

Political Party Development and Party “Gravity” in Semi-Authoritarian States The Cases of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan

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Abstract

What has affected the development of political parties in the competitive authoritarian regimes of the former Soviet Union? In this essay, the author examines the development of political parties in the predominantly Muslim Central Eurasian states of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In particular, he examines the extent to which political parties have become the primary channels for political recruitment, or the extent to which they have political gravity for electoral candidates. The author finds the greatest level of party gravity in Tajikistan, followed by Azerbaijan, and then Kyrgyzstan. A variety of social and political explanations are provided to account for these differences.

Key words: Post-communist politics, semi-authoritarianism, political parties, Central Asia, Southern Caucasus.

What has affected the development of political parties in the competitive authoritarian regimes of the former Soviet Union? In this essay, I examine the development of political parties in the predominantly Muslim Central Eurasian states of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.¹ Although all are decidedly nondemocratic, they resemble “competitive authoritarian regimes” that have active, yet circumscribed, oppositions. Although there is a growing literature on semi-authoritarian regimes,² there is very little literature on party

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¹ These three states were selected (although Azerbaijan is technically in the Caucasus and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are in Central Asia) because they share several common characteristics, most notably that they are predominantly Muslim, are all former Soviet States, and each fits the definition of a semi-authoritarian regime. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were not included because they do not qualify as semi-authoritarian regimes. Kazakhstan does qualify, but, unfortunately, I was unable to procure the relevant data for this study.

² Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.1 (2002): 51-65; Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,”

development in such regimes. These states represent an excellent opportunity to examine how political parties develop under semi-authoritarian conditions. In particular, I examine the extent to which political parties have become the primary channels for political recruitment, or the extent to which they have political “gravity” for electoral candidates.³ Further, knowing the extent to which parties develop as the primary channels for political recruitment (even under the conditions of semi-authoritarianism) provides insight into how democratization might proceed, if the semi-authoritarian regimes in the region, for whatever reasons, were to become fundamentally transformed.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in ambiguous political regimes that are neither fully democratic nor clearly authoritarian. In fact, as Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan argue, many regimes that had begun to democratize in the 1980s and 1990s had evolved into modern sultanistic regimes, a term that refers to extremely patrimonial regimes that coalesce around a highly personalistic and dynastic-prone ruler who exercises power at his/her own unrestricted discretion.⁴ In many ways, the Muslim Caucasian and Central Asian states appear to fit this model of “sultanism,” but in at least three cases (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) there is at least some elements of what Levitsky and Way refer to as *competitive authoritarianism*.⁵ In this essay, I examine the development of opposition political parties under the conditions of “patrimonial competitive authoritarianism.” Indeed, although there are many similarities when comparing these three countries, such as the emphasis on personalism, the clan-based nature of politics, and economic collapse that characterized most all post-Soviet countries, there are significant political differences as well. Azerbaijan and Tajikistan were racked by violent conflict in the early years of independence, whereas Kyrgyzstan’s transition

Journal of Democracy 13, no. 1 (2002): 5-21; and Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003).

³ To be sure, there have been other ways in which party relevance has been measured, the most common being public voter support of parties (see for instance John Coleman, “Party Organizational Strength and Public Support for Parties,” *American Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 4 [1996]: 805-824). This, however, is of questionable utility when examining the relevance of party organizations in semi-authoritarian or authoritarian regimes, in which popular perceptions matter less than the attitudes of political elites. Further, even in established democracies in the West, or newer democratic systems (as in Hungary or Poland), public support of parties is declining, and in the case of the post-communist states, very low. This, however, does not mean that parties are not the principal avenues for leadership recruitment—they are and will remain so in the foreseeable future. Thus, examining party “gravity” or attractiveness to aspiring political elites is, in my view, a good measure of party development in semi-authoritarian states.

⁴ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁵ Svante E. Cornell, “Democratization Faltering in Azerbaijan,” *Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 3 (2001): 118-131.

to independence was relatively peaceful.⁶ Further, the institutional context was different. Although all three states have strong presidential systems, Azerbaijan's presidency is perhaps the most powerful of the three states. In addition, each country used very different types of electoral systems, with Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan relying more heavily on single-member districts with a plurality/majority formula, whereas Tajikistan has consistently used a mixed parallel system with elements of a Proportional Representation formula. Thus, there is also good reason to believe that the trajectory of development of political parties would be very different for each country.

One indicator of the relevance of political parties (which is useful when examining parties under the conditions of semi-authoritarianism) is what M. Steven Fish has referred to as "party gravity."⁷ Essentially, this involves the extent to which parties become attractive as vehicles for ambitious politicians. In political systems that emphasize personalism, such as "superpresidentialism" and winner-take-all electoral systems, there is less incentive for politicians to associate with political parties because they do not make it more likely that candidates will win election and gain access to power. Thus, politicians have a strong incentive to pursue personal and informal relations in patronage networks that circumvent political parties. In this essay, then, I examine the extent to which political parties have such gravity (or not) for three Central Eurasian states for the period 1991-2005. This period covers the crucial first decade and a half in which political parties began to take root (or not). The developments during this period will crucially affect the contours of semi-authoritarian politics in each of these states for years to come.

Literature

In order to address the question posed above, we need to examine the structural conditions under which parties develop in Central Asia, particularly the semi-authoritarian nature of the regimes there. Thomas Carothers has argued that it is useless to associate hybrid regimes with democracy—for him, it is

⁶ Kyrgyzstan is often held out as an "island of democracy." See, for instance, John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy* (New York: Harwood Academic Press, 1999). However, the definition of Kyrgyzstan as a democracy is highly questionable, certainly under Akayev, but also more recently. More common is the assessment of Kyrgyzstan, as, at best, a semi-authoritarian regime. See, for example, Ottawa, *Democracy Challenged*; John Ishiyama, "Neopatrimonialism and the Prospects for Democratization in the Central Asian Republics," in *Power and Change in Central Asia*, ed. Sally Cummings (London: Routledge, 2001); and Eugene Huskey, "Kyrgyzstan: The Fate of Political Liberalization," in *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 242-276.

⁷ M. Steven Fish, "The Executive Deception: Superpresidentialism and the Degradation of Russian Politics," in *Building the Russian State: Institutional Crisis and the Quest for Democratic Governance*, ed. Valerie Sperling (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001), 177-192.

simplistic to assume that hybrid or “gray area” regimes are simply incomplete democracies. In fact, they may not undergo any political change at all and represent a potential new type of regime—semi-authoritarianism.⁸

One variety of semi-authoritarianism that is particularly applicable to the Central Eurasian states is what Levitsky and Way refer to as “competitive authoritarianism.” In competitive authoritarian regimes, formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. However, incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent that the “regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy.”⁹ Examples of such regimes include Croatia under Franjo Tudjman, Russia under Vladimir Putin, Peru under Alberto Fujimori, as well as Albania, Armenia, Kenya, Mexico, and Zambia in the 1990s.

Competitive authoritarianism is distinguishable from both democracy, on the one hand, and full-scale authoritarianism, on the other. In general, modern democratic regimes meet four minimal criteria:

1. Executives and legislatures are chosen through elections that are open, free, and fair;
2. Virtually all adults possess the right to vote;
3. Political rights and civil liberties, including freedom of the press, freedom of association, and freedom to criticize the government without reprisal, are broadly protected; and
4. Elected authorities possess real authority to govern, in that they are not subject to the tutelary control of military or clerical leaders.

Although there may be occasional violations of these criteria, these are not so systematic as to seriously impede the existence of democratic challenges to the regime. In contrast, in competitive authoritarian regimes, these violations are so systematic and frequent they create extreme advantages for the governing regime. Although elections are regularly held and are generally free of massive fraud, authoritarian incumbents routinely use state resources to maintain their political advantages. Thus, typically in competitive authoritarianism there are limits placed on the media coverage of opposition politicians, systematic harassment of opposition candidates, and, occasionally, the manipulation of election results. Members of the opposition may be jailed, exiled—or even assaulted or murdered.¹⁰

⁸ Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm”; see also, *Democracy Challenged*, in which Marina Ottaway argues that Azerbaijan is a clear example of a semi-authoritarian regime.

⁹ Levitsky and Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” 53.

¹⁰ Competitive authoritarian systems should not be confused with other types of flawed regimes that nevertheless meet basic standards of democracy, or what O’Donnell called “delegative

Yet, competitive authoritarian regimes are not full-scale authoritarian regimes either. In competitive authoritarian regimes, incumbents routinely manipulate politics to their advantage. However, they do not eliminate formal democratic rules, reduce them to a mere façade, or ban opposition parties altogether. Rather, incumbents are more likely to use bribery, co-optation, and subtle forms of suppression to “legally” harass, persecute, and extort cooperation. Further, in competitive authoritarian regimes, opposition forces often pose significant challenges to the regime. So, even though democratic institutions are seriously flawed in competitive authoritarian regimes, unlike in full-fledged authoritarian regimes, the incumbents must take the opposition seriously. Unlike “façade” electoral regimes which characterize full-blown authoritarian systems, in competitive authoritarianism, democratic institutions (such as legislative elections) offer an important channel through which the opposition may seek power and influence, even though it is seriously circumscribed. Among the Central Asian regimes, Levitsky and Way characterized Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as full-blown authoritarian regimes. In comparison, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan have characteristics that are akin to competitive authoritarianism.

Factors that Affect Party Gravity

Turning more directly to the question of what affects the degree of party gravity, there are at least three sets of factors that have been cited in the extant literature that impact the extent to which parties are attractive as vehicles for political mobility for prospective candidates—these include political cultural, social, economic resource, political institutional factors, as well as the impact of the Soviet political legacy.

An important political cultural factor is the extent to which “personalism” penetrates politics, or whether politics is dominated by vertical patron-client relations as opposed to programmatic debates. The three Central Eurasian regimes considered here are not only characterized by competitive authoritarianism but also have high degrees of personalism in politics, much like neopatrimonial states in Africa.¹¹ In particular, some scholars have argued that the defining feature of Central Eurasian regimes is “sultanism,” or the high concentration of authority in the hands of a single person with “dynastic tendencies.”¹² Although certainly there is a high degree of personalism in many

democracies.” Delegative democracies are characterized by low levels of horizontal accountability in which institutional checks exist on the executive. However, such regimes at least meet the minimum standards for democracy. Guillermo O’Donnell, “Delegative Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 1 (1994): 55-69.

¹¹ Ishiyama, “Neopatrimonialism and the Prospects for Democratization in the Central Asian Republics.”

¹² Farid Guliyev, “Post-Soviet Azerbaijan: Transition to Sultanistic Semiauthoritarianism? An Attempt at Conceptualization,” *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 3 (2005): 393-435, and Houchang

semi-authoritarian regimes, the Central Eurasian States are neopatrimonial *par excellence*.¹³ As in the case with many African states, neopatrimonial regimes are dominated by “Big Man” politics. Indeed, patrons use state resources to secure the loyalty of clients that reaches from the highest levels downward. Unlike corporatist authoritarian regimes in which groups (such as the military) dominate, in neopatrimonial regimes, authority is derived primarily from personal connections with the great leader. To be sure, there is a variety of different types of neopatrimonial regimes, some are more pluralistic (as in Tanzania under Julius Nyerere, or Kyrgyzstan, currently) and others are more like personalist dictatorships (such as Zaire under Mobutu, and Turkmenistan under Niyazov). Nonetheless, it is personal connections in a web of patron-client networks that define the basic avenues to obtain political power. Several scholars argue that neopatrimonialism can undermine the bureaucratic structure of the state, political institutions, and the rule of law, and provides strong incentives for corruption.¹⁴ Some have argued that neopatrimonialism can extend the reach of the state into the geographical and social peripheries of the country, provide short-term stability, and facilitate communal integration.¹⁵

Whatever the case, the sultanistic character of the neopatrimonial regimes in Central Eurasia acts as an independent factor that shapes the development of political parties in the competitive authoritarian regimes of Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Generally, it has been argued in the post-communist context that personalism militates against party gravity.¹⁶ However, one might imagine party formations built entirely on patron-client networks, hence, personalism may promote greater party gravity.

Another social factor that affects party gravity is the extent to which horizontal, ascribable ties interact with party boundaries. In particular, regarding these three states, clan-based politics plays an important role in shaping political relations. This is particularly true in Central Asia where, as Collins notes, especially in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, there are clan and tribal divisions with deep historical roots stretching back before the Soviet era.¹⁷ These clans, which Collins defines as “informal social institution(s) in which actual or notional kinship based on blood or marriage” forms the basis

Chehabi and Juan Linz, eds., *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

¹³ Ishiyama “Neopatrimonialism and the Prospects for Democratization.”

¹⁴ Michael Bratton and Nicolas Van de Walle, “Neo-patrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa,” *World Politics* 46, no. 4 (1994): 453-489.

¹⁵ Thandika Mkandawire, “Thinking about Developmental States in Africa,” paper presented at The United Nations University, African Economic Research Consortium Public Forum, African Development in the 21st Century, October, 16, 1998.

¹⁶ Fish, “The Executive Deception.”

¹⁷ Kathleen Collins, “Clans, Pacts and Politics in Central Asia,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.2 (2002): 137-152, 139.

of horizontal and vertical social and political relations in Central Asia. Indeed, “far from being irrational relics of a bygone age, the informal ties and networks of clan life reduce the high transaction costs of making deals in an environment where impersonal institutions are weak or absent and stable expectations are hard to form.”¹⁸

Thus, clans build a sense of trust and reciprocal relations upon which social and political organizations are built. Clans, in fact, serve as an alternative to formal market institutions and official bureaucracies. These ties extend vertically, by means of which clan members who have accomplished much and risen to prominence provide the social, political, and economic opportunities for the members of their respective networks in exchange for personal loyalty. The existence of clan-based politics provides for political competition. Clans compete in weakly institutionalized states and divide the central state’s resources among themselves. The upshot is a pluralism of sorts, as the clans compete with one another (and at times form pacts). However, as Collins notes, the patterns of interactions are likely not to be purely clientelistic in nature. Unlike clientelism, which is dependent on, to a large extent, the patron delivering goods and services to his or her clients, clan loyalties are far more stable and persist despite changes in economic conditions.

Clans are important social structures in each of the three cases investigated in this essay. Clan structure in Tajikistan corresponds with the north-south divide in the country and is most clearly visible in the factions associated with the People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT). The northern clan is associated with the Leninabad region, which is mostly urban. The Leninabad faction (Khudzhand clan) is one of the most formidable in the country. Unlike the northern Khudzhand, the southern Kulyob faction represents interests of the population of rural areas. The current president, Emomali Rakhmonov, is from the southern clan. Once he became president, his clansmen began ousting “men from Khudzhand” from key positions in the government, security structures, law enforcement agencies, and ideological institutions.¹⁹

Azerbaijan’s ruling elite is also based on several clans (largely organized along regional and patronage relationships) competing for control of a pyramidal distribution structure that allows substantial funds to be skimmed from the oil business. For Tadeusz Swietochowski, party formation in Azerbaijan is, to a large extent, based on regional kinship links and loyalties.²⁰ This is, in part, a remnant of the precolonizational period, when Azerbaijan was divided into territorially semi-autonomous principalities.²¹ Others have noted the

¹⁸ Ibid., 143.

¹⁹ *Rossiiskiy Vestnik*, no. 14, April 13, 2006, 6.

²⁰ Tadeusz Swietochowski, “Azerbaijan: Perspectives from the Crossroads,” *Central Asian Survey* 18, no.3 (1999): 419-434.

²¹ Ibid., 421; see also, Joseph A. Kechichian and Theodore W. Karasik, “The Crisis in Azerbaijan: How Clans Influence the Politics of an Emerging Republic,” *Middle East Policy* 4, no. 1 (1995): 57-77.

regional and clan affiliations of major political organizations.²² The governing Yeni (New) Azerbaijan Party represents the political and economic interests of the ruling Nakhichevan and Yerei clans, who have dominated Azerbaijani political life for decades. The opposition Musavat Party tends to promote the Nagorno-Karabakh clan's interests. Family, kinship-based groups and regional networks are the focal social institutions of Azerbaijani society that penetrate and pervade formal governmental structures.²³

Clan politics also permeates Kyrgyzstan.²⁴ In Kyrgyzstan, clan networks have penetrated the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. Where clans are aligned along the industrial north and the rural and agricultural south, "pacts" have created a rough balance of clan power—three or four major clans dominate the distribution of economic resources. Under President Akayev, his clan controlled the national bank and the security forces, which are headed by a former academic whose sole credential seems to be that he was related to the president, and Akayev's wife's clan controlled the ministries responsible for gold mining and privatization. Other clans controlled the hydroelectric power plants and oil refineries. Further, clan-based voting has undermined the development of formal institutions such as political parties. As Collins notes, in the Central Asian states the results of the first elections showed "that it is not election-rigging or corruption as such that undermines the most basic process of democracy, but the practice of clan-based voting."²⁵

The effects of clans on party gravity can be positive or negative. On the one hand, clans can serve to detract from party gravity, as they represent informal political connections that are far more enduring and reliable than other political communities (like parties). On the other hand, if clan identity overlaps with party identity (i.e., the boundaries of the party and the clan correspond), it is likely that political parties will have greater gravity as they solidify party bonds with clan ties.

There are also economic resource factors that impact on party gravity. In particular, if access to state office provides access to resources (such as oil or natural gas revenues), then parties, particularly the governing party, become quite attractive to politicians. Literature on African politics has suggested that both politicians and voters find it attractive to associate with the ruling party to gain access to patronage resources.²⁶

²² Vagi Guseynov, "Aliyev posle Aliyeva: Nasledovanie Vlasti kak Sposob yeye uderzhaniya," [Aliyev after Aliyeva: Inheritance of power as a means to retain it] *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [The Independent Newspaper], March 19, 2004, 10.

²³ International Crisis Group, *Azerbaijan: Turning over a New Leaf*, Institute for Democracy Europe Report, no. 156, Baku/Brussels, May 13, 2004, <http://www.icg.org/home/getfile.cfm?id=1228&type=pdf> (accessed October 15, 2007).

²⁴ Kathleen Collins, "Clans, Pacts and Politics in Central Asia."

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁶ John Ishiyama and John James Quinn, "African Phoenix? Explaining the Electoral Performance of the Formerly Dominant Parties in Africa," *Party Politics* 13, no. 3 (2006): 317-333, and

There are other political institutional factors that also have an impact on party gravity, such as the electoral system and presidentialism. Electoral rules have long been cited as exerting an important influence on political parties and party systems.²⁷ In particular, many scholars have noted the political effects of electoral laws. These approaches include analyses that focus on the differential impact of electoral laws, especially those that govern national legislative elections. The most noteworthy distinction in this body of literature is the impact of Proportional Representation systems versus Plurality/Majority formulae. In general, it has been argued that the more proportional an electoral system, the more likely parties resemble the features of the classic “mass party” as characterized by Maurice Duverger.²⁸ However, low-magnitude district systems (such as single-member district systems) are likely to highlight individual personality, and, hence, the role of personal connection. Thus, it is argued, such systems are more likely to produce parties that are based on personal connections as opposed to party program. To measure the degree to which openings are made available to political parties by the electoral system, I employ the often-used measure, the natural log of average district magnitude, which is calculated by dividing the total number of seats in the lower house of the legislature by the number of electoral districts.²⁹

In addition to electoral rules, there is also the posited independent effect of presidentialism.³⁰ In particular, there are the effects of what Steven Fish has referred to as “superpresidentialism,” which has acted as a major impediment to the development of political parties in post-communist politics.³¹ According to Fish, superpresidentialism is characterized by the following features:

An apparatus of executive power that dwarfs all other agencies in terms of size and the resources it consumes; a president who enjoys decree powers; a president who de jure or de facto controls most of the powers of the purse; a relatively toothless legislature that cannot repeal presidential decrees and that enjoys scant authority and/or resources to monitor the chief executive; provisions that render impeachment of the president virtually impossible; and a court system that is

John Ishiyama and Krystal Fox, “What Affects the Strength of Partisan Identity in Sub-Saharan Africa?” *Politics and Policy* 34, no. 4 (2006): 748-773.

²⁷ Rein Taagepera and Matthew Soberg Shugart, *Seats and Votes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), and Arend Lijphart and Bernard Grofman, *Choosing an Electoral System* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

²⁸ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties* (London: Methuen, 1954).

²⁹ Taagepera and Shugart, *Seats and Votes*.

³⁰ Johanna K. Birnir, *Ethnicity and Electoral Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³¹ Fish, “The Executive Deception.”

controlled wholly or mainly by the chief executive and that cannot in practice check presidential prerogatives or even abuse of power. Superpresidentialism is a regime. It may be contrasted with autocracy, insofar as the chief executive does not enjoy total power and is subject to bona fide, periodic challenge in national elections.³²

There are several reasons cited as to why superpresidentialism militates against the development of political parties. First, by concentrating authority in the hands of a single individual, the politics of personality prevails, making it more difficult for parties to develop coherent programs and identities. Fish contends that this effect is exhibited throughout the states of the former Soviet Union where “superpresidentialism chills party development in part by holding down incentives for important political and economic actors to invest in politics.”³³ In a superpresidential system, candidates have relatively little incentive to associate with political parties, when the legislature (the principal arena for party politics) has such little say in policy. Rather, individuals tend to focus on forming personal attachments with presidential hopefuls, bypassing association with political parties.

In addition to the social and institutional factors that affect political party development, there is also the impact of the legacies of the past. Some scholars have argued that decades of totalitarian rule (more extreme and of longer duration in the Soviet Union than in Eastern Europe or the Baltic States) pulverized what little there was of civil society, a legacy that continues to retard the development of political parties. Other scholars, however, argued that there were variations in the legacies of the past in terms of the effects of the dynamics of the transition itself on the development of political parties.³⁴ In particular, a crucial variable affecting the development of political parties is the extent to which reformists captured the leadership of the state either through the governing party or via the opposition, or whether hardliners maintained their advantage. If it is the former, then parties are more likely to develop “gravity” as the governing party accepts political competition and elections. Further, as the author has noted elsewhere, the dynamic of party development is also a function of whether the country emerged from a violent civil war.³⁵ Ironically, although severe conflict may harden positions dividing parties later, it does

³² Ibid., 179.

³³ Ibid., 181.

³⁴ Luke March, “From Vanguard of the Proletariat to Vox Populi: Left-populism as a ‘Shadow’ of Contemporary Socialism,” *SAIS Review* 24, no. 1 (2007): 63-77, and John Ishiyama. “Communist Parties in Transition: Structures, Leaders and Processes of Democratization in Eastern Europe,” *Comparative Politics* 27, no. 2 (1995): 147-166.

³⁵ Ishiyama, “Communist Parties in Transition.”

provide a strong incentive to formulate coherent political organizations, which may be the basis for stronger political parties later.

Although Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan share a common legacy of communist rule and are characterized by the predominance of clan-based politics, they differ in a few key respects—the dynamics of the independence process, the availability of resources available for party patronage, the correspondence of clan with party identities, and the political institutional context.

Transition Processes in Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan

Azerbaijan gained its independence after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. As with the other countries in the Caucasus (Georgia and Armenia), Azerbaijan's transition was quite traumatic, with tremendous amounts of economic, social, and political dislocation. In particular, Azerbaijan's independence was marred by a war with Armenia over the ethnic Armenian enclave located within Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh. The region effectively seceded from Azerbaijan (with Armenian and Russian help), taking with it about 16 percent of the country's territory. The influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees and infrastructural damage caused by the war had a debilitating effect on the Azerbaijani economy. Further, the nationalist upsurge accompanying the conflict (which led to ethnic cleansing of Armenian populations in Azerbaijan) prevented the development of an ideologically defined political spectrum, and has assisted the Aliev "dynasty" later to consolidate its hold on politics by labeling oppositionists as traitors.

At first, Azerbaijan gained its independence under the sway of a pro-Moscow communist leadership that remained in power until it was forcibly unseated in the spring of 1992 by mass demonstrations in Baku and elsewhere. The Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF), under the historian Abulfaz Elcibey, then took power, and he was elected president on June 7, 1992. Azerbaijan under the Popular Front developed in a clearly democratic direction and Elcibey's government was widely credited with having laid the basis for democracy in the country. However, the war with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh undermined the government's attempt to institute democratic and economic reforms, and the defeats at the hands of the Armenians and their Russian supporters led to the coup of June 1993 by Colonel Surat Huseinov. Elcibey fled Baku to his home region of Nakhichevan and surrendered his position to former KGB chief and USSR Politburo member Heydar Aliev, who proclaimed himself president on June 18, 1993, with Huseinov as prime minister.³⁶ Huseinov himself was later removed after attempting another coup against Aliev in 1994. In balloting in October 1993, Aliev was confirmed as president, officially winning 98.8

³⁶ Cornell, "Democratization Faltering in Azerbaijan."

percent of the vote. In March 1994, he concluded a cease-fire with Armenia, quickly consolidated his power, and effectively halted the ambitious Azerbaijani process of democratization that had been started in 1992.³⁷

Tajikistan, like Azerbaijan, was plagued by conflict during the transition to independence. However, the war did not heighten nationalism in the country as had been the case in Azerbaijan. Rather, Tajikistan experienced a genuine civil war that essentially pitted alliances of clans against one another. As in Azerbaijan, independence from the Soviet Union had been accomplished only reluctantly, and, initially, a pro-Moscow communist government remained in power. Tensions began in the spring of 1992 after opposition members took to the streets in demonstrations against the then president and former first secretary of the Tajik Communist Party, Rahmon Nabiyev.

Open fighting broke out in May 1992 between old-guard supporters of the government, backed by Moscow, and a loosely organized opposition, the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), comprised of disenfranchised groups from the Garm and Gorno-Badakhshan regions, democratic liberal reformists, and Islamists. The UTO consisted of highly different factions, the largest being the Islamic Revival Party (IRP), but it also included groups such as the secular Democratic Party and Lali Badakhshan (a regional party centered in Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous Oblast). The war was rooted in differences among the regional and clan elites rather than in actual ideological and political disagreements.³⁸ As fighting escalated, Nabiyev's own progovernment militias staged a coup d'état against him in September 1992. He resigned office from the safety of his home province of Leninobod. By December 1992, the Kulyob province's former boss turned paramilitary leader, Emomali Rahmonov, was in power. The rise of Rahmonov represented a real shift in power from the old power based in the clans of Leninobod in the north to the militias from Kulyob in the south.³⁹

With the aid of the Russian military and Uzbekistan, progovernment forces routed the opposition in late 1992. The height of hostilities occurred between 1992 and 1993 and pitted Kulyobi militias against an array of groups, including militants from the IRP and ethnic minority Pamiris from Gorno-Badakhshan. In large part due to the foreign support they received, the Kulyobi militias were able to defeat opposition forces and went on what has been described as an ethnic-cleansing campaign against Pamiris and Garmis.⁴⁰ The campaign was

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Shirin Akiner and C. Barnes, "The Tajik Civil War: Causes and Dynamics," *Accord* 10, no. 1 (2001): 20-32.

³⁹ Monica Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River: The Untold Story of Central Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002); Mohammad-Reza Djalili, Frédéric Grare, and Shirin Akiner, *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Why Did Nationalism Fail in Tajikistan?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 7 (1996): 1105-1129.

⁴⁰ Djalili, Grare, and Akiner, *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*.

concentrated in areas south of the capital and included the murder of prominent individuals, mass killings, the burning of villages, and the expulsion of the Pamiri and Garmi population into Afghanistan. The violence was particularly concentrated in Qurghonteppa, the powerbase of the IRP and home to many Garmis. Tens of thousands were killed or fled to Afghanistan.

From 1993 to 1997, a stalemate of sorts persisted, with the IRP and its allies waging a low-level insurgency against the government. In 1997, the General Agreement of Peace and Reconciliation in Tajikistan was signed, which effectively ended the civil war. The agreement guaranteed the UTO 30 percent representation in government. However, this quota was never fulfilled and many from the former opposition joined the ruling party, while others were marginalized or suspended their political activities altogether.

Unlike in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan, in Kyrgyzstan, the transition was marked by the earlier replacement of the communist authorities with the opposition. The early years of glasnost in the late 1980s had little effect on the political climate in the Kyrgyz Republic. There was some press liberalization, but by and large, liberalization proceeded only very slowly. What was unleashed, however, was violent ethnic and regional friction in the republic. In terms of ethnic tension, the most acute nationality problem in Kyrgyzstan was the existence of a large Uzbek population around the city of Osh in the southwest of the country (ethnic Uzbeks comprise about 13 percent of the population). In 1989, an Uzbek-rights group called *Adalat* began demanding that Moscow grant local Uzbek autonomy in Osh and consider its annexation by nearby Uzbekistan. In June 1990, violent ethnic confrontations began between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Osh Oblast, and a state of emergency and a curfew were introduced and lasted until August 1990.⁴¹

In addition, old regional rivalries pitting clans from the north against clans from the south reemerged. In 1985, power in Kyrgyzstan passed to Absamat Masaliyev, a representative of the southern elite—he replaced the “northerner” Turdakun Usubaliyev, who had ruled the then Soviet Kyrgyz Republic since the days of Nikita Khrushchev. Askar Akayev, who became Kyrgyz president in 1990, was, like Usubaliyev, from the north. Since then, the southern clans have remained in the opposition, but later rallied around Kurmanbek Bakiyev, another southerner from Osh.⁴²

In the early 1990s, the opposition Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement (KDM) had developed into a significant political force with support in parliament. In an upset victory, Askar Akayev, the president of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, was elected president in October 1990. In December 1990, the Kyrgyz Supreme Soviet voted to change the republic’s name to the Republic of

⁴¹ Huskey, “Kyrgyzstan: The Fate of Political Liberalization.”

⁴² Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia’s Island of Democracy*.

Kyrgyzstan. Despite these outward moves toward establishing independence, there remained considerable pro-Soviet sentiment in the republic. In March 1991, 88.7 percent of the voters approved in a national referendum a proposal to maintain the USSR as a “renewed federation.” In August 1991, following the abortive coup attempt in Moscow, the Kyrgyz Supreme Soviet vote declared independence from the USSR and the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan was banned (like the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova [PCRM] and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation [KPRF]).⁴³

Thus, in Tajikistan and Azerbaijan, the first years of independence were marked by continued communist rule and civil conflict. Ultimately, in both cases, there was a “democratic” interlude that allowed for the development of opposition political parties, but which was quickly followed by the reintroduction of authoritarianism, but an authoritarianism unable (or unwilling) to fully emasculate the opposition. In Tajikistan, the clan basis of the conflict provided the primary social bases that supported the party system there. In Azerbaijan, it was the memory of the democratic interlude under Elçibey that sustained the opposition. In Kyrgyzstan, the fact that the opposition took power first, and the general absence of conflict, removed the incentive to organize parties to mobilize an opposition.

The Current Political Parties in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan

In Azerbaijan, the political parties can be divided into two groups, those that are part of the governing bloc and the opposition. The government bloc includes the New Azerbaijan Party (Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası—NAP) and a number of smaller formations. In turn, the NAP is wracked by internal divisions between the old guard, made up of experienced cadres who served under Haidar Aliev during the communist era, and reformists, who are often Western-trained and grouped around İlham Aliev, the current president (and Haidar’s son). This modernist wing emerged triumphant at the NAP’s 1999 Party Congress and has consolidated its hold on the party.

The fragmented Azerbaijani opposition has its roots in the Popular Front government of the early years of independence. Parties are differentiated more by personality than by ideology. Despite the official existence of many parties, perhaps only four are truly relevant. The opposition parties with the largest degree of popular support are Musavat, the Azerbaijan National Independence Party (ANIP), the Democratic Party, and the Popular Front. Musavat takes its name from Azerbaijan’s first political party, founded in 1911, which ruled the first Azerbaijani republic between 1918 and 1920.⁴⁴ The party benefits from a

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ I. S. Bagirova, *Politicheskie partii i organizatsii Azerbaidzhana v nachale XX veka, 1900-1917* [Political parties and organizations in Azerbaijan at the beginning of the 20th century, 1900-1917] (Baku, Azerbaijan: Elm, 1997).

relatively strong nucleus of activists and has placed itself in radical opposition to the regime. Musavat produces the country's most popular political newspaper, *Yeni Musavat*, and claims to be the largest opposition party.

The Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (APFP) is the direct successor to the party of Elcibey. However, the party has been plagued by internal conflicts between the "classics," led by Elcibey himself, and the "reformers," led by the party's deputy chairman Ali Kerimov. After Elcibey's death in August 2000, the party split into two seemingly irreconcilable wings, both claiming the party's mantle. The Kerimov wing has a larger following among the party's rank and file and created the APFP-reformist group. This wing defines itself as "centrist," rejects neoliberal economic ideas, and promotes a role for the state in the economy. Later, Kerimov, in the spring of 2005, helped spearhead a united opposition Azadliq (Freedom) bloc of three parties (along with Musavat and the Democratic Party) that contested the November 2005 parliamentary elections.⁴⁵

ANIP is led by Etibar Memedov, and favors a minimal economic role for the state and the privatization of the economy. Unlike Musavat and the Popular Front, ANIP has shown a willingness to occasionally cooperate with the NAP. Finally, the Democratic Party is led by Rasul Guliev, a former speaker of parliament with a close political association with Haydar Aliev, who was exiled to the United States after having been indicted for corruption. The party is run by his loyal deputy, Sardar Jelaloglu, but its existence is entirely dependent on Guliev. The Democratic Party is a splinter group, not of the Popular Front, but of the Aliev government.

In Kyrgyzstan, there are few significant parties. The Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan (CPK), which was the only legal political party during the Soviet years, was abolished in 1991 in the aftermath of the failed coup against the Gorbachev government of the Soviet Union. A successor, the Kyrgyzstan Communist Party, was allowed to register in September 1992. It elected two deputies to the lower house of parliament in 1995. In that party, significant oppositionists include past republic leader Absamat Masaliyev, a former first secretary of the CPK. Another party with many former communist officials is the Republican People's Party. Two other, smaller neocommunist parties are the Social Democrats of Kyrgyzstan, which gained three seats in the upper house and eight seats in the lower house of the 1995 parliament, and the People's Party of Kyrgyzstan, which held three seats in the lower house.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Zurab Todua, *Azerbaidzhan segodnya : Vlast, neft, ekonomika, politicheskie partii, biografii* [Azerbaijan today: Power, oil, economics, political parties, biographies] (Moscow: Panorama, 1995).

⁴⁶ U. K. Chinaliev, *Politicheskie partii Kyrgyzstana* [Political parties of Kyrgyzstan] (Moscow: NIK, 1999), and Abzhalbek Anarbekov, *Politicheskie partii v Kyrgyzstane: 1991-1999* [Political parties in Kyrgyzstan: 1991-1999] (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: Center for State History, 1999).

Other parties include Ashar (Help), which was founded in 1989 as a movement to take over unused land for housing⁴⁷; Ashar took one seat in the upper house in the 1995 elections. A fluctuating number of parties and groups are joined under the umbrella of the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DDK); the most influential is Erkin Kyrgyzstan (Freedom for Kyrgyzstan), which in late 1992 split into two parties, one retaining the name Erkin Kyrgyzstan, and the other called Ata Meken (Fatherland). In the 1995 elections, Erkin Kyrgyzstan took one seat and Ata Meken two seats in the upper house. For all their proliferation, parties have not yet played a large part in independent Kyrgyzstan.

In Tajikistan, after the civil war ended in 1997, all of the parties had to undergo a process of reregistration that was concluded in 1999. The main parties were the governing People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT), the Tajik Communist Party (TCP), the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), and the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT).⁴⁸ The PDPT was formerly known as the People's Party, and registered in December 1994 under the chairmanship of Abdulmajid Dostiyev. The party is currently the state party and penetrates much of the state structure (most state employees are members of the PDPT, for example). The party was mainly made up of apparatchiks from the old regime and led by the southern Kulyob faction (which had supplanted the Northern Uzbekistan-oriented Northern Leninabad (Khudzhand faction) as the dominant political grouping in the country. In 1997, the party was renamed the PDPT, and members elected President Rahmonov as party chairman. The PDPT factions are largely based around personality, and continued regional and clan tensions within the party, pitting the northerners against the southerners. The party advocates continued state intervention into the economy, and positive relations with Russia and other countries of the Former Soviet Union (particularly Uzbekistan).

The TCP is headed by former Rahmonov client, Shodi Shabdolov, and had allied itself with the Kulyobi faction during the civil war. The party has fallen into disfavor with the regime, and some of its assets were nationalized in May 1998. In addition, there are some smaller parties that have sought to position themselves between the PDPT and the Islamists, such as the social democratic Party of Justice and Progress, which was formed by intellectuals in 1998.

⁴⁷ V. Ponomarev, *Samodeiatel'nye obshchestvennye organizatsii Kazakhstana i Kirgizii 1987-1999: Opyt spravochnika* [Autonomous social organizations in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzia, 1987-1989] (Moscow: Institute for Research on Extremist Processes, 1991).

⁴⁸ Mavlon Mukhtorov and Abduali Toirov, *Politicheskie partii Respubliki Tadzhikistan* [Political parties in the Republic of Tajikistan] (Dushanbe, Tajikistan: Status, 2004), and Nori Khamkarulova and Galina Nazarova, *Tadzhikistan: Parlamentskie vybory 2005: Sbornik po vyboram* [Tajikistan parliamentary election, 2005: Handbook on the election] (Dushanbe, Tajikistan: CIMERA, 2004).

The main parties of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) are the Democratic Party (Almaty platform) and the Islamic Rebirth Movement (primarily the Islamic Renaissance Party, IRP). The Society of Lali Badakhshan (a regional party) split from the UTO in 1999. The Democratic Party, founded in 1990, was banned in 1993. It split in 1994, with one new group forming the “Tehran platform.” The remaining wing (“Almaty platform”) was reregistered in December 1999. It has no special regional affiliation, but has more supporters in the urban areas of the country.

The other main party within the UTO, the IRP, has traditionally drawn its strength from many unofficial (as opposed to state-sponsored) Islamic clerics. It has a widespread network of local branches and has a network of financial supporters. The party is considered the most powerful challenger to PDPT and has had to contend with many obstacles from local authorities, especially in southern Tajikistan. In the later years, the party seems to have downplayed its religious aspects. The IRP has its stronghold in the Rasht valley and in rural areas of the country. Emboldened by international support for Tajikistan’s role in aiding the United States-led coalition in its war against terrorism beginning in 2001, Rahmonov has tried to connect the IRP and the radical Islamic organizations, Hizbut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IRP has vigorously denied any connection to these groups.

Analysis

Although there are many similarities among the three regimes (competitive authoritarian systems, clan-based politics, similar levels of post-Soviet economic dislocation, and so on), there are several crucial ways in which the three states are different. As indicated in table 1, the dynamics of the transition to independence were quite different—in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan, wars had an important impact on forging party identities, which was not the case in Kyrgyzstan. In Azerbaijan, the war established the NAP as the dominant party. Further, since there was a democratic interlude in Azerbaijan, this created the basis for the future political opposition to the NAP, given that the opposition had grown out of the Azerbaijani Popular Front. War in Tajikistan forged the identities of the contending militias as they overlapped with party identities. Thus, the dynamics of the transition increased the relevance and gravity of party organizations. In Kyrgyzstan, the transition was absent these struggles.

In addition, in Azerbaijan, clan politics overlaps with party boundaries (as is the case with Tajikistan). In Kyrgyzstan, there is less correspondence between party identity and clan identity. Thus, parties will have less gravity than in either Azerbaijan or Tajikistan. Further, the existence of large oil and natural gas reserves in Azerbaijan provides a strong incentive for politicians to associate with political parties, particularly the governing party, in the hope of gaining access to resources.

Table 1 also reports the institutional contexts in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan,

and Tajikistan. First, the table provides a measure of presidential power as calculated by Timothy Frye, Joel Hellman, and Joshua Tucker.⁴⁹ The measure calculates the strength of the constitutional presidency and ranges from 1-27, depending on how many powers are exclusively the president's, shared, or belong to other institutional actors. As indicated, the most powerful presidency exists in Azerbaijan (21), followed by Kyrgyzstan (14), and Tajikistan (12). Given Fish's superpresidentialism argument above, I would expect that parties would have least gravity in Azerbaijan, as compared to either Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan.

Second, the electoral systems governing the legislative elections are identified. As is indicated, although all three countries experiment with a mixed parallel system, in which a portion of the seats elected were elected via party lists, both in Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan these systems were abandoned later in favor of pure single-member district plurality/majority systems. Only in Tajikistan was the mixed system maintained. Thus, one would expect a greater level of party gravity in Tajikistan than in either Azerbaijan or Kyrgyzstan.

To assess the extent to which the parties have become relevant (party gravity) in the politics of the three countries, I focus on three indicators of party development. First, there is the extent to which parties are "continuous" organizations, or whether they are able to maintain a degree of organizational and political continuity over more than one election. Since the maintenance of an organization requires considerable resources across elections, the extent to which parties are able to maintain both a continuous existence and demonstrated voter appeal indicates more developed party organizations. The extent to which continuous parties predominate in a party system indicates a more developed system of political parties.

To measure the development of party organizations and political party systems, I examined the percentage of the seats in the lower house of the legislature received by the "continuous parties" over the first three consecutive post-communist elections. Focusing on the lower house of the parliament rather than on other institutions is justified, as Schlesinger has noted, because the single most important component affecting party development historically throughout the democratic world has been the legislative component, particularly the lower, more powerful house. The major continuous parties were defined as those parties which had won seats in both elections and held enough seats to form a parliamentary faction in the legislative sessions following both of the first two post-conflict or post-Soviet elections. In

⁴⁹ Timothy Frye, Joshua Tucker, and Joel Hellman, "Data-Base on Political Institutions in the Post-Communist World" (Data set, Columbus, Ohio, 2001). This measure was based upon Matthew Shugart and John Carey's scale of presidential power. Matthew Shugart and John Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Table 1. Transition Dynamics, Clan Politics, Oil/Natural Gas Production, Presidential Power, and Electoral Systems for Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan

	Transition	Do clan and party overlap?	Significant oil / natural gas production	Presidential power score (Hellman-Tucker)	Legislative electoral system
Azerbaijan	Communists retain power, interstate war, democratic interlude, authoritarian outcome	Yes	Yes	21	PR-parallel-mixed 2000 (25 party list, 100 SMDs) SMD plurality 2005 (125 seats)
Kyrgyzstan	Opposition takes power, democratic interlude, gradual creeping authoritarianism	No	No	14	SMD plurality-majority—two rounds 1995 PR parallel-mixed 2000 (15 party list, 45 from SMDs) SMD plurality majority—two rounds 2005
Tajikistan	Communists retain power, civil war, democratic interlude	Yes	No	12	PR- parallel-mixed (22 from party lists, 41 SMDs) 2000 and 2005

Source: Author's compilation.

Azerbaijan, these parties included the New Azerbaijan Party (Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası), Azerbaijan Popular Front (Azərbaycan Xalq Cəbhəsi Partiyası), and the Azerbaijan National Independence Party (Azərbaycan Milli İstiqlal Partiyası). In Kyrgyzstan, the continuous parties were the Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan (Partiya Kommunistov Kyrgyzstana-PKK) and the Socialist Party (Ata Meken). In Tajikistan, this included the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (Hizbi Demokrati-Khalkii Tojikston), the Communist Party of Tajikistan (Hizbi Kommunisti Tojikston), and the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (Nahzati Islomi Tojikiston).

The second measure of party development is the degree to which parties are important to candidates in securing election in the single-mandate districts. If parties are important, candidates will seek to associate with them as they run

for election. To measure this, I examine the proportion of candidates running who declared a party label to identify themselves as candidates, rather than running as independents. Finally, I examine the proportion of members of parliament who profess no party identification (or the independents). Although many are unofficially associated with the governing party, the fact that they remain officially independent would indicate that they have no particular need or desire (for whatever reason) to be associated with the party, thus indicating political benefits from remaining independent.

Table 2. Measures of Party Gravity

	Rank of party gravity	Percent of seats controlled by the major continuous parties, 1995-2005 (rank)	Percent of nominated candidates who purported a party affiliation, 2005 (rank)	Percent of seats in lower house held by independents, 1995-2005 (rank)
Azerbaijan	2	29.2% (2)	82.5% (2)	32.0% (2)
Kyrgyzstan	3	5.7% (3)	5.2% (3)	69.5% (3)
Tajikistan	1	73.5% (1)	92.1% (1)	7.9% (1)

Sources: Central Election Commission of Kyrgyzstan; Central Election Commission of Azerbaijan; Central Election Commission of Tajikistan.

Table 2 reports the percentage of seats controlled by the major continuous parties on average between 1995 and 2005, the percentage of legislative candidates who purported a party affiliation of any kind in the elections of 2005, and the percentage of seats in the lower house of parliament that was held by professed independents from 1995 to 2005. As indicated in the table, Tajikistan clearly represents, comparatively, the highest degree of party “gravity” of the three cases. It has the greatest percentage of seats controlled by the major continuous parties, the greatest percentage of candidates running who profess a party identity, and the lowest number of professed independents in the legislature on average from 1995 to 2005. Second, is Azerbaijan, across all three indicators. The least degree of party gravity is exhibited in Kyrgyzstan. There, parties controlled only a miniscule percentage of seats in parliament (5.7 percent), and only a very small proportion of candidates identified with a political party in 2005. Finally, the percentage of seats held by independents was highest in Kyrgyzstan as compared to either Azerbaijan or Tajikistan.

What explains these findings? As indicated above, although all three cases were examples of neopatrimonial competitive authoritarian regimes and dominated by clan politics, they were different in several key respects—the dynamics of the transition to independence, the extent to which clan politics

overlapped with party identities, the presence of oil/natural gas (in Azerbaijan), the strength of the presidencies, and, finally, the type of electoral system used.

Tajikistan has high levels of party gravity, despite the fact that it has the weakest of the three presidencies, which is contrary to what would be predicted by the literature on the effects of “superpresidentialism.” Further, unlike Azerbaijan, Tajikistan does not have significant deposits of natural resources such as oil and natural gas, which would increase the availability of patronage resources. Nonetheless, Tajikistan has maintained a high level of party gravity. This is due, in part, because Tajikistan has consistently used the parallel electoral system, with its proportional representation components that ensure that parties will be represented in the legislature. Further, it is due to the correspondence of clan identities (along the North-South dividing line) with party identification that has reinforced attachment of clan members to particular parties. However, perhaps the most important factor was the legacy of the civil war, which hardened the clan divisions and helped to consolidate the current array of political parties (particularly the PDPT and the IRP).

In Azerbaijan, the electoral system did not “enshrine” political parties as did the electoral system in Tajikistan. However, due to correspondence of clan affiliations with the political parties (with NAP dominated by the Nakichevan clan and other parties associated with other clans) and the ability of the NAP to dole out large amounts of patronage rewards due to the increasing revenue generated by exported oil, Azerbaijan has a high degree of party gravity. Politicians believe that associating with parties will garnish them with both political and material awards.

In Kyrgyzstan, which has the lowest level of party gravity, the transition process was not marked by the same violent conflict that consolidated the party organizations in Tajikistan, and to a lesser extent in Azerbaijan. Further, in Kyrgyzstan, there was little in the way of resources to distribute as patronage awards, and, hence, little incentive for clan and party identities to coincide. Thus, there was, and continues to be, little in the way of party gravity in Kyrgyzstan.

The above essay was an initial attempt to investigate party development in the competitive authoritarian regimes of Central Asia. As noted, the dynamics of the transition process (and, in particular, the importance of conflict on party development later), the resource endowments available to the regime, the correspondence of clan politics with party politics, and political institutional features help explain the variation across the three cases. This study also illustrates the potential value of investigating the development of political parties in competitive authoritarian regimes. Indeed, to a large extent, whether these regimes make a further transition to political democracy will depend heavily on the parties that have developed under the conditions of semi-authoritarianism.

