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ABSTRACT

Contrary to prevailing theories on clans, high levels of national identification, as reported in an AsiaBarometer survey conducted in 2005, indicate that citizens of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan possess a greater proclivity to a civic identity than to any other form of subnational identification. This essay examines the relationship between state and society, in order to understand how high levels of national identification can exist in a political and social arena trapped within the traditionalism of clan politics. Although clan identity remains a source of identification in Central Asia, it does not take precedence over a civic identity among the citizens, as it does among the political elite. The state’s continual engagement in corrupt, nepotistic and clientelistic clan-based politics has resulted in the politicization of clan identity and therefore required their persistence in society as a means to acquire political and economic goods. The conflicts which have occurred in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are indicative of the rift between a state engaged in clan-based practices and a society eager to transition into a political and social arena based on the tenets of modern, democratic statehood. Insofar as the citizens of these countries do not approve of the practices of their current leader, there are positive prospects Central Asia’s transition into democracy.

Keywords: Asia, Central, clans, nation building, national identity, democratic transition, conflict

Subject Terms: Clans; Asia, Central; Politics and Government; Soviet Union; History; Social Conditions
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval ......................................................................................................................... ii
Abstract ......................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents ......................................................................................................... v

**Introduction** ............................................................................................................. 1
  Clan Identities or Regional Identities? ................................................................. 5

**Chapter 1: State-society Relations – Clan Identity and the State** ................. 8
  Clan or Clan Identity ................................................................................................. 8
  Contending Theoretical Perspectives .................................................................... 9

**Chapter 2: The Rift - National Identity and “Clan Conflict”** ......................... 21
  Constructing and Deconstructing Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan ....... 21
  Kyrgyzstan: The Tulip Revolution? ....................................................................... 23
  Tajikistan: The Civil War 1992-1997 .................................................................. 26
  Uzbekistan: The Andijon Event ............................................................................. 30

**Chapter 3: The Fluidity of Clan Identity** ............................................................ 35
  The Econom-ification of Clan Identity .................................................................. 35
  The Soviet Economy of Shortage ......................................................................... 35
  Mass Mobilization From Economic Insecurity: The Examples of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan ................................................................. 37
  Profiting From Your Clan Identity: The Example of Kyrgyzstan ....................... 40

**Chapter 4: State Builders, Nation Destroyers; or State Destroyers, Nation Builders?** ......................................................................................................................... 44
  Measuring Levels of National Identification to Ethnicity ............................... 45
  Measuring Levels of National Identity to Type of Government ...................... 47
  Are Autocratic Governments Better than Clans Politics for Central Asia’s Transition into Democracy? ................................................................. 50

**Conclusion:** ............................................................................................................ 55

**Reference List** ........................................................................................................ 58
INTRODUCTION

It seemed as though the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 would be the year that marked Central Asia’s progression into modern nation-statehood. Finally liberated from the grip of the Soviet empire, all five Central Asian Autonomous Republics were free to define themselves along the spatial limitations of their borders and to build nation-states according to the idiosyncrasies of their history and culture. This final triumph of capitalism/democracy over communism and nation-state over empire, however, did not affect such an outcome. What resulted was a spectrum of authoritarian, totalitarian, autocratic and quasi-democratic regimes, which many Western scholars have sought to explain through the primordialist lenses of “clan politics”.

According to various scholars, Central Asian states had been trapped within the antiquity of the Soviet empire, and were now caught between the modernity of statehood and the traditional forms of organization that had persisted throughout, and prior to, the Soviet era. Whilst Central Asian states have ostensibly and legally transitioned into statehood, internally, the persistence of subnational groups has worked to the detriment of modernization theories. The persistence of these subnational groups, as well as the conflicts which have emerged in some of these states, have led onlookers to believe that citizens possess an affinity to clans rather than to the state. Hence, Weber’s modern state
seems no more than a distant reality, with nation building\(^1\) processes thwarted by the presence of clan identities and hindering the national cohesion needed to build a strong state. This alleged emergence of a battle between modernity and tradition, has thus, relegated any prospects for state building to the whim of 'tradition', thereby, deeming it a futile process in Central Asia; or one in which the notion of the state needs to be re-examined to one in which clan identity is accounted for.

However, the debate surrounding Central Asia's prospects for state building go beyond the questions of whether clans are a positive or negative force; or whether traditional forms of pre-state organization need to be incorporated into state building processes. And before we alter how we define the notion of the state and how much indigenization is too much or too little, these aforementioned questions should be prefaced with such questions as: why are people identifying with clans to begin with?; what are the factors underlying the tendency for people to identify themselves with clans? Attempting to understand the complex mechanisms involved in identity formation and the processes of self-identification would be beyond the scope of this paper. However, what this paper will seek to examine is the relationship between state and society, specifically looking at how the state has impacted the propensity for people to fall back on clan identity. The interplay between state and society has illustrated, time and time again, the reasons for clan persistence as well as for their significance in Central Asian society and as such this relationship will be examined further in order to understand how clan identities have persisted and remained significant today.

\(^1\) The definition of nation building used here is "defining 'who are we the people' and fostering the people's national identity, i.e. their sense of belonging to one distinct community" (Tolz 1998: 993). In terms of Central Asia, a major aspect of nation building can be viewed as transferring loyalty from clans to the state.
A greater understanding of how state-society relations impacts clan identity will better equip scholars on Central Asia in generating insight into Central Asia’s state building\textsuperscript{2} future, past and present. For example, nation building, a fundamental component of state building processes and the focus of this essay, when viewed in light of the significance and persistence of clan identities in Central Asia today, would seem an arduous and almost impossible task. Resuming where the Soviets left off unsuccessful in their attempts to transfer clan loyalties to the state, Central Asian state leaders have taken an active role in creating a national identity. It seems as though such attempts, contrary to what would be believed to occur in the presence of clan identities, have been met with much success. High levels of national identification within the Central Asian countries run contrary to prevailing theories on clans, which argue the pervasiveness of a primordial clan identity within these societies. 

How has there been a rise in levels of national identity in the presence of a society that strongly identifies with clans? What role has the state played in fostering clan persistence? What does this reveal about the nature of clan identity in Central Asian society and politics? And what does this mean for Central Asia's transition into democratic statehood?

Straying away from Kathleen Collins’ (2006) and Edward Schatz’s (2004) approach, which posits that a pervasive clan identity dominates the formal institutions of the state, this essay will develop on David Gullete’s (2006) approach and argue that the modern clan is representative of an identity that is formed through the strategic discourses of elites that indicate the struggle for resources among the elite, as well as the

\textsuperscript{2} The definition of state building used here is “defining state boundaries which can be accepted by all major political players and creating new political institutions which can inspire the loyalty of the people” (Tolz 1998: 993).
masses. However, this is not to say that clan identity is completely irrelevant to the
political and social arena of Central Asia; rather, this is indicative of the changing nature
of clan identity within the context of a constantly evolving political and social landscape.
While clan identity may not run deep within the sentiments of how Central Asians self-
identify, the legacy of centuries of clan-based politics and social organization is still
evident within Central Asia's political and social arena. Nonetheless, Central Asia is not
confined to the traditionalism of clan identity, nor is clan identity of complete
irrelevance; rather, the high levels of national identification within a political arena of
clan-based politics is illustrative of the evolving and continually evolving nature of
Central Asian politics and society.

This rift in clan identity between the state and society is clearly illustrated in the
conflicts that have occurred in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. These conflicts,
which many scholars have attributed to clan politics, occurred within the context of high
levels of national identification. As such, the notion that clan identity is pervasive
throughout Central Asian society is a conclusion that is not applicable, as is the
conclusion that clan identity is of no relevance. The politics of clan identity is
symptomatic of the transitioning of the political and social arena to a new order, based on
the tenets of the Weberian state, democracy and economic liberalism. Examining the
conflicts within Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan will help illustrate how, what
scholars have argued to be the result of a fractious\(^3\) clan identity, have in actuallty, been
the result of a struggle to obtain access to necessary goods and services by the masses

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\(^3\) The definition of fractious here will correspond to the definition of fragmentation following Pal Kolso,
which describes societies where sub-national cleavages are deep, significant and politically dominant
that were mobilized by the elite through a clan-based discourse. This is indicative of the difficulties experienced in post-communist countries due to economic, political and social restructuring.

In conclusion, this essay will examine how nation-building efforts by state leaders have not necessarily resulted in a positive trajectory for transitioning into democratic statehood. While increasing levels of national identification indicate positive insights for Central Asia’s transition into the modernity of statehood, the concomitant rise of autocratic governments in Central Asia is worrisome for their transition into democracy. In spite of the rise in autocratic government, society’s proclivity to a civic identity, rather than a clan identity, indicates positive prospects for society to influence the state to move away from the corrupt, nepotistic and clientelistic practices of clan politics. And seeing as Central Asia has just emerged from the grips of repressive Soviet rule, it seems highly improbable that Central Asian society would quietly succumb to the grips of autocratic rule.

The complex interplay between state and clan has resulted in a paradoxical scenario in which state builders have simultaneously become nation destroyers and nation builders have become state destroyers.

**Clan Identities or Regional Identities?**

Before entering into the thrust of the argument it is necessary to clear up any confusion that may arise with regard to the lines of fragmentation in Central Asian society. Much of the literature explaining the causes of conflict, post-Soviet identity formation or the factors hindering national cohesion have been divided on whether the
political elite within Central Asia represent ‘regions’ or if they are acting on behalf of
‘clan’ interest. This paper takes the position that although some scholars have argued
that regionalism, and not clans, were the key players in the conflicts in Kyrgyzstan,
Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and vice versa, regions and clans cannot be viewed as
mutually exclusive. In most cases, clans are subsumed under regional groupings, as are
their many ways of self-identification. As Roy states, when Central Asians are
questioned as to their identity, they will give multiple identity references, some of these
being ethno-linguistic, tribal, regional, religious or socio-religious (2007: 18).
Uzbekistan, for example, has four or five major regional grouping that are partially kin-
reinforced (Olcott 1993: 101).

Gullette also proposes, in his research on ‘traibalism’ in Kyrgyzstan, that clan and
regional identities cannot be viewed in separation of one another and that narratives in
Kyrgyzstan combine notions of region and kinship connection (2006: 46). Making the
issue much more complicated, Bichel argues that in Central Asia, the term clan is
employed differently. While in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, the nomadic
model of clans are based on lines of descent, which in turn are the names of the territories
they inhabit, in the sedentary model of clans, as in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, clans are
based on regional networks of patron-client relations and hence, clan names are based on
their geographic locale and not blood lines (2002: 298). Even Pauline Jones-Luong, who
argues that regional political identities are predominant in Central Asian politics, posits
that, while specific Soviet policies created regional allegiances, clan structures remained
intact within those regions (2002: 68). John Glenn, in his analyses of subnational
identities in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, has also made sure to stress the
importance of clan, as well as regional influences, in their political systems (1999: 116). Collins, however, states that clan factions sometimes correspond to historically distinct regions and sometimes they do not; when clans come to power and assist their network by doling out positions to them, they are also seen as representing their region at large, but in reality, they typically restrict their patronage to their kin, fictive kin, and allies (2006: 278-279).

With a lack of consensus among scholars, and even within Central Asia itself, on what defines the 'clan', what can be said with certainty is that clans and regions cannot be viewed in separation from one another; rather, the terms clan and region are so interrelated that discussing one requires the discussion of both. As Dukenbaev and Hansen posit, there is a symbiotic relationship between clan, region, elite and class, as they are a complex of patronage networks based on ethnic and geographic factors (2003: 25). Despite whether the conflicts were based on clan or regional factions, what is of importance is whether these forms of identification take precedence over a national identity.
CHAPTER 1: STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS – CLAN IDENTITY AND THE STATE

Up to date, there have only been a few empirical studies published on how Central Asian’s construct their identities. This is quite problematic when attempting to understand the problems, successes and future trajectory of nation building processes in Central Asian countries. While much of the literature on clans in Central Asia attempts to take a nuanced approach to identity politics, incorporating elements of constructivism, instrumentalism, as well as historical institutionalism, the general underlying premise of this literature is that the state, which is pervaded by ‘clan politics’, reinforces and perpetuates the existence of clan identity in society. Hence, much of the literature focusing on clan identity either argues for their inclusion in modern state apparatus’ or for their outright dissolution (as they are viewed as inherently destructive to democratization). While the modern state may be a powerful identifier, with the ability to create identities, it does not have a monopoly on the production and diffusion of identification.

Clan or Clan Identity

During the pre-Soviet era, networks emerged from traditional kinship ties. The basis of economic and political collective well being was constituted from tribal and clan relations. Clan affiliations are a legacy of centuries of long nomadic lifestyles, taking precedence over the individual to such a degree that it is most often the group that is vying for power and advantage, and sometimes co-operating for mutual advancement.
Due to these clan affiliations, politics in Central Asia took on an informal characteristic, in which there is very little regard for formal rules and institutions. Rather, people preferred to resolve their problems through informal channels of communication or contact (Dukhenbaev and Hansen 2003, 24). These channels of informal networks, which were maintained through acts of gift giving and other forms of reciprocity, were essential to social life in three aspects: survival, security and social mobility (Kuehnast and Dudwick 2004, 8). While clan affiliations may have been the way in which society and politics were organized, this does not mean that Central Asian societies are 'trapped' within this 'traditional' model of organization. In order to understand why certain forms of identity persist, as Brubaker and Cooper state, "we should seek to explain the process and mechanisms through which what has been called the 'political fiction' of the 'nation' – or of the 'ethnic group', 'race', or other putative 'identity' – can crystallize, at certain moments, as a powerful compelling reality" (2000: 5).

Contending Theoretical Perspectives

The primordialists approach to clans suggests that within any particular ethnic group the belief of a shared history and ancestry and the existence of a common culture create feelings of solidarity towards a specific community. Hence, the persistence of clan cleavages is explained by "antecedent commonalities" (Glenn 1999: 29) that are passed on from generation to generation. They do not require common abstractions to link the members of a national group; rather, they are based on day-to-day social interactions that are based in deep-seated feelings of loyalty and trust. However, the shortfall of primordialists in explaining how clans in Scotland, Ireland, or Italy have either declined, disappeared or gone through significant social transformation, have led scholars to seek
explanations on why they fuel resurgence in some cases and not in others (Collins 2006: 44, Schatz 2004: 13, Glenn 1999: 32).

Constructivist approaches offer a perspective that provides the possibility for collective identities to be relatively malleable. According to constructivists, “identities at both the individual and collective levels are ultimately fluid, chosen, instrumentizeable, responsive to change in relevant incentive structures, and liable to be manipulated by cultural or political entrepreneurs” (Lustick 2000: 1.1). Identities rise and fall in significance depending on political process, elites’ effort to exploit those circumstances and the mobilization of the empathetic capacities of the masses. Instrumentalists, on the other hand, base identity formation on the competition of scarce resources. This perspective posits that individuals will consciously self-identity on the basis of a specific ethnicity when it is perceived to be instrumental in accessing valued goods. Group solidarity is promoted by shared interest and shared identities and provides the means to mobilize the group in pursuit or defence of these goods. As such, this approach does not base group identification on kinship; rather, they are based on language, religion, or region of origin (Hempel 2006: 2). These wider communities become increasingly relevant as individuals respond to resource shifts resulting from increased immigration, urbanization, industrialization, and state expansion associated with modernization (Hempel 2006: 2). The group is viewed as a medium for accessing goods in changing environments.

The ideas of historical institutionalists are embodied in the notion that institutions play “a crucial and autonomous role in shaping political behavior” (Lecours 2005: 511). Institutions are believed to affect identities and condition their political consequences
shaping actors’ strategies, as well as preferences, goals, interests and identities (Lecours 2005: 513). The most important argument for historical institutionalists is their emphasis on the contingencies and irregularities of history. Lecours posits that this perspective does not view history as a coherent sequence of events resulting from the behaviour of rational self-interested maximizers, but is contingent on the interaction of different actors and institutions and therefore, is subjected to unexpected developments and incongruities (2005: 514).

Clan Politics?

Many of the above perspectives have been incorporated in studies of clan identity in Central Asia. Kathleen Collins provides a nuanced approach to clans by developing on primordialists, instrumentalist and historical institutionalist approaches. She describes clans as “an information organization comprising a network of individuals linked by kin and fictive identities”, but further states that “they are networks based on the rational calculations of individuals made within a collectivist and institutional context” (2006: 7). According to Collins, the clan is built on an extensive network of kinship, which is defined by birth or by fictive kinship (which are long-standing ties based on historical family alliances, shared mahalla4, village or regional network, and school and business colleagues) (2006: 26). Collins’ view regards the very core of clan groupings to be based on the ascriptive, primordial notions of kin-based trust and identity; however, she also views clans to be rational actors. They are rational actors in that, within clan groupings, elites need the support of their networks to maintain their social status while also making gains within the political and economic system (2006: 29). Similarly, nonelites need clan

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4 Mahalla refers to a local community
elders and patrons to assist them in finding jobs, gaining access to education, loans, obtaining goods in an economy of shortage, and obtaining political and social advancement (2006: 29).

Collins hypothesizes three conditions which have led to clan persistence: late state formation due to colonialism; late formation of a national identity; the absence of a market economy and in its place the existence of a shortage economy (2006: 44). These conditions, within the kin-based collectivist cultural context she describes, have resulted in “clan politics”, which infiltrates, penetrates and transforms the formal regime. Clans are “informally behind the levers of power of the formal regime”, establishing informal “rules of the game” through mechanisms of kin-based patronage, while the new (modern state) regime may be formally institutionalized (2006: 244). These informal rules of the game are established by “pacts” created between clans, which foster stability by managing the interests of competing clans over the way they arrange a pattern of governance over resources (2004: 237). Collins concludes that “until economic or political conditions give clans substantial incentive to invest in the state, they are unlikely to do so”, and in the meantime, clan-based politics is likely to instigate a negative cycle that can result in clan conflict in pursuit or defence of clan interests (2006: 21).

Edward Schatz provides an account, which is supportive of Collins’ view, through his fieldwork in Kazakhstan. Rather than using the term kinship to describe how clans define membership, Schatz posits that clan membership is defined through “genealogical knowledge”, which like fictive kinship “can be created or manipulated by elites to justify their rule, just as it can be shaped or altered by secular influences” (2004: 26). Schatz also identifies what he terms as the “mechanisms of identity reproduction”, which
"involves causal chains that can be linked to specific temporal and spatial contexts and contingencies" (2004: 13). The particular mechanisms of identity reproduction in Kazakhstan that are accountable for clan persistence are largely due to the nature of the Soviet state. According to Schatz, these mechanisms are: the political economy of shortage; the concealable nature of clans; and Soviet campaigns targeted at eliminating and eradicating clan divisions (2004: 17). Schatz also views clan identities to be the constructs of state action, in that state practices which privilege members of specific clan networks while "manufacturing shortages for those who are outside of the clan network", politicize the role of clans (2004: 139). Similar to Collins' theory on clan "pacts", Schatz terms what he calls "clan balancing" as a mechanism used in Kazakhstan that provides relative peace and stability between clans over the struggle for resources (2004: 110).

For both Collins and Schatz, clan identity and membership is based on somewhat of a primordial concept of kinship or genealogical knowledge, which can be created or manipulated by elites. Clan identity became politicized during the Soviet era due to the shortage economy and emerged in the post-Soviet era as access networks to goods that were in short supply. These access networks jockey for control over lucrative resources and in some instances may devolve into "clan conflict" (as in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). Collins and Schatz both argue that, while the state may be formally instituted, the informal institutions of the state apparatus control the levers of power and create pacts to balance the interest of different clans, thereby, evading conflict. The clan-based political system, while being rooted in and transformed by informal social organizations, now construct the clan identity of modern society. These scholars argue that state practices give shape to the political role of clan identity. Hence, according to
these approaches, clans should be legitimately incorporated into the state apparatus or substantial economic and political incentive will be needed in order for clans to invest in the state and move away from clan-based politics.

While the state, or the informally institutionalized clan-based state apparatus, may have succeeded to this effect in politicizing clan identity through kin-based, clientelistic practices, the processes of identification are not merely at the whim of the state. Collins and Schatz provide a perspective on state-society relations, in which the informal social organization of clan transforms the regime, and the informally institutionalized clan regime in turn, reinforces, perpetuates and transforms clan identity. However, do the principals that guide the kin-based, clientelistic practices of the state also run deep through the sentiments of Central Asian society, resulting in a vicious self-reinforcing cycle of clan identity? And exactly how pervasive is clan identity within the state apparatus?

**State-Clan Relations: Clan Identity Revisited**

Theorists on state-society relations, especially believers of modernization theory, thought that the forces of modernization would have a homogenizing effect on society, dissolving sub-national divisions (ethnic/kin-based groups) from social and political importance. Sub-national forms of identity would be replaced by an identification with the state as local level allegiances would succumb to the pressures of industrialization, including the political and economic standardization of education, and the effects of mass literacy and mass media (Glenn, 1999: 32-33). Durkheim’s classical modernization theory posits that in advanced industrial societies of the West:
Mechanical causes and impulsive forces such as affinity of blood, attachment to the same soil, ancestral worship, community of habits [that] bring man together, in modern, industrial societies these forces decline, along with tradition and the influence of the conscious collective, and their place is taken by the division of labor and its complementarity of roles. (Durkheim 1972: 278).

In essence, the division of labour within modern societies would transfer a person’s political loyalty from a specific grouping to that of a social class, whilst increased communication between the regions within a state would result in a feeling of belonging to a greater community (Glenn, 1999: 34).

Aside from the evolutionary/naturally/progressively homogenizing effects of modernization, the state apparatus (itself a product of modernity) also has a genuine interest in creating a homogenizing national identity in order to gain ‘state social control’⁵. And the state, because of its material and symbolic resources to impose “the categories, classificatory schemes, and modes of social counting and accounting with which bureaucrats, judges, teachers and doctors must work and to which non-state actors must refer” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 16), is one of the most important agents of identification and categorization. Hence, nation building projects, especially the creation of a national ideology, is an important aspect of increasing the state’s consolidation of power.

However, while ostensibly, Central Asian societies have transitioned into modern statehood, the state apparatus, as Collins and Schatz argue, is pervaded by ‘clan politics’. Therefore, these Central Asian societies are disseminating two contradictory forms of identification. Whilst the formally institutionalized state apparatus is diligently at work

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⁵ According to Joel S. Midgal state social control, “involves the successful subordination of people’s own inclinations of social behaviour or behaviour sought by other social organizations in favour of the behaviour prescribed by state rule” (1988: 22).
attempting to create a more cohesive society through the conception of a national identity, the informally institutionalized clan regime is undermining such attempts through the politicization of clans, which is simultaneously causing clans to be a significant source of identification.

Collins' and Schatz's analysis is rooted in Joel S. Migdal's theory of "state in society". This theory strays beyond modernization theory, which understands "the state as a stand-alone organization with firm boundaries between it and other social forces", and focuses on the "process of state engagement with other social forces, highlighting[s] the mutual transformation of the state and other social groups, as well as the limitations of the state" (Migdal 2001: 250). It rejects the statist approach of modernization theories, which sees the state as an autonomous entity whose actions are not affected by society. Rather, it understands that, at times, society can penetrate and transform the state but that the state may also transform society.

The shortfall of Collins' and Schatz's approach is that while it acknowledges the interplay between state and society, their arrival to the conclusion of a political system pervaded by clan politics, which in turn, also pervades the way in which members of society self-identify, unfortunately leaves Central Asia trapped within a vicious cycle confined to a traditional clan identity. While the state may be engaging in clan-centred political practices, this does not necessarily mean that society is equally pervaded by clan identity. Rather, there is empirical evidence suggesting that clan identities are not as pervasive in Central Asian society, thus indicating the possibility for society to influence transformations within the state apparatus. There is also evidence suggesting that the
state apparatus may be moving towards a less clan-centric form of government, contrary to what Collins and Schatz argue.

To support such a possibility, David Gullette provides a perspective on clan identity that is a move away from the clan politics of Collins and Schatz. Based on fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan, Gullette posits that the political arena in Kyrgyzstan is not the result of deep-rooted clan or regional identities. Rather, he argues that scholars have reified notions of relatedness into formal, corporate groups, thereby misleadingly portraying Kyrgyz society as battling against 'traditional' models of social organization in a modern era (2006: 23).

Gullette argues in a similar fashion to Collins and Schatz, that in contemporary Kyrgyz society, clans and tribes represent an imagined community of people whose relatedness is chartered through biological links or memories and relations attached to shared ancestors through history, called “genealogical imagination”. However, Gullette posits that these identities are wholly constructed and that these links are stressed in certain contexts as strategic attempts by individuals who employ various identities to expand their political and economic network (2006: 5-7). According to Gullette, the uses of the word *traibalizm* (a term critiquing the allocation of government positions to friends and family of current government workers and ministries, combining notions of 'clan' and 'regional' identity into one concept) discredits the significance of clan and regional differences, as well as the notion that clans and regional affiliations are primordial social formations (2006: 45). Rather, Gullette proposes that the uses of the word *traibalizm* indicate “the way in which people manipulate relationships to gain political and economic power” (2006: 54).
Accordingly, Gullette argues that conflicts have not been the result of cohesive clan and tribal formations that internally support their members in opposition to similar groups, but that these descriptions of factions represent the ways in which elites manipulate identities in order to gain power and resources. Clan and tribal factions are not evident in everyday life; rather, individuals and families are parts of various relations and networks that are “changeable, fluid, and by no means homogeneous” (Gullette 2006: 53).

Gullette’s approach allows us to understand the changing significance and role, as well as the malleability of clan identity, in Central Asian society today. While clearly illustrating the insignificance of clan identity in the way that Kyrgyzstan society self-identifies, Gullette places very little weight on the legacy of clan structures within the state apparatus. Gullette is correct to assert that clan identity is very malleable, however, clan identity was not always as insignificant within Central Asia society as it may be today. And insofar as the elite are able to mobilize the masses based on these clan identities, regardless of how insignificant they are as a source of self-identification, it is indicative of the fact that the clan still holds some form of relevance to the elite as well as the masses. While clans may not possess the same meanings or role today as they did prior to the Soviet era, throughout the Soviet era and post-independence, this does not mean that the “clan” is of no significance but that the “clan” has gone through significant changes throughout history in response to specific institutional, economic and ideological contexts. Within the paradigm of the modern state, economic liberalism and democratic ideals, the role, meaning and significance of the clan has, without a doubt, evolved to fit within the paradigm in which it is functioning. While modern society may no longer rely
on clan groupings, state structures as well as social norms are more than likely to be affected by the legacy of centuries of clan based politics and society. Thus, while society may not necessarily self-identify with clans, the elite and the state apparatus may still be functioning within a clan-based paradigm. This rift between state and society is well illustrated within the conflicts which have occurred in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Therefore, while Gullette’s approach underscores the malleability of clan identity as well as the current significance of the clan in how Central Asians self-identify, it does not take into consideration the legacy of clan identity within Central Asian politics and society.

While Collins and Schatz take an approach that places Central Asia within a paradigm trapped in a vicious self-reinforcing cycle of clan identity, Gullette’s approach illustrates the malleability of clan identity but underestimates the significance of a history of clan-based politics and society that linger within the underpinnings of the political and social cultures of these countries (although it may be diminishing). As Gullete argues, clan identity may not be pervasive throughout Central Asian society, but the elite and state apparatus, as Collins and Schatz argue, still seem to be engaging in clan-based politics. The conflicts which have occurred within Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which are discussed below, are illustrative of this rift between state and society.

Although many scholars have argued that clan identities have been the source of conflict and fragmentation (‘clan conflict’) within Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, when examining their high levels of national identification, such a theory seems highly improbable. Much of the empirical evidence that will be presented below
indicates how clan identities have been quite malleable, and in many instances, have become nothing more than a means to acquire political and economic goods. In addition, and most importantly, viewing clans from this perspective sheds light on the possibility for the state apparatus to move away from the corrupt, nepotistic, and clientelistic clan politics by the pressures of a society that seems to be moving towards a state-oriented political culture, leaving behind their pre-state/“traditional” forms of social and political organization. High levels of national identification, even within an alleged clan-oriented state apparatus, illustrate positive prospects for the possibility of society influencing change within the state.
CHAPTER 2: THE RIFT - NATIONAL IDENTITY AND “CLAN CONFLICT”

While Soviet policies may have served as a midwife to their initial march into statehood, since independence, the Central Asian Republics have been going through nation building processes in attempts to strengthen the fragile status of their states. From former President Askar Akaev’s idea of Kyrgyz citizenship, to Tajikistan’s adoption of the Samanids as their cultural symbol, and Uzbekistan’s adoption of Timur and Aliseh Navoi as symbols of their national identity, the Central Asian Republics have been actively pursuing the idea of national cohesiveness. Alarmingly, and contrary to the fragmenting nature of ‘clan politics’ that pervades Central Asia, levels of national identification have been on the rise within the five Central Asian countries, even amid the clan-based conflict that has occurred. This section will provide a brief synopsis of the ‘clan conflict’ which has occurred within Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan and illustrate how high levels of national identification counter the argument that clan identity pervades Central Asian society, but proves that there is a rift between the sentiments of the state and society.

Constructing and Deconstructing Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan

It is argued that all five Central Asian states are engaged in clan-based politics; however, only three of these countries have experienced post-independence violence: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Many scholars have argued that one of the
causes of these conflicts has been the fragmenting nature of pervasive clan identities (Collins 2004, Schatz 2006, Khanin 2000, Khamidov 2002, Akerman 2002, Jonson 2006, Foroughi 2002). Although clan politics have shaped political trajectories in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, they have not experienced any prolonged or extreme periods of violence between clans because their greater state revenues (from energy resources) have allowed President Nazarbaev and President Niyazov to appease clan rivals through “pacts” and “clan balancing”. Schatz argues that in Kazakhstan, Nazarbaev’s concerns with preventing regionalist movements based on kinship divisions, ensuring social stability, and protecting his own privileges, wealth and power, required clan balancing in the fourteen regions (2005: 14). While Collins states that in Turkmenistan, Niyazov was careful to maintain a balance of clan representation in his government and that in the mid-1990’s, he was careful to appoint regional governors and administrators from local tribes (2005: 9). Roy (2007: 115) and Collins (2005: 9) both posit that Niyazov made a deliberate attempt to balance between the different tribal factions in Turkmenistan.

In essence, in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, Presidents Nazarbaev and Niyazov devised informally institutionalized clan-based solutions to apparent clan-based problems. Based on the relative stability within these countries, it could be argued that the inability of state leaders in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to find solutions to appease clan rivals resulted in conflicts. Can the lack of clan-based solutions really be a cause of the conflicts within these countries? And if clan identities are so pervasive within Central Asian society that clan-based solutions are needed, why are levels of national identification on the rise within the countries which have experienced ‘clan conflict’?
Kyrgyzstan: The Tulip Revolution?

In Kyrgyzstan, former president Askar Akaev, brought forward the idea of citizenship into the discourse of state ideology, referring to the equality of citizens and respect for civil rights as more important than ethnic identity (Marat 2008: 13). Akaev’s civic-based ideology appealed to the various ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan and acknowledged the contributions they had made during the Soviet era. The Epic of Manas, a poetic jewel of the Kyrgyz cultural tradition, was included into the official state ideology and promoted among Kyrgyz citizens. Akaev pioneered the modern definition of citizenship in Kyrgyzstan and tried to utilize the Epic of Manas to develop a national consciousness (Marat 2008: 17). What appeared to be the dawning of a new democratic era and the beginnings of a more cohesive society in Kyrgyzstan, dubbed the events in 2005 as the Tulip Revolution. However, to some, the Tulip Revolution was a mere indication of how fragmented Kyrgyzstani society really was, illuminating the relevance and nature of clan identity.

A flawed parliamentary election in March 2005 was the impetus for the ousting of President Akaev. Election results, giving ninety percent of the seventy-five seats to Akaev loyalists, was merely one of the irregularities characterizing the elections (Nations in Transit 2006, 6). In response to Akaev’s continual attempts to maintain power through the 1990’s and early 2000’s, groups had been demonstrating in support of opposition figures since the last half of the 1990’s. What started off as isolated protests, mainly in support of individual candidates banned from elections, began spreading across the country and unifying. Upon receiving notice of the election results, protesters seized and bombed administrative buildings, blocked major highways and stormed the President’s building on March 24, 2005, successfully forcing Akaev out of office and to flee to
Moscow. Quickly after, Kurmanbek Baikyev, former Prime Minister to the Akaev regime, was named interim president and in elections on July 10, 2005, he was officially elected president.

While the events of March 24, 2005 may have some believe that it was a clear exhibit of the most vibrant civil society in the Central Asian states, demonstrating how active social organizations in the country are, some argue that the current situation in Kyrgyzstan illustrates that, perhaps, the revolution was not a revolution but merely a transfer in power from one clan to another (Radnitz 2006, 132). The ongoing protests, the near ‘failed state’ conditions of Kyrgyzstan, which the International Crisis Group labels as bordering a ‘civil war’ (ICG 2006), and Bakiyev’s position in the People’s Movement of Kyrgyzstan (NDK), which was the main organizing force around the revolution, all undermine the democratic integrity of the so-called ‘Tulip’ Revolution.

In Kyrgyzstan, three major clan confederations, known as the right wing, “Ong kanat” (consisting of one clan, the Adygine, based in southern Kyrgyzstan), the left wing, “Sol kanat” (consisting of seven clans from the north and west), and the “Ichkilik” (consisting of many clans from the southern Kyrgyzstan) make up their social and political form of organization (Berdikeeva 2006: 6). Kyrgyzstani politics has been characterized by a rivalry between the north and the south; the former being the technological, educational and administrative center of the country attempting to eliminate competition and maintain control over resources and distribution of power, and the latter remaining agricultural, traditional and seeking better representation in the government (Berdikeeva 2006: 6).
Initially, the post-Tulip Revolution political arena represented a seeming break away from the North-South rift, as well as a transition into a more democratic era. Kurmanbek Bakiyev's (representing the South) election as president signified a break away from North dominated politics. Felix Kulov's (representing the North) appointment as Prime Minister indicated a possible reconciliation between divisive clan lines and a move towards a democratic power-sharing agreement between clans. However, starting with Felix Kulov's dismissal as prime minister in 2007, President Bakiyev has gradually brought his relatives into key positions of power; currently, an estimated 80 percent of politicians in the government and parliament are representatives of his clan (Saidazimova 2008). More than three years after the "revolution", Kyrgyzstan is witnessing President Bakiyev's administration transforming into the same regime as the one that triggered the revolution to begin with. The same clan-centered, clientelistic and nepotistic practices of the Akaev regime are prevailing over national interests.

Nevertheless, it appears that Kyrgyzstani society has increasingly moved away from the clan-centered politics of the state to one based on the tenets of Weber's modern state. In a public opinion survey conducted by the IFES in November of 2005 (months after the Tulip Revolution), when asked which is more important, ethnicity or Kyrgyzstani citizenship, a solid majority of 61 percent said their Kyrgyzstani citizenship is more important than their ethnicity (IFES 2005: 6). Similarly, a public opinion survey conducted by AsiaBarometer found that 66.9 percent of those surveyed defined themselves by their national identity than by any other type of identification. In

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6 The question asked by AsiaBarometer (in 2003 and 2005) for all five Central Asian countries was, "Throughout the world many people identify themselves by their nationality. For example, Korean, Indian, etc. Do you think of yourself as being [YOUR COUNTRY'S PEOPLE], or do you not think of yourself in this way?"
previous surveys, conducted in 1996 and 2001, the public was more equally split on whether ethnicity or identity as a citizen was more important, indicating how the political and social cultures of Kyrgyzstani citizens is moving towards state-based concepts, while state leaders remain locked in clan-centred practices that benefit themselves (IFES 2005: 6). It seems that in Tajikistan the same rift between state and society exists.


Tajikistan has always been the poorest and least accessible Soviet Republic in Central Asia and the only country out of the five Central Asian states to suffer complete state failure. During the first two years of independence, the Central Asian states had proved to be relatively politically stable, except for Tajikistan. The contraction of central government during the final years of perestroika and especially in the course of a brutal civil war in 1992, had procured a situation where large segments of the population had to depend on various strongmen, as far as their livelihood, security, and often very existence were concerned (Nourzhanov 2005: 2). By 1992, Tajikistan was ravaged by a civil war that appeared to be ethnically and religiously driven, however, it has been argued that the conflict involved ethnoregional clans, which in the past, held power at different times.

Ostensibly, politics in Tajikistan is organized in a similar fashion to the way politics and societies are organized in Kyrgyzstan. Regional groupings seem to be the dominant form of political and social organization in Tajikistan, with clan structures remaining intact within those regional groupings (Pauline Jones-Luong 2002: 68). The major factions in Tajikistan are the Khujandis (north), Badakhshanis (east), Kulobis (southeast) and Kurgan-Tyubis (southwest). In Kyrgyzstan, regional groupings are split along a north-south divide with the north having dominated politics; in Tajikistan,
politics has also been dominated by the north. The split along these regional factions and
the practice of forming government comprised of members of the president’s respective
regional affiliation, has been argued to have been the major factor underlying the bloody
civil war which cost approximately 20,000 lives (Akerman 2002: 2).

The first presidential elections that took place in Tajikistan, in November 1991,
was the precursor for the civil war. The former communist leader and representative of
the Leninbad (now Khodjent, also spelled Khujand) region, Rakhmonov Nabiev, had won
the election and formed his government in the Soviet tradition with people mainly from
the north of Tajikistan (the Leninbad region) (Jonson 2006: 41). The opposition did not
accept the outcome and in 1992, political tensions resulted in demonstrations demanding
that parliament be dissolved; work on a new constitution be sped up; and persecution of
opposition parties be ended. In an attempt to calm the situation, Nabiev agreed to a
coalition government, with one-third of its members appointed from the opposition -
descendants of families from the east and south of the country. However, this provoked
strong reaction from the Leninabad region and by September 1992, civil war was in full
swing and Nabiev was forced to resign (Jonson 2006: 41). In November of 1992,
Emomalii Rahmon, the current president, was elected acting head of state and by the
spring of 1993, different factions of the opposition joined forces and created the United
Tajik Opposition (UTO) (Jonson 2006: 41).

Although Rahmon’s appointment was a break from the sixty years of Leninabadi-
dominated political leadership in Tajikistan, the new leadership still had its regional-
ideological constituents from the Leninabad region as well as from the Kulob region (the
province where Rahmon was born) (Foroughi 2002: 9). It is argued that the conflict was
between the 'northern groups' and the 'southern groups', however, due to the complex alliances throughout the regions, this is not strictly accurate (Beeman 1999: 2). The main protagonists of the conflict were Rahmon, Nouri, and Abdullajanov, all of whom were ethnically Tajik but represented different regions (Nourzhanov 2005: 11). The civil war was essentially a war between the government forces, comprised of the Leninabad and Kulob region versus the opposition (UTO), which was primarily formed of Islamists from the Gharm and Garateguine Valley and democrats from Dushanbe (Foroughi 2002: 9).

While the 'inter-Tajik' talks mediated by the UN in 1997 were instrumental to bringing together the warring sides with a peace deal between the UTO and President Rahmonov (including provisions designed to reintegrate the opposition into the government), the thirty percent of ministerial posts stipulated to be filled by UTO appointees have not been gracefully implemented (Gleason 2007, 6). In fact, it has been argued that President Rahmon's regime is heading in the same direction as former dictator of Turkmenistan's President Niyazov's regime, as President Rahmon becomes increasingly more insolent towards signs of opposition as well as insisting that people cut back on opulent displays (Nigel 2007). Despite President Rahmon's stray away from democratic tendencies and progression towards building a cult of personality, he has taken measures to strengthen the country's national identity.

In Tajikistan, the government initially refrained from playing a leading role in producing a national ideology. Since the end of the five-year civil war in 1997, Tajikistan's two major political forces, Rahmon's regime and the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), have been competing over whose views will be more dominant in the national ideology (Marat 2008: 18). However, the Tajik's have decided to embrace the
Samanids as a cultural symbol of Tajik Civilization and utilize the Aryan myth for the creation of a national historiography. In 2003, President Rahmon ordered that the fifteenth year of independence would be the ‘Year of the Aryan Civilization’. It has been through the Aryan myth that the presidential and intellectual apparatuses of Tajikistan have been able to insist on the autonomous nature of the people (Laruelle 2007: 16). President Rahmon has even changed his surname from Rahmonov to Rahmon, dropping the “ov” and embracing the traditional Tajik spelling, as well as ordering authorities to implement a pattern of naming newborn children in this traditional Tajik manner (Arman 2007).

The majority of the population seems to credit President Rahmon for the country’s stability after the civil war. This is evident in a 2004 survey by the U.S. funded International Federation of Election Systems (IFES), which indicates that 58 percent of those surveyed chose Rahmon as the most trusted figure in the country (Nations in Transit Report – Tajikistan, 2006). The genuine public support of the regime may give the illusion that these efforts by state leaders have won over the submission of the population to the state, however, Korostelina states that people who lived through the 1992-1997 conflict have an excessive willingness for compromise and submission to the president to avoid any tensions (2007: 227). While one study revealed that salience in national identity in Tajikistan decreased from 27 percent in 1996 to 12.6 percent in 1999 (Korostelina 2007: 2), indicating how the majority of Tajik society identify more strongly with subnational forms of identification than with the state, another public opinion survey by AsiaBarometer indicated how in 2005, 82.4 percent of Tajiks identified themselves as being Tajik while only 16.4 percent identified themselves to be either Kyrgyz, Uzbek,
Russian or other (Asiabarometer, 2005). Similar to the findings in Kyrgyzstan, this indicates that the state and society are at odds with each other – with society indicating a proclivity to a unified, national, state-based identity - and the state remaining largely entrenched in clan-based politics. Similarly, Uzbekistan also seems to be following the same state-society dynamic as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

**Uzbekistan: The Andijon Event**

A proclivity towards national identity also appears fairly high, and on an incline, in Uzbekistan. A public opinion survey conducted by the IFES in 1996 found that 55 percent of citizens were proud of their national citizenship with the highest levels of national sentiment based in the eastern Ferghana Valley and the south-central regions (which was twice as great as in the capital and western region) (IFES, 1996: 35-36). Another public opinion survey conducted by AsiaBarometer in 2003, indicated that 58 percent identified themselves by their nationality (Uzbekistani) and when asked the same question in 2005, AsiaBarometer found that 59.8 percent identified themselves by their nationality. Although Uzbekistan has consistently pursued a highly authoritarian, centralized style of government (with President Karimov anointing himself as the guardian of the nation) it has not ignored the need to create a national identity.

The Karimov regime has sanctioned two permanent symbols of Uzbek national identity: Timur and Alisher Navoi. Timur has been “reinvented as the original progenitor of the modern Uzbek state”, whereas Alisher Navoi, a medieval poet, has figured even more prominently in the Karimov regime’s attempts at building an Uzbek nation (Bell 1999: 203). In the case of all three states, iconic elements of Soviet-defined identity have been “selectively jettisoned, preserved or reinvented in a process of nation-building
dominated by reigning political elites” (Bell 1999: 207). Along with the aforementioned attempts by elites to find national icons and reinvent history, all three states have been quick to clear Russian and Soviet terms from their linguistic landscape, as well as rename major streets and towns. However, these attempts have not necessarily resulted in the concomitant decline in the importance of regional and clan identity within the state apparatus and among the elite.

On May 13, 2005, in the Uzbek city of Andijon, the acts of violence carried out by the Karimov regime in order to subdue a large crowd gathered at Babur Square, was an indicator of Uzbekistan’s stray away from their post-independence transition into democracy. A report by The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) states that what started out as the arrest of twenty-three businessmen accused of having connections with a group called Akraimiya (an Islamic movement), evolved into the massacre of approximately 300-500 people by government forces (2005: 8). According to this report, an unidentified armed group stormed the Andijon Prison and released the twenty-three men. What resulted from this was a gathering at Babur Square, where people were sharing opinions and discussing their problems (OSCE 2005: 11). It is argued that the protest had no clear political message and that interviews, surveys and first-hand accounts all emphasize that people came to express their social and economic frustrations (Hill and Jones 2006: 111). Allegedly, a portable microphone was passed through the crowd, and individuals began to air pent-up complaints about everything from government repression, poverty, and corruption to poor schools and hospitals (Hill and Jones 2006: 111). Although Uzbekistan has experienced healthy macroeconomic gross domestic product growth in recent years, on the microeconomic level, agricultural
and natural resource sectors are not generating enough jobs for Uzbekistan's growing population, resulting in decreased living standards for all but a small, privileged group (Hill and Jones 2006: 113).

While some have attributed the events in Andijon to a growing Islamist influence in the Central Asian region due to poverty, unemployment, authoritarianism, suppression, and corruption, others claim that the source of the protest has been due to clan politics (Naukim 2006: 134). It is argued that the trial of the twenty-three Andijon businessmen was linked to the ousting of their patron and former regional governor Kobiljon Obidov (Naukim 2006: 134). Obidov had fallen out of Karimov’s favor after a wave of protests over the deteriorating living standards that had swept throughout the region and had been replaced by Saydullo Begaliev. Begaliev had begun a purging of Obidov’s favourites (the twenty-three businessmen that had been jailed) and forced them to sell their enterprises to the allies of the new regional governor. When they refused, they were taken into custody. Clearly, in Uzbekistan, the paternalism that forms the backbone of their social structure perpetuates the existence of solidarity groups which complicates state building processes (Naukim 2006: 138).

Politics in Uzbekistan has been described as a contest between five different regions: Ferghana, Khorzem, Samarkand/Bukhara, Sukhandarya/Kashkadarya and Tashkent (Everett-Heath 2003: 196). The most powerful clan is the Samarkand clan, which is directly linked to President Karimov who is from the Samarkand region (Akerman, 2002: 2). In Uzbekistan, similar to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, members of a specific clan (the Samarkand clan) control key government positions. The acquisition of government positions indicates political control as well as access to lucrative economic
resources for particular regions/clans. This has been argued to have resulted in regional/clan identities taking precedence over “an all-Uzbek identity” and even over ethnic ties, which “appear malleable and less important” than regional/clan identity (Akerman 2002:2). Thus, the act of (the respective leaders of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) doling out government positions and resources to specific regions/clans has resulted in the creation of a political and social arena where clans have become the principle channel from which people empower themselves, economically and politically. As Akerman posits, clans are “engaged in a continuous struggle to consolidate their power and influence; the main objective is to hold as many government posts as possible” (2002: 2). However, this does not necessarily infer that clans are a source of identification within these Central Asian countries.

This section has illustrated that the conflicts within Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan cannot be explained by the existence of a pervasive clan identity when viewed in juxtaposition to the high levels of national identification. It seems that clan identities, within the context of a transitioning Central Asia, have become a channel with which to vie for political and economic good, thereby, indicating that clans serve a very instrumental purpose amongst the general populace. Clan identity seems to only be very pervasive amongst the elite whose benefits from clan identity are markedly greater than those of the general populace. Hence, the conflict in the three countries seem to stem from intraelite competition for control over scarce political and economic resources (Luong 2003: 276). And the general populace was mobilized by clan leaders for mere economic reasons, not due to a strong clan identity. Clan identity served as a vehicle with which the elite could mobilize citizens and citizens could address their dire
economic situation. The next section will further illustrate the economic factors which have altered the meaning of clans and clan identity for Central Asians throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.
CHAPTER 3: THE FLUIDITY OF CLAN IDENTITY

While clans may have been the way in which Central Asian society was organized politically and socially prior to the arrival of the Soviets; with industrialization and modernization, clans have evolved and come to serve a more instrumental purpose for Central Asians today. Having transitioned within three different ideological and economic paradigms within the 20th century, clan identity and the purpose clans serve has had to adjust to the context within which it was functioning. This section will provide evidence indicating that the conflicts within Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were not manifestations of "clan conflict" or a rivalry between regions within "traditional societies", but that clan identities have been mobilized by the elite and the masses to gain economic and political goods. This section will also briefly examine the extent to which clan identity pervades the elite/state apparatus and conclude that the elite/state apparatus show signs of a slow move away from clan-based politics.

The Econom-ification of Clan Identity

The Soviet Economy of Shortage

Despite industrialization and agricultural modernization during the Soviet era, the nonmarket economy continued throughout the Soviet Union. This nonmarket economy was characterized as a political economy of shortage, in which shortages of goods, services, and access to power encouraged access networks to proliferate (Schatz 2004: 17, Collins 2006: 47). In light of these economic and political conditions, people
mobilized pre-existing cultural links as a means of gaining access to such goods (Schatz 2004: 17). These kinship networks, due to their concealable nature, were tapped into in order to fill in the gaps of the shortage economy, thereby, creating a need for their persistence (Schatz 2004: 14).

While the concealable nature of clans allowed for networks to proliferate under Soviet surveillance, the relatively egalitarian conditions of Soviet society enabled most people to establish far-reaching social networks, called *sviazь*\(^7\), in which gift giving and forms of reciprocity helped people compensate for the failures of the centralized socialist economy (Keuhnast and Dudwick 2004, 13). These networks allowed people to obtain ‘deficit’ goods and services, and gain access to elite education, quality health care, and positions of power. Due to the Soviet shortage, who a person knew (and how much *blat* - pull or influence - one had) and who a person could access was far more important than money, thus giving meaning to the phrase, “better a hundred friends than a hundred rubles” (Kuehnast and Dudwick 2004).

The economic and political circumstances of the Soviet era was merely the beginning of the evolution of clan identity. Following independence, the continued and even worsening economic conditions of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan generated a population that the elite could quite easily mobilize based on economic hardships, while also serving as a vehicle with which citizens could organize and put forth their dire economic situations.

\(^7\) German for connections
Mass Mobilization From Economic Insecurity: The Examples of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

Until the 17th century, the Tajik nation was part of a flourishing trade route that linked the East and the West. Following the establishment of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic in 1929, there was a period of economic growth and industrialization. According to Hickson, collective farms were established, land and water reforms were initiated and investment policies were developed based on the principle of the social division of labor (Hickson 2003:6). Tajikistan was required to deliver quotas of raw materials, primarily cotton, set by their central planners in Moscow. Overwhelmingly concentrated in agriculture, non-industrial and non-technical sectors and occupations, by the time of independence, Tajikistan was left with an economy dominated by a disproportionate dependence on cotton, rural poverty and organized corruption (Hickson 2003:6). Tajikistan’s transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, unable to develop its own local economic base, coincided with its plunge into civil war.

With independence, Tajikistan has lost all its subsidies from the union budget. In rural areas, basic social infrastructure and many income sources were directly linked to the collective farms or other Soviet-era institutions (Diawara 2006). A United Nations Development Programme report (UNDP) states that by the late 1990’s Tajikistan was reporting income poverty levels that were comparable to those of Africa’s poorest countries and that Tajikistan’s per capita GDP levels still remain forty percent below its pre-transition level (Diawara 2006).

The sources of conflict in Tajikistan have been the result of a series of factors, most pertaining to the competition for resources, which were exacerbated by regional divisions, the patrimonial nature of government and tensions that were legacies of the
Soviet era (Foroughi 2002: 11). These clan affiliations were prominent in the era prior to colonization by the Soviet Union and were merely exacerbated by the regional divides consolidated by Soviet policies and the lack of state presence during the formative years of Tajik independence. Regional and clan ties in the face of extreme economic turmoil provided the mechanism for elites to manipulate the need for economic and political security of the general population, and mobilize them in a struggle to secure scarce resources. Within the context of economically disparate regions, in which political power literally implied economic prosperity due to the patrimonial nature of the state, regional leaders mobilizing against the state made logical sense. The north regions of the country (Leninbad) had most of the republic’s investment, they were economically richer and more industrialized, and they also had most of the political power. On the other hand, the south remained agricultural and impoverished and Gorno-Badakshan remained the most isolated region with few roads and other facilities of inter-republican means of transformation and communication (Akcali 2003: 14). The diversity of the economic distribution of benefits has been a major source of differentiation among regional groups as well as a major source of contention.

Uzbekistan, like Tajikistan, has been marred by economic difficulties as well. Of all the former Soviet Union states, Uzbekistan has one of the lowest living standards. In a UNDP report, it states that in the 1990’s about seventy percent of the population had incomes below subsistence wage, which was coupled by an inadequate supply of goods and services relative to money incomes, and an uneven distribution of industrial development in rural areas where the majority of the population lived (Sirajiddinov 2004: 6). In light of these challenges Uzbekistan adopted a gradualist approach to economic
reforms, which created an environment conducive to economic growth, enabling them to outperform countries such as Kazakhstan (the region's current economic superpower) and managing to keep them out of post-independence recession. However, delaying structural reforms was constraining development; therefore, between 1998 and 2004, macroeconomic and business regulation reforms were implemented in order to transition Uzbekistan toward a market economy, as well as to support and strengthen small and medium enterprises (SME's) and develop a social protection strategy aimed at poverty reduction (Verme 2006: 278).

What, in fact, resulted from the economic reforms would be quite contrary to the social welfare elements of the reform's agreements and illustrative of a government aimed at undermining the economic and financial potential of individually owned, small, and medium business. The reason for the hostility towards SME's is twofold: first, the revolutions in other former Soviet republics and the role of the population led to the perception that SME's could be a direct threat to the leadership; and second, the current leadership's connection with large businesses in which the small firms were a potential source of competition (Verme 2006: 283). When the state constrained the economic and political freedoms, and ignored the needs of a large share of its population, the people found it necessary to resort to alternative sources of opportunities and leadership. The jailed businessmen of Andijon provided those opportunities and alternative forms of leadership (Verne 2006: 283). Ironically, the reasons for the government's hostility towards the SME's resulted in a situation which also threatened the regime.

These men were a group of successful businessmen who enjoyed support from the local population because they had created jobs and made significant improvements to
living conditions in the city. As such, the government found this to be threatening to the regime and feared the potential encroachment of one of the coloured revolutions that had swept throughout the post-communist states. While the majority of the concerns expressed at the protest were based on economic and political grievances, the impetus for the protest was the arrest of twenty-three businessmen that were associated with a specific patron and regional governor in a system where economic and political prosperity are directly linked to clan/regional leaders.

Similar economic circumstances have resulted in the econom-ification of clan identity in Kyrgyzstan; however, as discussed below, in Kyrgyzstan people have gone as far as adding monetary value to their clan identity.

**Profiting From Your Clan Identity: The Example of Kyrgyzstan**

By 1992, the transformation of the Kyrgyz economy into a market system was adopted in full swing. Following a radical approach to economic restructuring, in the initial stages, the government liberalized prices for most goods and services, introduced a national currency, eliminated export duties, substantially reduced import tariffs and removed most capital controls. By 1998, over half of the industrial sector had been privatized, a market-friendly legislation was developed and the system of centralized planning and subsidization of both producers and consumer was eliminated (Mikhalev and Heinrich 2003, 263-263). Contrary to the premise that economic liberalization would logically provide more space for the growth of civil society (Hyden 1998, 5), in Kyrgyzstan, the initial stages of economic liberalization led to massive impoverishment, thereby, strengthening the need for traditional patronage networks (Anderson 2000, 82). However, in this period of economic turmoil, these patronage networks no longer stood
to represent any sort of primordial affiliation to kinship, but rather became a means with which to acquire power for local leaders; and a means to acquire a source of income for the economically marginalized.

In Kyrgyzstan, what seemed to be civic protests, or social organizations making full use of their democratic right to protests, appears to have been the economically marginalized who had sold their vote or who have been coerced into regional/clan affiliations by their leaders. The mere fact that Kurmanbek Bakiyev (the individual who led the major group (NDK) involved in the ousting of Akaev) became president of Kyrgyzstan, as well as the immediate and speedy break up of the NDK shortly after Akaev’s regime was toppled indicates does paint a shady picture of the type of democratic civil society organization involved in the Tulip Revolution. As the current situation of Kyrgyzstan illustrates, the forces that drove the revolution and the revolution itself did not result from democratic tendencies and did not result in a transformation or overthrow of a sociopolitical order; rather, it resulted in the consolidation of clan politics in the state apparatus.

The revolution had been a ‘putative’ revolution that has been more notable for its continuity than for change (Radnitz 2006, 132). Rather than these recent protests being labeled as civil society movements, Radnitz posits that they are a result of ‘hyperdemocracy’. Hyperdemocracy refers to a sense of manipulated ‘people’s power’, which results from localism, loyalty to particular leaders, and a weak central state, which has been the day-to-day politics of the post-Akaev era (2006, 139). It appears that contenders for power on the local or regional level have been using the power of the
masses to claim formal power. The masses are acting out of social obligation but also out of personal interests because, at times, their support is rewarded with monetary goods.

Political activism in Kyrgyzstan and the post-revolution uprisings have been referred to as a phenomenon called “rent-a-mob” (Saralaeva 2005). Saralaeva describes the protest that occurred on June 17, 2005 three months after the revolution, against the Central Election Commission’s refusal to register Urmat Baryktabasov as a presidential candidate (evidenced to be stimulated by Baryktabasov himself who is allied with Akaev) to be the same core group of people who participate in multiple riots against the new government for monetary rewards (2005). This seems to have become a recurrent practice in post-revolution Bishkek. Almost half of the paid picketers tended to be women, and were generally uneducated and economically impoverished. Anderson notes that in times of extreme poverty, deteriorating traditional forms of kinship ties, and increasingly regionalized politics where regional leaders dictated political orientation, those seeking survival will gladly sell their labour or their vote for a pair of shoes (2000; 82).

Clearly, the revolution was not a democratic break-through and President Bakiyev’s undemocratic ways of dealing with these protests show that the current regime is no different from the Akaev regime. The nature of clan relations in Kyrgyzstan illustrate the monetary as well as political significance clans hold. While clan affiliations were a way with which local leaders could mobilize the masses to intimidate rivals or claim formal power; to the impoverished masses affiliating with a specific clan stood for nothing more than the acquisition of monetary goods.
The conflicts in these three countries are indicative of the significance of economic factors in facilitating the mobilization of the masses by clan/regional leaders. Were it not for the dire economic circumstances, and the uneven economic development in these countries, clan leaders would have had no basis to mobilize people. The uneven development in these countries is facilitated by the clan-based clientelism, nepotism and corrupt practices of state leaders, who create an enabling environment for local clan leaders to become patrons to the masses who are not receiving the political and economic goods that the state should be providing them. In some cases, as was illustrated in Kyrgyzstan, people were willing to shift clan loyalties depending on access to goods or be bought out by clan leaders to protest on behalf of a clan they had no kinship ties with – blood or fictive.
CHAPTER 4: STATE BUILDERS, NATION DESTROYERS; OR STATE DESTROYERS, NATION BUILDERS?

Within the 20th century, the meaning and significance of clan identity has shifted as people have had to adapt and find solutions to the challenges posed by what would seem to be a constantly transitioning political, economic and social arena. The post-Soviet order required the masses to identify with a civic identity more so than any other form of subnational identification, something which was to be enabled by the state. However, the state’s continual engagement in clan-based practices resulted in the politicization and perpetuance of clan identity as a relevant form of self-identification. Hence, although the existence of the primordial clan in Central Asian society would seem to be a destructive force for nation building processes, in actuality it is the state and not clan identity that is nation destructive. While Central Asian state leaders have been actively pursuing the role of state builder by creating national identities, they have also been actively engaging in acts that are nation destructive by simultaneously perpetuating clan identity.

However, the sources of contention within these societies, as well as between society and the state, could easily be misconstrued as the result of an ever-persistent clan identity. Ostensibly, it could appear as though clans are so entrenched in the way Central Asian countries organize themselves (politically and socially), that it would be impossible to imagine a government or society that does not incorporate their intrinsically clannish nature. But, contrary to what would be expected of a country in which subnational levels
of identification exist, levels of national identification throughout the three countries seem fairly high. While the conflicts in the three countries indicate that some sort of relationship exists between regional/clan identities and the fragmented nature of these societies, as well as state-society relations, as shown above high levels of national sentiment within these societies indicate otherwise. Nevertheless, high levels of national identification are not necessarily indicative of a population who identifies with the state. This section will examine other aspects that may be correlated to high levels of national identity and also examine the potential for high levels of national identification to produce disastrous results, when viewed within the context of Central Asia’s possible slide into autocracy.

**Measuring Levels of National Identification to Ethnicity**

High levels of national identity can also be correlated to various other factors, such as ethnicity, religion, language, socio-economic status and type of government. For example, how homogeneous or heterogeneous a population is ethnically, may affect levels of national identification. High or low levels of national identification may merely be an indicator of the percentage of the population which belongs to the ethnic group the country is named after. When examining the relationship between ethnicity and national identification in Uzbekistan, it appears that such a relationship does exist. The public opinion survey conducted by the IFES found that 75 percent of respondents self-identify as ethnic Uzbeks; 9 percent as Russian; 6 percent as Kazakh; 2 percent as Tajiks, Tatars and Karakalpakis; 1 percent as Kyrgyz; and 3 percent as other ethnicities. It appeared that 55 percent of Uzbekistanis were proud of their national citizenship, however, within that 55 percent; 63 percent were ethnic Uzbeks; 38 percent ethnic Kazakhs; and 15
percent ethnic Russian. Uzbeks were more “nationalist” than any other ethnic group, however, ethnic Uzbeks also felt that ethnicity was more important than their national citizenship (IFES - Uzbekistan, 1996:35-36).

The IFES also found that in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan ethnicity had “a clear bearing on national pride and support for the nation-building exercise” (IFES - Tajikistan, 1996: 27). In Tajikistan, 64 percent of those surveyed self-identified as ethnic Tajiks; 22 percent as Uzbeks; and 5 percent as Russians. The survey found that overall, 54 percent of Tajiks were proud of their citizenship, however within that 54 percent, 61 percent were ethnic Tajiks; 47 percent ethnic Uzbek; and 37 percent other (IFES – Tajikistan, 1996: 27). Ethnic Tajiks, as in Uzbekistan, also value their ethnicity more than their national citizenship. Similarly, in Kyrgyzstan, 76 percent of Kyrgyzs were either proud or content of their citizenship. However, the IFES survey reported that when asking ethnic Kyrgyzs about their feelings towards Kyrgyzstani citizenship, 49 percent were proud, whereas only 12 percent of ethnic Russians were proud (IFES – Kyrgyzstan, 1996: 21-22).

When examining overall levels of national identification in the five Central Asian countries to levels of homogeneity, there also appears to be somewhat of a linkage. The AsiaBarometer public opinion survey found that the most homogeneous nation, Turkmenistan (with a population of 85 percent ethnic Turkmen), had the highest level of national identification among citizens, at 89.2 percent; Tajikistan (with a population of 79.9 percent ethnic Tajiks) was at 82.4 percent; Kyrgyzstan (with a population of 64.7 ethnic Kyrgyzs) was at 66.9 percent; Kazakhstan (with a population of 53.4 percent ethnic Kazakhs) was at 46.9 percent; but Uzbekistan, the second most homogeneous
nation in Central Asia (with a population of 80 percent ethnic Uzbeks) was at 59.8 percent. With the exception of Uzbekistan, the four other Central Asian countries illustrate a relationship between ethnicity and national identification. However, the Asiabarometer survey does not provide an ethnic breakdown of those surveyed, nor does it indicate what percentage of each ethnic group comprises the percentage of people who identify themselves by their national identity. Hence, while it may appear that some kind of relationship between national identification and ethnicity exists, the extent of that relationship is unknown. In addition, as the survey information provided by the IFES is quite outdated and with very little current research being done on the relationship between ethnicity and national identity in Central Asia, it is difficult to draw any concrete conclusions.

**Measuring Levels of National Identity to Type of Government**

Although high levels of national identification project a positive trajectory for nation building projects in Central Asia, it may not always be the case. Increasing levels of national identification in countries which appear to be consolidating autocratic governments can be a dangerous mix. While high levels of national identification are indicative of a society that is able to transition into the modernity of statehood, it may not be conducive to the transition into democracy needed for state building. As history has shown time and time again, state leaders have been able to manipulate a society’s proclivity to national identification to consolidate autocratic rule. In countries such as Croatia, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia, threats to national identity were used to legitimate autocratic rule and autocrats have used nationalist fear of secession to justify

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8 Figures on population of ethnic groups attained from CIA Factbook.
authoritarian measures. In contrast, nationalist mobilization has served to undermine autocracy, such as in Armenia, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, against Soviet rule (Way 2006: 2-3). As such, Lucan Way provides an explanation to distinguish between the factors affecting the interaction between identity and autocracy that either undermine or strengthen autocracies.

Way suggests that "nationalism and identity mobilization more broadly can be [a] force for and against autocracy depending on its relationship to the dominant power and the size of the identity’s support base" (2006: 3). Identity can be a force for autocratic consolidation if and when an identity can be framed in pro-incumbent terms and is held by the majority of the country’s elite/population; but it can also be a force for contestation if and when an identity can be framed in anti-incumbent terms and is held by the majority of a country’s elite/population. Lastly, identity can also be a force for autocratic contestation if and when an identity can be framed in pro-incumbent terms while only held by a minority of the country’s elite/population. Hence, Way concludes that although divisions over national identity may hinder the democratic consolidation needed for state building processes to occur, such diversity can promote competition by hindering efforts to strengthen autocratic rule (2006: 24). Thus, in examining state building processes in Central Asia, it is important not to focus merely on the processes but the context within which the processes are occurring. While high levels of national identification, in theory, are positive signs for the national cohesion needed for state building to occur, in the presence of an autocratic ruler it can be detrimental to state building.
This could quite possibly be the case for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. When examining levels of national identification throughout the three countries, there seems to be an unsettling rise in national identification as the regimes become increasingly autocratic; straying further away from anything that appeared to indicate the possibility of democratic consolidation. The 2008 Nations in Transit reports state that all three countries have scored progressively lower in their democracy ratings as well as their civil society ratings (except for Kyrgyzstan whose civil society score has remained the same since 1999) since early 2000, indicating the increasingly repressive nature of these societies and the increasing difficulty of people to raise concerns or publicly disagree with the government (Marat, 2008: 321, Pannier, 2008: 631, and Muhutdinova, 2008: 567). The report states that in Kyrgyzstan, President Bakiyev has alienated competing political forces from decision making in the government and Parliament, while also promoting his political bloc, Ak Zhol, to Parliament (Marat, 2008: 322). In Tajikistan, President Rahmon, has further consolidated his power base by exerting pressure on opposition parties and sacking former opposition figures from government positions (Muhutdinova, 2008: 568) and finally, in Uzbekistan, President Karimov’s unchallenged control over Uzbekistan since 1991 has continued to dominate all aspects of society and proved to be completely intolerant of criticism and dissent, giving it the lowest score on the democratic governance index of 7.00 (Pannier, 2008: 632-633).

This descent into consolidated autocratic rule for the three Central Asian countries and the progressively low democracy rating from the Nations in Transit Report begs to question whether the ‘clan’ based fragmentation within these societies could have actually been sources of contestation and competition against efforts to strengthen
Autocratic rule. There appears to be some sort of relationship between the increasing levels of national identity, the consolidation of autocratic rulers, and the progressively low democracy ratings in the three countries. One possible positive indication of the increasingly autocratic nature of Central Asian governments is their stray away from clan-based politics, although there can be negative outcomes if high levels of national identification are indicative of Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek society’s approval of their governments.

**Are Autocratic Governments Better than Clans Politics for Central Asia’s Transition into Democracy?**

As illustrated, clan identity was of no real consequence in the conflicts which occurred in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan - other than as a medium for elites to mobilize the masses and as a vehicle for the masses to address their dire economic situation. Hence, clan identity does not run deep within the sentiments of how Central Asians self-identify. This explanation is contrary to Collins’ (2004) and Schatz’s (2006) perspective on clan identity, for how levels of national identification can be as high as they are in countries that are allegedly trapped within the traditionalism of clan identity. This, in turn, indicates the possibility for a positive state-building trajectory – one in which society has the potential to influence the state apparatus. However, rather than demanding that state leaders move away from an age-old tradition of clan-based politics, which would be a much more difficult task, perhaps societal demands need only be based around the tenets of democratic governance, as there is evidence indicating that the state has already begun moving away from clan-based politics.
While most state leaders will deny that their governments engage in a system of corruption, nepotism and clientelism based on clan politics, upon examining the government structures, as well as the conflicts which have occurred in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, it is quite apparent that clan affiliations and clan loyalty have played a significant role in the way the state organizes itself. But as indicated above, it also appears that these governments are straying away from clan politics and heading in the throes of autocratic governments.

In Kyrgyzstan, President Bakiyev’s government seems to be looking more and more like a family portrait than a distribution of power among the clan affiliations within his southern support base. While Bakiyev is viewed as a representative of the southern clans, he does not hold the support of all southern politicians. This is not unlikely considering the positions within government are being filled by his family members and not by members of his clan. It has been reported that the president’s brothers work in Kyrgyz embassies abroad, head village administrations, or hold various important position within the state apparatus (Saidazimova 2008). Rather than clan politics pervading Kyrgyzstan, it seems that President Bakiyev’s nepotistic practices are more indicative of his autocratic leanings, which make former President Akaev seem like a harbinger of democracy.

In Tajikistan, President Rahmon’s apparent stray away from his patrimonial regional ties and into the throes of a dictatorship could possibly point to positive signs in terms of a break away from clan/regional ties and into a ‘benevolent patron of the entire region, eclipsing all local warlord’ (Nourzhanov, 2005: 125). In 2002, President Rahmon
fired two influential Kulobi field commanders as well as dramatically curtailing the authority of various Kulobi leaders (Nourzhanov 2005: 125).

In Uzbekistan, Karimov has presented himself as a leader of the whole nation, standing above any clan loyalty (Ilkhamov, 2007: 76). The Uzbek state has denied the existence of clan politics and has presented clans as contrary to national interests, striving to eliminate memories of regional loyalties and sub-national affiliations (1997: 520). Although Karimov, as head of state, has been a product of the clan politics he denounces, he has managed to distance himself from factional groups, gradually consolidating power under his personal control and loosening dependence on previous allies and partners. Karimov has also effectively managed to limit the institutional capacity of local elites by consolidating his seizure of major national resources and minimizing the sway of regional leaders through the policy of frequent rotations and ousting regional hokims from their posts every three years (Ilkhamov, 2007: 76).

The combination of autocratic governments and high levels of national identification could have disastrous results for a smooth and timely transition into democracy for Central Asia if their high levels of national identification are an indication of citizens’ approval and affinity of the government; and not merely an indication of a society that possesses a true understanding and proclivity for a civic identity. In order to see a democracy flourish, it is of course necessary for countries to develop a national identity, but if high levels of national identification are indicative of citizens’ approval and affinity of their autocratic government, it may legitimize the present regime and hinder/prevent a transition into democracy. However, this does not seem to be the case, as data from the AsiaBarometer survey indicate low approval ratings from the
populations of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, on how they feel about the way their government is dealing with issues of: the economy, political corruption, human rights, unemployment, crime, the quality of public services, immigration, and environmental problems (2005).

Also, data from the AsiaBarometer indicate that the citizens of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan favour democracies over dictatorships/autocratic governments (2005). In the 2005 AsiaBarometer survey conducted in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, citizens were asked to indicate whether they thought autocratic, authoritarian, military and democratic government systems were “very good, fairly good, or bad for their [this] country”. All three countries expressed high levels of aversion to military governments (with only 7.4 percent indicating ‘very good’ or ‘fairly good’ in Uzbekistan, 33.9 percent in Kyrgyzstan, and 33.6 percent in Tajikistan), but only moderate levels for autocratic and authoritarian governments (with approximately 50 percent of the populations of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan indicating autocratic and authoritarian governments to be “very good” or “fairly good” – with one exception in Uzbekistan which found that only 28.4 percent of the population felt autocratic governments to be either “very good” or fairly good”). However, the survey found the approval ratings for democratic governments was the highest of all four government systems listed, with the exception of Tajikistan (with 25.5 percent in Uzbekistan indicating a democratic political system to be “very good”, 26.9 percent in Kyrgyzstan, but only 13.2 percent in Tajikistan). In Tajikistan, the survey found that their most preferred government system was an autocratic regime (with 24.5 percent of the population indicating autocracies to be “very good”).
In spite of Tajiksitan’s citizens’ preference for autocratic regimes, when asked in the same survey whether citizens have a duty to vote in elections, an overwhelming 78.3 percent either “strongly agreed” or “agreed”. And when also asked whether they believe if the people elected stop thinking about the public once elected, 75.6 percent either “strongly agreed” or “agreed”. Tajikistan’s preference for autocratic regimes, but their dissatisfaction with a government that they believe does not think about the public and their proclivity towards democratic ideals such as elections, could be the outcome of years of civil war who’s end the citizens attribute to the current president. Rather than Tajik citizens possessing an actual preference for autocratic regimes, years of civil war in which the population witnessed different factions fighting for power may possibly be the reason why citizens feel that governance by a single powerful leader without the restrictions of parliament or elections is necessary for peace and stability.

The Election Guide from the IFES also indicate that in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan the number of registered voters is on the rise as well as the number of votes cast. While in Uzbekistan it seems that voter turnout has declined from a startling 95 percent in the 2000 election (Nations in Transit 2001: 409) to 90 percent in the 2007 election (IFES Election Guide), this could potentially indicate a form of dissidence, as high voter turnout in Uzbekistan is argued to reflect, not political participation, but the ceremonial nature of Uzbekistan’s elections. The Nations in Transit report suggests that elections are seen as an opportunity to demonstrate patriotism (2001: 409). Hence, the combination of high levels of national identification, low approval ratings for their autocratic governments, and an inclination for democratic governance provide promising prospects for government contestation to occur from the masses.
CONCLUSION:

Central Asia’s slow, and at times, seemingly regressive transition from the communist era into an era of democracy, economic liberalism, and modern statehood has led many scholars to examine the traditional forms of rule that once was the basis for their social and political organization. Central Asian states have very little that could constitute a democratic tradition. Power was personalized at all levels and was based on a hierarchical and patriarchal structure of the family unit, which was replicated in political life. This political and social structure was based on tribal or clan affiliations and has become the topic of controversy for post-communist transitional studies.

The persistence of a clan identity has resulted in the concomitant rise in questions regarding the applicability of modern state apparatus’ within a society paralyzed by traditionalism. However, the persistence of a clan identity is not indicative of a battle between modernity and tradition; rather, the changing nature of clan identity from the pre-Soviet era, throughout the Soviet era and post-Soviet era, illustrates how clans represent the ways in which Central Asian society is dealing with the difficulties of transition. Far from the need for clan-based solutions to what many scholars have argued to be clan-based problems, it is evident that Central Asian societies are not trapped within a vicious self-reinforcing cycle of ‘clan politics’. If anything, viewing clans from the perspective of ‘clan politics’ and creating solutions that legitimize informal clan institutions into formal institutions, runs the risk of reinforcing clan identity within these societies.
Clan-based politics is evident within the state apparatus; however, high levels of national identity counter the notion that Central Asian society has a greater affinity to subnational groups than the state. Central Asian states are neither trapped within the traditionalism of clan identity nor are clan identities completely irrelevant to society and state. Rather, these states are moving along a continuum between tradition and modernity. The elite and state leaders seem to be engaging in a clan politics while society seems to be moving towards the tenets of modern statehood, projecting a greater proclivity to a civic identity than to any subnational form of identification.

The conflicts which have occurred in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are symptomatic of such a rift – while the elite and state leaders engage in an age-old battle over clan-controlled distribution of political and economic goods, the impoverished mass (who have no way to access economic goods) is mobilized by a strategic discourse based on clan affiliations. This rift between state and society indicate positive prospects for society to influence change within the clan-based politics of the state structure. However, high levels of national identification can be problematic as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan leave behind their traditional forms of rule and rate progressively lower in their democracy ratings. As these state leaders show signs of leaving behind their clan affiliations in exchange for greater personal wealth and power, high levels of national identification can become detrimental to democracy and state building.

The potential of such an outcome has brought to question whether or not nation building processes are indeed a significant indicator for progress made in state building. Perhaps a fragmented society serves a positive purpose, preventing the consolidation of autocratic rule. And perhaps these ‘clan conflicts’ are in fact illustrative of a society
transitioning from a political culture of repression to a political culture of participation. In spite of these possible hypotheses, high levels of citizen dissatisfaction with their respective governments in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and their preference for democracies over autocracies/dictatorships, coupled with the fact that these countries just emerged from the repressive grip of the Soviet regime, make it highly unlikely that citizens of these countries would succumb to the throes of another repressive regime. Rather, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek societies' proclivity towards a state-based national identity indicate the possibility for bottom-up change to occur within these countries.
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