition in Eastern Europe', *British Journal of Political Science* 23, no.4 (October 1993).

considerable amount of campaign and financial resources. As was determined, in addition to facilitating the deployment of clientelistic strategies based mainly on indirect forms of interaction, the instalment of the party-list PR system can further prompt parties to utilize conventional media outlets and high-cost political advertisements in order to enhance campaign visibility. This emerging trend in political campaigning, unseen under the preceding majority-vote system, evidently reflected the embedded logic of the party-list system incentivizing parties to develop national-level and somewhat professionalized campaigns. However, and as with the expansion of clientelistic practices and types of voter mobilization, the observed relationship between electoral institutions and the extent of media marketing strategies tended to be conditioned by the distal effects of social-structural factors, such as inconspicuous cleavage dimensions, explaining the profound weakness of party-society linkages and difficulties in building stable party brands. The trend in using media marketing and advertising strategies to communicate party platforms has long been identified as a characteristic feature of modern political campaigns in developed democracies, but the emphasis on the implications of election campaign activities and spending seems especially pronounced in predicting electoral outcomes in the post-Soviet region as opposed to the level of investments in party organizations⁶⁸¹.

8.4. Uncertainty, coherence and frequent party switching

In line with an alternative argumentative framework (see Figure 3 below), the empirical analysis of frequent party switching in Kyrgyzstan demonstrated that the observed instances of *en masse* legislative defections need to be interpreted in the context of party organizational models underpinned by the logic of the electoral market. This principally contrasted the original proposition underscoring the exogenous effects of political and institutional uncertainty on the predisposition of

⁶⁸¹ Siim Trumm, 'What Does It Take to Get Elected in a Post-Communist Democracy?', *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 30, no.1 (February 2015).

party actors to switch party allegiances and relatedly prioritize short-term benefits associated with holding political offices. Rather, the tendency to switch or abandon parties was attributed to a range of strategic considerations associated with the obtainment of potential perks and benefits from holding political offices, enhancement of re-election prospects and evasion of political persecution. Whilst the propensity for party defection fuelled by office-seeking incentives and strategic decisions to evade political persecution and further particularistic interests subsided following the gradual consolidation of incumbent's authoritarian regime, the prevalent pattern in switching party affiliations for re-election, nonetheless, remained fairly consistent.

The latter tendency, observed markedly during the election campaign period, confirmed the existence of profound challenges in maintaining intra-party unity, coherence and discipline as party elites tended to adopt organizational styles based on highly centralized, hierarchical leadership structures and exclusive decision-making mechanisms. As was evident from the analysis, party elites in Kyrgyzstan, as elsewhere in new democracies, are strategically inclined to treat party organizations as serving the goal of retaining or re-gaining public offices and expanding own political influence. However, the logic of the electoral market and mobilization necessitates the recruitment of 'new actors' or prominent and resourceful politicians, often with ambition, to share considerable campaign-related costs incurred for the promotion of party's campaign visibility and distribution of diverse forms of clientelistic benefits. In the context of party elite's prioritization of own political goals underpinning centralized authority structures and strong ideological bases of membership, this consequently leads to intra-party tensions perpetuating personalism in politics and low levels of party institutionalization. In the meantime, and unlike the patterns of party organization and mobilization, found to be closely intertwined, subsequent research on party switching in Kyrgyzstan needs to further examine both individual-level and political contextual determinants that extend

beyond the logic of organizational styles and electoral mobilization in order to produce a complete explanation of distinctive patterns of frequent party switching phenomenon.

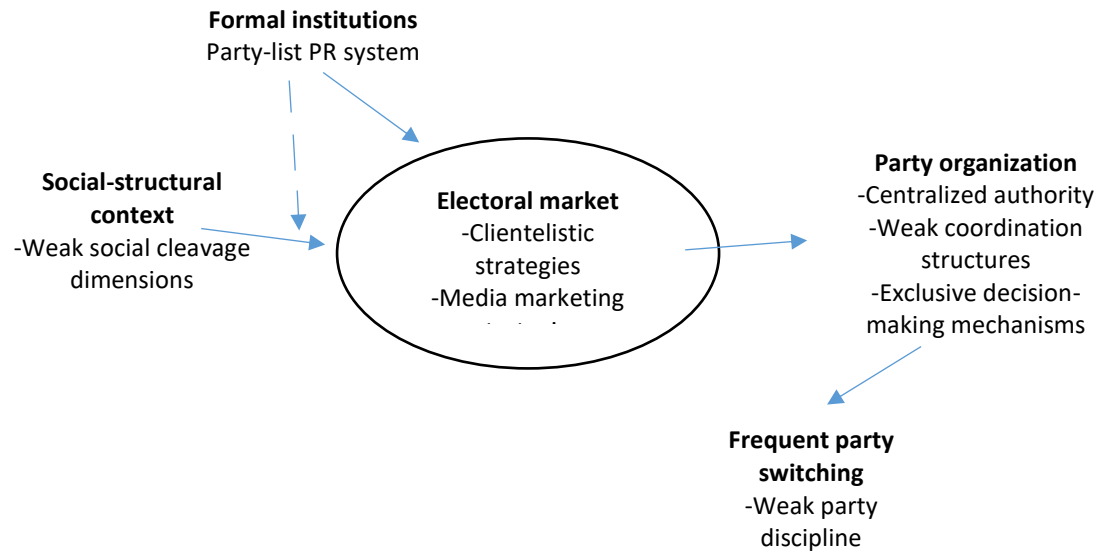


Figure 3. Argumentative framework.

8.5. The model of political and institutional uncertainty

In the light of analysis, hitherto presented, the model of political and institutional uncertainty employed as an overarching theoretical framework was found inadequate in terms of explaining the patterns of party organization, mobilization and coherence associated with a low level of party institutionalization. This appears to hold true even in the context of a more refined operationalization of the uncertainty concept as indicating political instability and regime's level of consolidation and permitting to capture potential variation in elite investments in party-building and an overall degree of party institutionalization. Rather, the underlying reason for weak party institutionalization in Kyrgyzstan was attributed to deeper social-structural conditions, including the inconspicuity of cleavage dimensions and the consequent weakness of party-society linkages, that

fundamentally framed the logic of the electoral market as inducing party elites to employ diverse forms of both clientelistic and media marketing strategies.

In addition to creating practical complications in both operationalizing and measuring political uncertainty, the presumed conception of uncertainty as a defining feature of new democracies further proves somewhat implausible as party actors develop the tendency to adjust to an uncertain political environment, respond to institutional incentives and behave according to the logic of electoral mobilization. In other words, the emphasis on contextual uncertainty as a 'distal' causal determinant of weak party institutionalization potentially runs the risk of overlooking the dynamic interaction of contending factors, such as the dynamics of elite competition, institutional rules and endogenous considerations, which under the broader social-structural influences tend to affect the patterns of party organization, mobilization and coherence. A more refined variant of the uncertainty model, therefore, needs to incorporate complementary factors informing the strategic behaviour of political actors and explaining nuanced patterns of party institutionalization. As formerly noted, the tendency to switch party allegiances was driven by a variety of individual-level considerations, such as political ambition, re-election incentives and political positioning toward the incumbent regime, which cannot be entirely explained with reference to the context of high political uncertainty and office-seeking motivations.

In the meantime, the uncertainty model needs to take heed of nuanced factors that would shed light on the strategic behaviour of political actors and capture the observed variation, albeit an insignificant one, in terms of organizational and mobilizational strategies developed by party elites. In effect, the variation in the configuration of the dominant electoral strategies seemed to be shaped by endogenous factors, including a party's brand or, its lack thereof, and the availability of either state administrative or 'club' resources in order to finance campaign activities. This equally applies to some tenuous efforts made, rather unsuccessfully, by few parties to advance

programmatic appeals or develop 'collegial' leadership and organizational structures against the backdrop of dominant party organizational models. In the absence of strong ideological dimensions, however, party actors seemed, on the whole, to act in a rather constrained manner reflected in the form of 'inert' responses to institutional, political and social-structural influences that tend to impede the process of party institutionalization. In contrast, a higher level of party institutionalization in the post-communist Europe was contingent on the ability of party elites to structure multiple cleavage dimensions that emerged to shape political competition, whereas the identifiability of social groups in East Asian countries enabled new parties to target and expand own support base and build organizational structures based on the sustenance of old clientelistic networks.

Potential avenues for future research and limitations of the study

Building on the assumption that a critical investigation of formal political institutions and organizations appears crucial for understanding the broader processes of democratization, subsequent research on party institutionalization in Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere in new democracies, can further involve a more systematic examination of deeper social-structural bases underpinning party competition. In particular, this would involve tracing continual patterns in the attitudes and behaviour of the electorate and why insignificant social divisions are not translated into the political arena and utilizing conventional 'social cleavage' theories. As well, and given the observed effect of formal institutions, it would be reasonable to explore the causal nexus between a party-list voting system and the patterns of voter mobilization in a more rigorous manner and by undertaking a comparative analysis of electoral institutions and electoral strategies in the post-Soviet region. In a similar vein, the patterns of electoral mobilization can be investigated based on the extent and efficiency of media marketing strategies and campaign expenditures in order to account for electoral success and dominant electoral strategies. This, nonetheless, would necessitate conducting

both intensive case study research examining particular aspects of party institutionalization as well as comparative analysis of few cases sharing similar patterns in party politics, which given its scope, has not been feasible within the framework of this research. Beyond methodological and practical difficulties associated with collecting the empirical material, the analysis of party institutionalization at this stage proved somewhat problematic due to the newness of 'post-uprising' parties and a small number of electoral cycles that shaped the conditions in which parties evolved, organized and competed.

Conclusion

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the presumed contextual effect of political uncertainty on strategic behavior and choices of party elites in new democracies and ensuing patterns of party organization, mobilization and intra-party politics tends to be minimal, warranting further examination of a complex and multi-faceted interplay of complementary factors contributing to low levels of party institutionalization. It was noted substantively that beyond political uncertainty, high levels of which are observed in the early period of political competition in new democracies in the form of a 'distal' background factor, the patterns of party organization-building and electoral mobilization are crucially affected by the logic of electoral mobilization and the broader social structural context. This implies that the party strategies for building flexible and loose organizations and avoiding internal democratic structures and mechanisms reflect the 'modern' trends in election campaigning, such as the increasing recruitment of professional campaign staff and emphasizing modern technology-based media marketing campaigns, rendering party organization-building an extraneous strategic task.

In the context of new democracies, the latter pattern is further conditioned by the inconspicuity of social cleavage dimensions that would be defining the ideological space for political and electoral competition. This holds implications for organizational structures as parties, in the absence of solid social-structural and attitudinal bases of electoral support, would be less inclined to invest in building an extensive network of local party organizations and promoting internal accountability mechanisms in order to sustain linkages with the target constituencies and maximize electoral gains. In post-communist East Central Europe, which exhibited higher levels of party and party system institutionalization across new democracies, the electoral success of leading parties was consistently attributed to investments made by party elites in order to promote party organizational strength by building extensive organizations and complex party structures for internal

coordination and decision-making. In turn, the variation in party organizational strength was contingent on the ability and strategy of party elites to adjust to broader institutional and social conditions, including by structuring existing social cleavages, which tend to be relatively solid and salient, for electoral purposes.

In a similar vein, the profound weakness of both social and ideological underpinnings of party formation and development in Kyrgyzstan has further conditioned the prevalence of clientelistic and personalistic appeals of voter mobilization overshadowing programmatic appeals based on credible policy-based commitments to voters. Contrary to theoretical propositions predicting that heightened conditions of political and institutional uncertainty would induce parties to combine clientelistic and programmatic politics, there has been a consistent trend in employing varying practices of electoral clientelism, due in large part to the absence of societal demands and propensities toward programmatic partisan competition. In addition, both the extent and type of electoral clientelism, employed widely alongside media marketing strategies, seemed to be determined by complementary causal factors associated with broader socio-economic and institutional environments. As formerly explained, in the face of higher poverty rates and profound socio-economic conditions, it was a common practice amongst candidates standing from a single-member constituency to engage in a clientelistic distribution of material goods, whilst the subsequent shift to a party-based proportional representation system has instigated the clientelistic practices of vote-buying and sponsoring infrastructure development projects and services beyond single constituencies.

The institutional and legal framework has been equally important in affecting the extent and patterns of party switching, manifested mainly in the form of legislative defections in favor of the ruling coalition and the incumbent regime or in order to form new extra-legislative and full-fledged

parties with an intention to contest the next parliamentary election. The legal norm adopted following widespread party defection in the parliament and banning legislative party switching has effectively reduced the former rates, providing a moderate institutional incentive for parties to foster party cohesion. In the meantime, the frequency of party switching by sitting legislators, as with the patterns of party organization and mobilization, was additionally explained with reference to factors that extended beyond the presumed effect of political and institutional uncertainty. Consistent with the initial proposition, it was confirmed that contextual uncertainty, defined in terms of uncertain prospects of re-election, compels some legislators to defect toward supporting the ruling coalition in order to pursue office-seeking incentives. However, the long-term considerations for vote-maximization proved to be an equally significant determinant of party switching amongst ambitious politicians, as was the propensity to shift political allegiances by legislators to pursue particularistic interests, such as evading political persecution or furthering business interests.

The observed multiplicity of potential causal factors implies that the patterns of party organization, mobilization and coherency need to be examined within broader social-structural and institutional context and based on the concurrent investigation of political incentive structures shaping the behavior, perceptions and strategic choices of political actors in new democracies. As previously inferred, political actors can potentially manipulate institutional and electoral rules for political purposes to consolidate power and gain advantage over opponents, in a way that the process of democratization and party development could be subverted. That said, it was also evident that whilst a conducive institutional environment, reflecting a combination of political actor preferences, elite compromises and popular pressure, the patterns of party institutionalization tend to be fundamentally conditioned by social-structural precursors. In effect, this suggests that party-building process, viewed as both a catalyst and a crucial component of broader democratization

process, unfolds alongside socio-economic development and technological advancements associated with strengthening democratic governance, civil society and an associational life.

On a practical level, and in the light of emerging disillusionment with party politics in Kyrgyzstan, the process of institutionalization, and hence democratization, can be potentially instigated and facilitated by ensuring that institutional and legal settings further promote 'parliamentarism' and incentivize party elites to invest in fostering internal democratic structures and compete on an even playing field. In practice, this would entail making revisions to the party legislation stipulating the implementation of democratic procedures for party leadership selection and integrating internal accountability mechanisms. At the same time, and given the saliency of financial resources for maintaining party organizations and conducting election campaigns, it would be equally critical to find ways to provide public financing to parties (e.g. extending free political advertisement on state-owned media outlets) that failed to secure parliamentary seats and hold the potential to evolve into a viable political organization based on internal democratic structures and promoting an issue-based political agenda.

On a theoretical level, and in addition to integrating complementary and nuanced factors that distinctly affect the patterns of party organization, mobilization and coherency, the model of political and institutional uncertainty can be considerably refined based on the empirical findings presented heretofore by mainly reviewing the main assumptions underpinning the inherent structural uncertainty across new democracies. It is plausible that the pattern of continued political instability associated with intense intra-elite competition could become a consistent feature of new democracies, whereby political actors learn to adjust to broader conditions of contextual uncertainty. Finally, subsequent improvement of the model would necessitate revisions to the conceptual framework ensuring that the concept of political uncertainty is empirically observable

and operationalizable, providing an analytic leverage to explain within case-variation in terms of party organizational strength and voter mobilization strategies.

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Appendix 1

List of interviews

Name of interviewee	Position	Date, place
Aida Alymbaeva	Lecturer, International University of Central Asia	May, 2015, Bishkek
Asel Doolotkeldieva	Assistant Professor, American University of Central Asia and Teaching Fellow, OSCE Academy in Bishkek	April, 2015, Bishkek
Avtandyl Abdykadyrov	Acting chairman of Karakol city council	May, 2015, Karakol
Azat Zagirov	Lecturer, Karakol State University	May, 2015, Karakol
Baktybek Kainazarov	Program Assistant, National Democratic Institute's office in Kyrgyzstan	April, 2015, Bishkek
Baktybek Monoldorov	Expert	June, 2015, Jalal-Abad
Chynara Esengul	Political analyst	May, 2015, Bishkek
Daniyar Djamankulov	Political analyst	May, 2014, via email correspondence
Daniyar Omurbekov	Bishkek city coordinator, 'Zamandash' party	May, 2015, Bishkek
Emil Aliev	Deputy Leader, 'Ar-Namys' party	May, 2015, Bishkek
Emil Juraev	Associate Professor, American University of Central Asia and Teaching Fellow, OSCE Academy in Bishkek	August, 2013, Bishkek
Erlan Askarov	Naryn province coordinator, 'Ata-Meken' sociality party	May, 2015, Naryn
Jiydegul Asanalieva	Naryn province coordinator, 'Zamandash' party	May, 2015, Naryn
Kamaldin Toktosartov	Bishkek city coordinator, 'Ata-Meken' socialist party	May, 2015
Kamil Ruziyev	Human rights activist	May, 2015, Karakol
Kubanychbek Duisheev	Karakol city coordinator, 'Zamandash' party	May, 2015, Karakol
Maksat Kasenov	Karakol city coordinator, 'Respublika' party	May, 2015, Karakol
Maksat Joldoshbekov	Member, 'Kyrgyzstan' party	May, 2015, Naryn
Medet Tilegenov	Assistant Professor, American University of Central Asia	August, 2013 and October 2015, Bishkek
Nurbek Moldokardyrov	Member, 'Kyrgyzstan' party	May, 2015, Naryn
Nurlan Artykbaev	Civic activist	June, 2015, Osh
Raihan Tologonov	Deputy Leader, 'Ata-Meken' socialist party	May, 2015, Bishkek

Renat Samutdinov	Leader of youth wing, Social-Democratic Party	May, 2015, Bishkek
Roza Baratova	Member, Social-Democratic Party	May, 2015, Karakol
Sartbay Tursunbayev	Karakol city coordinator, Social-Democratic Party	May, 2015, Bishkek
Seit Oskonbaev	Karakol city coordinator, 'Respublika', party	May, 2015, Karakol
Seitek Kachkynbai	Assistant Professor, American University of Central Asia	May, 2015, Bishkek
Shairbek Juraev	Director, Crossroads Central Asia	May, 2015, Bishkek
Tamerlan Ibraimov	Political analyst	May, 2015, Bishkek
Temirbek Asanbekov	Leader, 'Meken Yntymagy' party	May, 2015, Bishkek
Ulan Djaanbaev	Acting Naryn city coordinator, 'Respublika' party	May, 2015, Naryn
Umut Moldovekova	Bishkek city coordinator, 'Respublika' party	May, 2015, Bishkek
Anonymous respondent 1	Party member	June, 2015, Osh
Anonymous respondent 2	Party member	October, 2015, Bishkek
Party staff	'Bir-Bol' party	May, 2015, Naryn

Appendix 2

Results of 2015 parliamentary elections

Party	Number of votes	Percentage of votes	Number of seats
Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan	435,968	27.35%	38
Respublika-Ata-Jurt	320,115	20.08%	28
Kyrgyzstan	206,094	12.93%	18
Onuguu-Progress	148,279	9.30%	13
Bir-Bol	135,875	8.52%	12
Ata-Meken	123,055	7.72%	11
Butun Kyrgyzstan-Emgek	97,869	6.14%	
Zamandash	43,405	2.72%	
Uluu Kyrgyzstan	23,899	1.50%	
Ar-Namys	12,807	0.80%	
Meken Yntymagy	12,679	0.80%	
Congress of Peoples of Kyrgyzstan	9,619	0.60%	
Aalam	6,398	0.40%	
Azzatyk	5,355	0.34%	
Against all	12,428	0.78%	

Source: Kyrgyz Republic, Parliamentary Elections, 4 October 2015: Final Report, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/219186>.

Appendix 3

List of parties

No.	Name	No.	Name
1.	'Erkin-Kyrgyzstan'	122.	'Azamat'
2.	'Asaba'	123.	'All Youth Political Party'
3.	'Ata-Meken'	124.	'Party of Transparent Liberals'
4.	'Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan'	125.	'Unity and Development'
5.	'Republican People's Party of Kyrgyzstan'	126.	'Bir Bol'
6.	'Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan'	127.	'Aikol El'
7.	'Agrarian Party of Kyrgyzstan'	128.	'People's Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan'
8.	'Novaya Sila'	129.	'Karkyra'
9.	'Party of the Veterans of the War in Afghanistan'	130.	'People's Congress of Kyrgyzstan'
10.	'Jangy Kyrgyzstan'	131.	'Strana Edinstva'
11.	'Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan'	132.	'Party of Union, Freedom, Justice and Motherland'
12.	'Party of Protection'	133.	'Kaganat'
13.	'Party of Labour and People'	134.	'El Biyligi'
14.	'Party of Economic Revival of Kyrgyzstan'	135.	'Bilim Ilim Orodus'
15.	'Party of Citizens of Bishkek'	136.	'Jash Bilek'
16.	'Rodina'	137.	'Algyr Kyraan'
17.	'Ar-Namys'	138.	'Party of Kyrgyz Workers and Peoples'
18.	'Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan'	139.	'El Uchun'
19.	'Baba Diykan'	140.	'Party of Justice and Development'
20.	'Party of People's Unity of Kyrgyzstan'	141.	'International Liberal Party of Kyrgyzstan'
21.	'Kairan el'	142.	'Taza Tabiyat'
22.	'Republican Party of Kyrgyzstan'	143.	'Chyndyk'
23.	'Party of Pensioners of Kyrgyzstan'	144.	'Ak Sham'
24.	'Erkindik'	145.	'Amal'
25.	'Youth Party of Kyrgyzstan'	146.	Liberal Democratic Party 'Nur'
26.	'Ulutman'	147.	'Party of Labour'
27.	'Elmuras'	148.	'Nurzaman'
28.	'Glas Naroda'	149.	'Support and Promotion of Kyrgyz Language'
29.	'Soglasie'	150.	'Ak Bata'
30.	'Elet'	151.	'Kelechek El'
31.	'Party of Construction Workers of Kyrgyzstan'	152.	'Kyrgyz Liberal Democratic Party'
32.	Party of People of Kyrgyzstan 'Elnuru'	153.	'Muras'
33.	'Alga-Kyrgyzstan'	154.	'Kyrgyz Ata'
34.	'Construction Workers of Kyrgyzstan'	155.	'Ishenim'
35.	'Turan'	156.	'Socialist Party of Ak Halatchan'
36.	'Party of Greens of Kyrgyzstan'	157.	People's Party 'Kyrgyzstan'
37.	'Patriotic Party of Unity of Kyrgyzstan'	158.	'Adilettuu Kyrgyzstan'
38.	'Meken Birimdigi'	159.	'Jashtar Bulagy'

39.	'Eldik Birimdik'	160.	'Onuguu-Progress'
40.	'Kyrgyz Kylymy'	161.	'Ak Kalpak'
41.	'Edinstvo Kyrgyzstana'	162.	'Chong Kazat'
42.	'Sil'niy Kyrgyzstan'	163.	'El Ordo'
43.	'Ene-Til'	164.	'Alliance of Political Forces of Kyrgyzstan'
44.	'National Movement of Kyrgyzstan'	165.	'Democratic Alliance'
45.	'Kyrgyz El'	166.	'Erkin El'
46.	'Aikol-Manas'	167.	'Kuttuu Kyrgyz'
47.	'Eldik Yntymak'	168.	'Iyman Nuru'
48.	'Uluu Birimdik'	169.	'Aktiv'
49.	'Kalystyk Biylik'	170.	'People's Party'
50.	'Birimdik'	171.	'Menin Bishkegim'
51.	'Kyrgyz Conservative Republican Party'	172.	'AK'
52.	'Nezavisimaya Zhizn'	173.	'Asman Ala-Too'
53.	'Umai Ene'	174.	'ElAman'
54.	'My Za Progress'	175.	'Kalk Yntymagy'
55.	'Akshumkar'	176.	'Party of Power Engineers'
56.	'Liberal-Progressive Party'	177.	'People's Consent'
57.	'Avangard'	178.	'Reforma'
58.	'Tynchtyk'	179.	'Uluu Kyrgyzstan'
59.	'Peasant's Party of Kyrgyzstan'	180.	'Yntymak'
60.	'Ata-Jolu'	181.	'El Dostugu'
61.	'Mudrost'	182.	'Tabylga'
62.	'People's Political Party of Ala-Too'	183.	'Birge-Vmeste'
63.	'Sanjyra'	184.	'Bagyt'
64.	'Party of Transport Workers of Kyrgyzstan'	185.	'Jaran'
65.	'Patriots of Kyrgyzstan'	186.	'Tunuk Kyrgyzstan'
66.	'Party for Life Without Barriers'	187.	'Party of Freedom and Democracy'
67.	'Stolitsa'	188.	'Onuguu Kyrgyzstan'
68.	'Jangy Mezgil'	189.	'Union'
69.	'Kyrgyz Jeri'	190.	'Kelechek-Budushee'
70.	'Kutuu El'	191.	'Danaker-Mirotvorets'
71.	'Ata-Jurt'	192.	'Kyrgyz Ulut Ordosu'
72.	'Clean Society'	193.	'Tartip-Poyradok'
73.	'Chyndyk'	194.	'Aruu El'
74.	'Kut'	195.	'Respublika-Ata-Jurt'
75.	'Meken Tuu'	196.	'Za Rodinu'
76.	'Butun Kyrgyzstan'	197.	'Ala-Too Yntymagy'
77.	'Party of Veterans and Youth of Kyrgyzstan'	198.	'Human rights'
78.	'Beren'	199.	'Kel'
79.	'Kyrgyzstan's Tobacco and Cotton Farmers'	200.	'Aikol'
80.	'El Menen'	201.	'Patriot Party'
81.	'Party of Peasants and Workers of Kyrgyzstan'	202.	'Mekenim Kyrgyzstan'
82.	'Zamandash'	203.	'Power in Unity'
83.	'Jashasyn Kyrgyzstan'	204.	'El Birimdigi'

84.	'Uluu Kyrgyzstan'	205.	'Aytish Ata'
85.	'Respublika'	206.	'Ala Too-Kyrgyz Jeri'
86.	'El Kelecheği'	207.	'Demokrat'
87.	'Bakubat Kyrgyzstan'	208.	'Birimdik Eldik Kyrgyzstan'
88.	'Ak-Jol'	209.	'New City Party'
89.	'Aalam'	210.	'Kaynar'
90.	'Svoboda Vybora'	211.	'Eldik-Narodnaya'
91.	'Party of Progressive Forces'	212.	'Centre of Peace and Study of Spirit and Science'
92.	'Kyrgyz Ulut Ordosu'	213.	'Tazalyk'
93.	'Abiyirduu Kyrgyzstan'	214.	'El Talaby'
94.	'Eldik Kenesh'	215.	'Bai Meken'
95.	'Socialist Party of Kyrgyzstan'	216.	'Kalys'
96.	'Party of Congress of People of Kyrgyzstan'	217.	'Taza Kyrgyzstan'
97.	'El Armany'	218.	'Patriot Yntymagy'
98.	'Komsomol'	219.	'Commonwealth of People of Kyrgyzstan'
99.	'Sodrujestvo'	220.	'People's Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan'
100.	'Ak Sanat'	221.	'Jaratman El'
101.	'Jangy Bagyt'	222.	'Youth of Tash-Kumyr'
102.	'Uluttar Birimdigi'	223.	'Jany Door'
103.	'Azattyk'	224.	'Nash Narod'
104.	'Spravedlivost'	225.	'Jakshylyk-Dobro'
105.	'Union of People of Kyrgyzstan'	226.	'Birik'
106.	'Workers' Party of Kyrgyzstan'	227.	'Asyl Muras-Jashtar'
107.	'Youth Movement of 7 April'	228.	'Ala-Too Kalk Birimdigi'
108.	'Meken Baatylary'	229.	'Uluu Koch'
109.	'Youth Democratic Party'	230.	'Slava Stoletiu Oktybrya'
110.	'Mezgil Agymy'	231.	'Istok'
111.	'Mekenchil'	232.	'Young Generation of Kyrgyzstan'
112.	'Egemen Kyrgyzstan'	233.	'Yntymak'
113.	'United People's Movement'	234.	'Uluu Jurt'
114.	'Uluu Barchyn'	235.	'Youth Progressive Party of Kyrgyzstan'
115.	'Women for Justice'	236.	'Ashar-Altan'
116.	'Jyldyz'	237.	'Free Country'
117.	'Kok Jal Jashtar'	238.	'Adam-Demokrat'
118.	'Meken Yntymagy'	239.	'El Erki'
119.	'Mekenchil Patriottor'	240.	'United Kyrgyzstan'
120.	'Sil'noe Obshestvo'	241.	'Kyrgyz Kelecheği'
121.	'Kyrgyzstan'	242.	'Altyn-Door'
		243.	'People's Power'

Source: Central Election Commission, <https://shailoo.gov.kg/media/gulina/2019/04/12/11-2019.pdf>.

Appendix 4

List of documents

1. Law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On Political Parties;
2. Law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On Public Associations';
3. Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic;
4. Constitutional law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On Elections of the President and Deputies of Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic';
5. Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic;
6. Report on the Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan: February-March 2000, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe;
7. Final Report on Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan: 27 February and 13 March 2005, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe;
8. Final Report on Pre-Term Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan: 16 December 2007, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe;
9. Final Report on Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan: 10 October 2010, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe;
10. Final Report on Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan: 4 October 2015, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe;
11. Preliminary Report of the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations on 2010 Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan:
12. Final Report on Monitoring of the Media Coverage the Election Campaign in 2010 Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan;
13. Freedom in the World 2011: Kyrgyzstan- Freedom House;
14. Freedom in the World 2014: Kyrgyzstan- Freedom House;
15. Statutes of the following parties: 'Ata-Meken', Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, 'Onuguu-Progress', 'Respublika', 'Ar-Namys', 'Zamandash', 'Kyrgyzstan', 'Ata-Jurt'