

**THE IMPACT OF ELECTORAL REFORM ON NEOPATRIMONIAL REGIME IN
KYRGYZSTAN**

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ABSTRACT

In this research I analyze the Kyrgyz political context from the perspective of neopatrimonialism. I apply the transition framework developed for African neopatrimonial regimes to Kyrgyzstan. While featuring substantial amount of political participation and competition as well as formal institutional setting of the state bureaucracy the political regime is not transforming along the lines of African neopatrimonial states. The proposed framework of the transition from neopatrimonialism does not work in terms of incentives and the outcomes. Having assessed Kyrgyz neopatrimonialism, I suggest that the capacity for transition rests with the re-arrangement of formal institutional settings of political participation. This is exemplified in the analysis of the 2007 electoral reform and the consequent parliamentary elections in the country. I argue that the change in formal institution of elections is able to devalue informal political institutions of patronage and clientelism, the integral elements of neopatrimonialism.

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INTRODUCTION

In October 2007, after protracted disputes over the constitutional arrangement of the political power in Kyrgyzstan the president Bakiev initiated the constitutional referendum which was the seventh in a short history of independent Kyrgyzstan, in which he proposed new electoral rules. According to the amendments in the constitution and the electoral code political parties were assigned exclusive rights in forming the legislature and the executive, however with the president attaining the ultimate control over the political system.¹ Right after the event the Ministry of Justice of Kyrgyzstan informed the public that it had already around one hundred political parties in the record. A few weeks before the parliamentary elections assigned for mid-December 2007 the Central Electoral Commission announced that of 22 political parties which had applied for participation in the electoral campaign 12 were allowed as they met the electoral code requirements.²

At any rate, one would say that be it either one hundred or twelve, these numbers of political parties could hardly reflect weakly defined preferences of the population. Kubat Sultanbekov local political analyst, sarcastically said on the occasion that at least every second Kyrgyz citizen lately demonstrates a desire for a seat in the parliament and every third wanted to be a president hinting on intensification of clan and regional division in the society and extreme disunity of local elites.³

¹ Elena Pacar, „V Kirgizii perezapisut konstitutsiyu“, [“Kyrgyz constitution will be re-written”], *Vzglyad* online, September 21, 2007 available at: <http://vz.ru/politics/2007/9/19/110443.html> (last entered April 18, 2008)

² Madina Maratova, “Polprocenta, kotorye sotryasayut Kyrgyzstan”, [“Half of percent that rend Kyrgyzstan”], *Delovaya nedelya*, November 23, 2007 available at: <http://tazar.kg/news.php?i=6991&sea=%EF%EE%EB%E8%F2%E8%F7%E5%F1%EA%E8%E5%20%EF%E0%F0%F2%E8%E8> (last entered April 18, 2008)

³ Kubat Sultanbekov, “Komentarii po dosrochnym viboram v Zhogorku Kenesh KR” [“Comments on early parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan”] *Otkrytiy Kyrgyzstan*, December 21, 2007 available at: <http://tazar.kg/news.php?i=7283&sea=%EF%EE%EB%E8%F2%E8%F7%E5%F1%EA%E8%E5%20%EF%E0%F0%F2%E8%E8> (last entered on April 18, 2008)

In this research I look at whether the new electoral rules managed to show a capacity to override traditional institutions of clanship and stream them to the domain of formal political participation with clearly defined legal rules. As the clannish patronage networks have been the indispensable element of what I call Kyrgyz neopatrimonial regime the analysis suggest the dynamics in the regime change.

The data shows that adoption of electoral rules results in leveling down clannish values and patterns of narrow kinship and locality in political participation. The broader population and the clan elites readily diverge from traditional patterns of trading over the political preferences. However the same data indicate at the strength and further consolidation of North-South regional identity. Population shows sensitivity neither to ideological standings nor to party action plans but cast their preferences depending on which of the two regions the party leaders are associated with. This does not necessarily mean that the neopatrimonial regime is left intact, rather it suggests on the development of significant dividing line in the society which can be actively employed in the party politics.

This paper frames the Kyrgyz political regime in the concept of neoptrimonialism. Neopatrimonialism is a combination of traditional patrimonial and legal-rational types of domination in which the boundaries between the private and public are either blurred or at least formally recognized.⁴ The basic features as well as the pivot of Kyrgyz neopatrimonialism is the prevalence patronage and clientelism within the public domain as well as in the relations between the state and the broader population. These institutions are mainly described in terms of clannish, tribal and localist relations, due to historically developed social fabric of Kyrgyz ethnicity.⁵

⁴ Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, 2006. "Neopatrimonialism Revisited – Beyond a Catch-all Concept", GIGA Working Papers. # 16, 18, available at: http://www.giga-hamburg.de/dl/download.php?d=/content/publikationen/pdf/wp16_erdmann-engel.pdf (last entered on May 21, 2008)

⁵ [Klanovie i rodoplemennie otnosheniya]

As this research generalizes the concept neopatrimonialism to Kyrgyz political context I benefit from the scholarly studies on the regimes in developing countries. A number of empirical studies on neopatrimonial regimes in Africa as well as humble attempts to generalize the concept in Central Asia provide valuable insights for thorough and comprehensive contextualization of Kyrgyz political system as well as balanced assessment of the extent to which both the formal and informal institutions interact and shape the political process in the country. The volumes by Roth, Engel, Erdmann and Bratton and Van de Walle set the roadmap for an accurate analysis and defining distinctive features of Kyrgyz political regime. The concept of neopatrimonialism helps demonstrating how political institutions particularly party building were mainly shaped by informal norms and further were located in a process of transformation to important formal institutional setting.

My discussion on the transformation attempts in Kyrgyz political regime finds inconsistencies with the “transition” framework developed by Bratton and Van de Walle in regard to African neopatrimonialisms. The suggestion they cast that democratic and peaceful transition in African regimes depends on the level of political participation and competition in the ancien régime finds a little confirmation in Kyrgyz context.⁶ At that the Van de Walle and Bratton’s modal path, borrowed from political regime change in Europe and Latin America to accommodate to transition in Africa, correctly predicts the dynamics in Kyrgyzstan.⁷ But they can not suggest on transition in the area for they are not conditioned by the incentives found in African “transition” nor they lead to the outcome which could make it a transition.

The research employs mainly the process tracing with some discourse analysis. Parties’ ability to create a broad appeal and to gain mass support thereon is seen as one of the basic

⁶ Michael Bratton and Nicolas Van de Walle, “Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa,” *World Politics*, 46/4 (July 1994): 485 available at: [http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=0043-8871\(199407\)46%3A4%3C453%3ANRPTI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-K&cookieSet=1](http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=0043-8871(199407)46%3A4%3C453%3ANRPTI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-K&cookieSet=1) (last entered: May 21, 2008)

⁷ Ibid 454

indicators to measure formal rules capacity to overcome patronage. That on the one hand points at their capability to reject narrow localist and clannish ambitions and invest efforts and resources for concerted action and objectives. On the other hand this shows either the population susceptible or not to well articulated common ideas, goals and action plans on the part of population which is patched into ethnic and sub-ethnic traditional values and identities.

The research looks at the discourse of the messages made by party leaders to broad set of constituents. To test the outcome I explore the structure of parties and the ways they interact with its constituents. In examining the parties' message to their constituents and how it was brought, I briefly describe the rhetoric used to attract constituents. This involves exploration of party platforms and programmes, speeches delivered by party leaders, the campaigning styles. Campaign rhetoric is checked in terms of its consistency with the overall goal of the electoral reform to fight clan politics, patronage and regionalism.

As the Central Electoral Commission recently made the cross-regional results of parliamentary elections available I find appropriate using some statistical figures in order to make suggestion on voting behavior.⁸ First the electoral results are utilized in the discussion on the electoral turnout. Second one assumes that the data cross-regional provides information on region-contingent voting. The assumption has been that the vote-casting reflects the persistent socio-cultural cleavage along North-South region within Kyrgyz society.

The research has following weaknesses and limitations. The first one concerns a number of contingencies under which the electoral reform was implemented. As it was mentioned while the electoral rules are aimed at enhancing party politics consequently massive participation in the

⁸ One needs to bear in mind that despite the substantial record of fraud and violations during the parliamentary elections they have not been recognized to have affected the overall results. For details see: "Komentarii po dosrochnym viboram v Zhogorku Kenesh KR" ["Comments on early parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan"] *Otkrytiy Kyrgyzstan*, December 21, 2007 available at: <http://tazar.kg/news.php?i=7283&sea=%EF%EE%EB%E8%F2%E8%F7%E5%F1%EA%E8%E5%20%EF%E0%F0%F2%E8%E8> (last entered on April 18, 2008)

governing of the country the presidency preserves the ultimate control over the political system promulgating alternative norms in the constitution. For example despite the party factions in the legislature are provided the right to form the government the president retains the power to override the authorities of the cabinet and its head as well as to dismiss the cabinet. The presidency retains the control over the military and special services and is authorized to establish committees and agencies beyond the control of the cabinet and the legislature. On the top of all the institutions such the courts and Central Electoral Commission (CEC) which basically supervise the electoral process remain absolutely subordinate to the office of president.⁹ Basically the fact that the research is weary of discussing basing on the results produced by the CEC given the abundance of claims on the electoral process violations confirm the strength of these limitations. In short all institutional achievements are basically under threat of being overridden by the will of one ruling body.

Another limitation concerns the timeframe selected in this research. The fact that the paper analysis and draws conclusions based on the only one electoral round can not provide the full picture of the effect on the informal institutions made by the reform. This limitation can be accounted for such categorical suggestion as population's disaffection to the ideas and programs offered by the parties.

⁹ "Venecijskaya komissia: Opredelaya spisok polnomochiy presidenta Kyrgyzstana, ego razrabotchiki, dvijimie jelaniam ugodit', sobrali vse v evropeiskoi, amerikanskoi, latinoamrikanskoi I russiyskoi konstitutsionnih sistemah pravleniya," ["Venice Commission: the authors of Kyrgyz constitution, striving to please the president picked every presidential authority from European, American, Latin American and Russian constitutional forms of government"], 24.kg On-line News Agency, December 20, 2007. available at: <http://24.kg/politic/2007/12/20/71897.html> (last entered on April 18, 2008)

NEOPATRIMONIALISM: THE CONCEPT AND THE TRANSFORMATION PATH

Discussion of the concept

In this chapter I introduce the concept of neopatrimonialism which will later facilitate the description of the Kyrgyz political context also with some reference to other Central Asian countries. Studies on neopatrimonialism in other political contexts, in particular Africa and Southeast Asia provide quite an instructive roadmap to look at the possible frames of political change in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover it can be argued that the case of Kyrgyzstan provides valuable insights for reviewing the studies on transition in neopatrimonialism.

Neopatrimonialism develops from the concept of patrimonialism, a type of traditional authority described by Max Weber in his seminal work *Economy and Society*. Weber argues that patrimonial domination is legitimized by tradition and historically originates from the tradition of testament and distribution/decentralization of the domestic property and the authority from the master or the father of household – *oikos* to his sons or other close subjects. This “economic and administrative decentralization” featured tight-knit connections between the masters and his subjects in a way of mutual rendering of economic security and subsistence. The relations between the master and his subjects feature absolute power and authority enjoyed by the former and the implicit obedience and the loyalty by the latter. This type of relations are on the one hand prescribed and sanctified by the tradition since “times out of mind”, on the other hand it was a mechanism necessary to preserve the rational exchange of service as well as to maintain the patrimonial rule. Besides prescribing obedience and loyalty tradition also limits the arbitrary use of power against the subjects. Indescribable “sanctity of tradition” and the deeply rooted concept

of “communal fate” and “mutual aid” never let ties be severed between the master and the subjects. It is assumed that the ground for the tradition is a “mere habituation” and its sanctity comes from the understanding that any shock or a breaking of established matter of things may lead to political and economic adversaries in master – subject relationships.¹⁰

As human organization and relationships historically grow sophisticated so does the practice of patrimonial domination. According to Weber patrimonial decentralization at *oikos* that is at micro-level was projected at the level of a polity. Head of a state – a patron confers power to his subjects in manorial and his subjects in return assure his economic and political-military security. The emergence of complex net of manorial and dependencies and the need for proper governing and administration bring into being particularly patrimonial bureaucracy and patrimonial armies.¹¹

The basic distinction of patrimonial bureaucracy from the one defined as “legal-rational” is that there is no separation between the “private” and the “official” sphere. There is neither employment nor career promotion on the basis of technical qualification and professional performance. Mainly bureaucracy is appropriable that is a subject for privatization and can be conceived as a type of dependency or a manorial.¹² Thus in patrimonialism political power is exercised on a discretionary manner and treated as a private affair of the ruler. At the heart of the patrimonial regime holds the principle of personal loyalty, superior to impersonal law which relies exclusively on traditional forms of legitimation or on hereditary succession.¹³

Erdmann and Engel have argued that the concept of neopatrimonialism has developed from the attempt to create an analytical guide to explain post-colonial African political regimes by

¹⁰ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London University of California Press, 1978), 1006 – 1012

¹¹ Ibid 1013

¹² Ibid 1029

¹³ Alisher Ilkhamov, “Neopatrimonialism, interest groups and patronage networks: the impasses of the governance system in Uzbekistan”, *Central Asia Survey* 26/1 (March, 2007), 66

combining two Weberian types of domination: traditional patrimonial and legal rational. The scholars report that patrimonialism with the prefix neo- sometimes with the adjective “modern” as a form of domination distinct from “traditional patrimonialism” was first used by Shmuel Eisenstadt following the tide of criticism against the usage of the categories of “modernization” and “development” for Sub-Saharan Africa. And the concept of neopatrimonialism was developed along the reflections on the roots of bad governance and general drawback from democratic and stable political development thus acquiring different and often conflicting connotations considered by various scholars.¹⁴

The basic dispute in defining the concept of neopatrimonialism mainly revolves around the extent to which the components of legal (-rational) domination interact and co-exist with the elements of traditional – patrimonial type of domination. The additional but not less important questions one may cast are: What are the socio-historical roots of neopatrimonialisms? What are the common elements or the “building blocks”? And finally, though not confined to this, important question is what models the respective scholarship offers with regard to the change of/from neopatrimonialism.

Guenther Roth’s term of “personal rulership” is defined as the most proximate to the current definition of neopatrimonialism as it meant de-traditionalized, personalized patrimonialism.¹⁵ For Roth, who termed “personal rulership” later “neopatrimonialism” it meant the domination based not on any belief of the ruler’s unique qualifications but linked to material incentives and rewards. Additionally it differs from rational-legal bureaucracies in that “public administration base neither constitutionally regulated legislation nor on advancement on the basis of training and qualification”.¹⁶ However it is noted that though the scholar made a valuable

¹⁴ Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, 8

¹⁵ Ibid 12

¹⁶ Guenther Roth, 1968 “Personal Rulership, Patrimonialism, and Empire-Building in the New States”, World Politics, 20/2, 195 - 196 <http://www.jstor.org/view/00438871/di971169/97p0103z/0>

differentiation between the “personal rulership” this definition fails to “relate patrimonialism to legal rational bureaucracies”.¹⁷

Furthermore Roth brings up the point that the elements of neopatrimonialism can persist in any regime between democracy and totalitarianism, though mentioning that with regard to the distinction between the concepts of neopatrimonialism and authoritarianism.¹⁸ This is disputed by Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel who argue that there is always a personal moment even in highly advanced bureaucratic systems accommodating democratic rules. The scholars suggest that there are distinct regimes classified as neopatrimonialism.¹⁹

One finds the definition of neopatrimonialism provided by Engel and Erdmann quite instructive for framing the variety of country contexts:

....Neopatrimonialism is a mixture of two, partly interwoven, types of domination that co-exist: namely patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic domination....under neopatrimonialism the distinction between the private and the public, at least formally, exists and is formally accepted, and public reference can be made to this distinction... In neopatrimonial regimes, the chief executive authority maintains authority through personal patronage, rather than through ideology or law... Neopatrimonial rule takes place within the framework of, and with the claim to, legal-rational bureaucracy or “modern” stateness....²⁰

However further particularization of the concept may appear problematic. Engel and Erdmann attempt to construct a more complete and cohesive definition of neopatrimonialism by setting its clear-cut distinction from patrimonialism. It is claimed that neopatrimonial regime features neither privatized politics nor excessive discretionary actions on the part of personalist ruler. They often express dissatisfaction with associating neopatrimonialism with the regimes in which the discretionary power over bureaucracies, resource control and distribution powers

¹⁷ Erdmann and Engel, 9

¹⁸ Roth 196 (Erdmann and Engel as well as other scholars writing on the issue are more inclined to relate neopatrimonialism to the domain of authoritarian regimes)

¹⁹ Erdmann and Engel, 28

²⁰ Ibid 18

belongs to an unrestrained ruler who uses clientelist tools of awards and incentives as the basic mechanism of holding this power. The scholars label this more a patrimonial type of regime.²¹

However one may detect some inconsistency with Weberian definition of patrimonial domination in such particularity, which posits that in patrimonialism it is tradition and its inviolable sanctity that constitute the basic source for legitimacy.²² What makes more sense in being particular in identifying neopatrimonialism is delineating the relationship between legal-rational bureaucratic and traditional types of domination. One may think that variations in the level of discretion the rulers in neopatrimonial regimes enjoy must not automatically reject the context under consideration as neopatrimonial but rather ascribe such distinctions to difference in features conditioned by certain type of socio-economic and historical development and elaborate on the typologies of the regime.

The description of neopatrimonialism provided by Engel and Erdmann is quite instructive for framing the political context in Central Asia particularly in Kyrgyzstan. However, their excessive focusing on the extent to which private incentive takes part in public actions in defining a “pure” neopatrimonialism may cause unnecessary complexities for comparative framing transformation paths of neopatrimonial regimes. It should be noted that the dynamics of the traditional and the legal-rational is not monotypic and vary across contexts as well as being contingent on the type of socio-economic and other patterns of development.

Concerning the roots of neopatrimonial domination, particularly in Africa, the analysts report that legal-rational component was introduced over old, traditional patrimonial imperial rule, but “was confined to the colonial capitals and reached to population of European decent”.²³ The vast majority of the indigenous population remained under “the realm of patrimonial rule of

²¹ Ibid 22- 23

²² Weber, 1009

²³ Erdmann and Engel, 19

kings, chiefs, and elder”, as the scope of “rationalization” was very limited in terms of time it took and the resources it claimed.²⁴ After independence the indigenization of bureaucracies and establishment of authoritarian rule the public institutions were pervaded by informal relations from the top and below.²⁵

Engel and Erdman’s reflection on the role of clientelism, patronage and rent-seeking is also of high importance for the present research as it provides necessary details on their role in neopatrimonial domination. Clientelism and patronage are conceptualized as an integral part of neopatrimonial domination. Both are associated with trading political support in exchange to public goods. It is argued that clientelism develops in response to security challenges created by weakly performing state institutions thus reiterating neopatrimonialism. As the scope of clientelism increases to unbearable scales for political actors they take the refuge behind formal norms of legal-rational bureaucracy thus making clientelism unreliable and insecure institution in fact. Patronage is ascribed to high-politics as it is associated with a distribution of public goods to groups which maybe formed on the basis of identity – for example ethnic or sub-ethnic.²⁶

Alisher Ilkhamov introduces patronage and clientelism as informal mechanism of power control assuming that they have the same importance as the formal mechanisms in neopatrimonialism. The author discusses informal dimension of neopatrimonialism in terms of clan concept. At that he equates the notion of clan to clientelism arguing that they “denote different facets in describing the same set of phenomena”.²⁷ The basic feature of clan or clientelism as one may suppose the core of element of neopatrimonialism is the capacity to “override the formal boundaries and rules of the state institutions”. Another argument important for operationalizing in the next chapters is that “creation of clans and patronage networks makes

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid 20 - 21

²⁷ Ilkhamov, 70

sense only if they help to gain privileges and resources associated with the state power”. And secondly they are created by those who already occupy state power to secure inviolability of their power base.²⁸

The Bratton and Van de Walle Transition framework for neopatrimonialism

Bratton and Van de Walle’s attempt to frame African political regimes into the comparative studies of political change offers quite instructive tools for framing Central Asian political change. In assessing the transition of neopatrimonial regime the scholars mainly rely on the arguments that the institutions of preceding regime condition the type and often the outcome of the change. Based on the experience of political transition in Europe and Latin America, they suggest that the amount of permitted political participation and competition condition the type of political change.

Bratton and Van de Walle argue that political institutions of *anciene régime* as the independent variable is less *deep* than looking at socio-economic structure, and looking at them is more reliable than centering on the actors’ behavior in predicting the type of transition. Basing on this assumption they borrow the elements of “transition modal path” from the literature on the transition in Europe and Latin America to apply them on neopatrimonial regimes in Africa.²⁹

While employing modal path approach in explaining regime transition, the scholars suppose that the character and the type of transition in Africa are distinct from the cases of transition in Europe and Latin America. “Because personal relationships constitute the foundation and the

²⁸ Ibid 71

²⁹ Bratton and Van de Walle, 460

In the same piece they update the readers on what the modal path of transition is. Against the backdrop of deteriorating social peace the soft-liner political elites meet with the moderate opposition leaders “behind the scenes to forge a compromise “pact” to guarantee the vital interest of major elite players” in the transition

superstructure of political institutions and the ruling body rarely employs bureaucratic formulas to maintain authoritative institutions the dynamics of transformation are highly unpredictable”.³⁰

Based on these theses Bratton and Van de Walle lay out the modal path of political transition intrinsic to neopatrimonial regimes.

- “Political change from neopatrimonial regimes originates in social protest”.³¹
- “Neopatrimonial elites fracture over access to patronage.”³².
- “Elite political pacts are unlikely in neopatrimonial regimes.”³³

As a reaction to this point one would contend that the capacity for pact or any other types of formal or informal intra-elite arrangement varies depending on the degree to which the legal-rational bureaucracy plays role, as well as on the degree to which the elites and significant social forces are preoccupied with the sense of unity and stateness and their cohesion. On the other hand pacts insure inviolability of economic and political resources. Most probably one must assume a quite distinct format and outcome of negotiations. Because in essence neopatrimonial pacts bear

³⁰ Ibid 458

³¹ Ibid 460

Shrinking economic opportunities, declining living standards, particularistic and exclusionary patterns of reward lead to social unrest demanding removal of incumbent leaders. Mass upheaval ousts the incumbent government as the resources are exhausted to the point where it can no longer maintain loyalty of the civil servants and the military. At that, even if the attempts to open up are to take place it is more a response to the crisis rather than an initiative taken by the leadership for the sake of personal survival. However the basic impediment to react timely is the lack of institutional ties between the ruling groups and the society which could signal on the imminent crisis. The civil society is driven off to underground as they pose a threat to the leaders’ authority.

³² Ibid 462

This path predicts emergence of alternative elites capable of arousing the depressed and previously leaderless social groups into concerted action. However the elite factionalism is not the product of ideological distinctions and the basic issue on stake is not the liberalization. Rather the struggle takes place over the spoils of the regime. And these elites are the product of high personnel turnover intrinsic to quicksand of neopatrimonial clientelism. The dismissed public servants act as civil society leaders or prominent dissident in exile. They accuse the incumbent regime of economic decline and corrupt governance. They position themselves as propagators of regime change “usually by promoting symbols such as multiparty democracy”

³³ Ibid 464

Because “incumbent leaders and opposition are so polarized are as a result of winner-take-all power struggles that there us slim possibility that the moderates from either sides can reach an agreement”. Secondly, the pact making presupposes substantial “political institutionalization of the regime”. Those who involve in negotiations over pacts represent “major interest blocks within state and society”. The opposition in neopatrimonial regimes lacks broad social foundation and fall unable to overcome squabbles between and among numerous minor clientelist networks. The cases in which elites manage to reach certain power-sharing agreements are ascribed to “personality, management skills and the governing institutions of the incumbent rule”.

particularistic and isolated norms and produce asymmetric distribution of awards as well as preserve loose patron-client patterns they are not likely to lead to democratic transformation.

- “In neopatrimonial regimes, political transitions are struggles to establish legal rules.”³⁴
- “During transition from neopatrimonial regimes, middle class elements align with the opposition”.³⁵

While calling all these elements of modal path of neoprtrimonialism a “transition” Bratton and Van de Walle argue that “it is too early to make definitive judgments” as the process in the context under consideration is still ongoing. The scholars argue that “the dynamics of political change and the likelihood of peaceful transition to democracy are shaped by the amount of formal political participation and competition allowed by the ancienne regime”.³⁶

Preliminary implications for the Kyrgyz political context

Defined as neopatrimonialism Kyrgyz political regime can be largely grouped into the category described by the scholars as competitive one-party system with a large deal of formal, legal-rational component as a well as substantial amount of formal political participation and

³⁴ Ibid 466

The scholars argue that unlike the corporatist regimes of Latin America in which the “elites and the society are acculturated to an orderly rule of law” the political transition in neopatrimonial regimes feature a strife for establishing the primacy of legal rules in fundamental terms. This takes the form of demands for “limiting the constitutional powers of the executive”. At some point the contents of the constitution and the electoral rules become a cornerstone in the contention. Because the regime challengers’ camp in neopatrimonialism represents a loose alliance of narrow clientele leaders the incentives behind this strife are mainly confined to trivial gaining access to resources.

³⁵ Ibid 467

Unlike in corporatist authoritarianisms in Latin America and Southern Europe in pre-capitalist neopatrimonialisms private entrepreneurship is not likely to side with the ruling regime as they are resented with unpredictability, overregulation and corruption. The national bourgeoisies are more likely to endorse to “democratic opposition” in order to be included into “new rules of the political game”.

³⁶ Bratton and Van de Walle, 485

competition. However, as it is explicated in the following chapter, Kyrgyz political regime has undergone basically all elements of “transitional path” predicted by Bratton and Van de Walle, but incentives and outcomes.

I would see the core reason for such deviation in the prevalence of traditional institutions of patronage and clientelism based on clanship, tribalism and regionalism intrinsic to Kyrgyz political realities as well as other Central Asian states. These institutions should be accounted for the failing to benefit from relatively open and liberal system. Following to this assumption in the last empirical part I will try to test the impact of recent electoral reforms in Kyrgyzstan on the dynamics of informal institutions.

NEOPATRIMONIAL NATURE OF THE KYRGYZ POLITICAL REGIME

Clans as the pivot of the Kyrgyz neopatrimonialism

In this chapter I contextualize the neopatrimonial regime in Kyrgyzstan in following respects. I argue that the traditional informal institutions of patronage and clientelism have the critical impact on the establishment of the political regime as well as on its dynamics. Based on evidences from the context I describe in what way these institutions have become the founding factor in development of neopatrimonial norms in the system. This is exemplified in the description of their role in the basic institutions of political system such as separation and division of power as well as party politics. I attach particular importance to discussion on the role of informal institutions in party politics to elaborate on its reiterating influence on neopatrimonialism in Kyrgyz political regime.

Discussion on the political context in Kyrgyzstan like in any other Central Asian countries necessitates some elaboration on patronage and clientelism in their local self-manifestation. There is a number of considerable accounts of politics in Central Asia in terms of different types of patronage and clientelist networks. Mainly the role of these institutions in socio-political interactions in the region is described in terms of clans, regionalism and locality.³⁷

Collins argues that as the Soviet system collapsed, the clans – “informal identity networks based on kin and fictive kin bonds” emerged as political actors.³⁸ With general regard to Central

³⁷ See for example Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and regime Transition in Central Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Ilkhamov, 68;

Pauline Jones Luong, *Institutional change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). While the author does not employ extensively the discourse of informal institutions her description of “regional identities” have much in common with Collins’ and Ilkhamov’s reflections on clans and patronage.

³⁸ Collins, 25 – 26, According to the scholar the clan network members are connected to each other by kin-based bonds and bear mutual *responsibilities* within that *identity*. The concept of fictive kinship comprises ties originating

Asian context Collins argues that these kin and fictive kin bonds are coupled and reinforced by their distributive functions. At the time of transition where the state falls unable to provide basic social services and “efficient markets are lacking” clan networks become the basic device of channeling political, social and economic exchange.³⁹

What the scholar calls a clan politics – “politics of competition and deal making between clans in pursuit of clan interests” was critical on the “political trajectory” and regime dynamics in these countries.⁴⁰ Similarly at times of weakened state in post-colonial transitional situations informal agreements over “the governance of resources” between clan elites helped to keep peace and stability between groups.⁴¹

Extensive review of various interpretations of the concept of clans is not in scope of this essay but one believes that definition provided by Kathleen Collins is most appropriate. However, basing on certain experience as well as grounding on the reviewed literature on the Central Asian political contexts I need to contend that while the “clan politics” is relevant framework for explaining the basic political dynamics, a substantial proviso must be made. The phenomenon of clan may manifest itself in different dimensions.⁴² It may be a type of ascription to extended family, tribe, locality, and region, place of employment or education. All these dimensions are found in Kyrgyz political and socio-economic relations however varying in the degree of salience. In this regard one finds relevant and instructive to bring up following core features of clan provided by Collins.

from kin by marriage, close friends and their relations. In this regard one contends that “fictive kinship” may appear quite controversial feature of clan as it in fact may comprise a number of “layers” – region, locales, neighborhood, workplace, classmates colleagues and etc. On the other hand the salience of either distributive or identity constituent may be quite fluid and flexible.

³⁹ Ibid, 29

⁴⁰ Ibid 20

“Political trajectory” in Collins’ conception is “the term used to capture the dynamic element of both the creation and institutionalization of new regime type, and the collapse and disintegration of regime and state”.

⁴¹ Ibid 50

⁴² Being a national of the country and closely involved in international governance assistance programmes I happened to encounter manifestations of “clan politics” at different levels of state governing in my interaction with the variety of local actors ranging from public officials and common citizens to NGO and media workers

....Kin and fictive kinship as affective ties comprise the identity and bonds of its organization. Kinship ties are rooted in the extensive family organization that characterizes society in this region and historically tribal societies. “Fictive kinship” ties go beyond blood ties and incorporate individuals into the network through marriage, family alliances, school ties, localism (*mestnichestvo*), neighborhood (*mahalla*) and village (*qishloq*). Clan ties are neither exotic and primordial, nor inherently negative or undemocratic; they are networks based on rational calculations of individuals made within a cultural and institutional context....⁴³

In short one may describe the features of the Kyrgyz social fabric in the following way. Considering that the post-soviet politics in Kyrgyzstan is increasingly ethnocentric with substantial deal of exclusion of ethnic groups other than the Kyrgyz, local clan is a sub-ethnic, pre-political and mainly primordial type of network. Culturally the Kyrgyz ethnos claims a “semi-military” type of social structure.⁴⁴ The ethnic group is divided into three large conglomerations of numerous tribes. These conglomerations are geographically detached from each other, two of them being located roughly in the south and one in the north. Some residual chunks of tribes dispersed on “historically and culturally alien” territories. However the folklore clearly identifies those “chunks” and ascribes them to corresponding conglomeration. Thus natural detachment on the one hand and certain pattern of socio-historical development of the Kyrgyz society, conditionally speaking, in pre-Russian and Russian period on the other hand produced a large degree of alienation within this ethnic group with regard to traditions, language and general patterns of way of life.⁴⁵ After the Bolshevik coup in Russia these two groups were gradually framed in one republic - a “sovereign” part of the Soviet state. There is also a type of sub-dimension of territoriality or localism of village or a district level which overlaps with clan

⁴³ Ibid 17

⁴⁴ The term is borrowed from Dr. Fumagalli’s lecture # 9 on Central Asian Politics

⁴⁵ Separated from each by mountain pass of Tein – Shan large chunks of Kyrgyz tribes though associated to one Central Asian polity – khanate of Kokand did not show substantial features of monolithic ethnic group

boundaries. Because the Soviet rule territorialized local nomadic tribes in separate settlements the physical separation between them was largely preserved.⁴⁶

In the light of above discussed features of clanship in the area, Luong's claim that Soviet policies and institutions in Central Asia created regional political identities may appear arguable.⁴⁷ It is quite another matter to argue that these identities were reinforced by administrative-territorial division and consequent staffing policies which largely featured staff rotation confined to one administrative unit or one region.⁴⁸ The same criticism may go with Ilkhamov's claim that clans were created with the purpose of capturing state assets to the benefit of that clan network.⁴⁹ One would insist on applying the "reinforce" discourse with regard to interaction of formal and informal institutions in Central Asia.

Clientelism and patronage are basic mechanisms of clan's access and appropriation of political resources in Kyrgyzstan. Collins, however, insists on distinguishing the concept of clan from clientelism and patronage as well as corruption. Her basic point is that exchange of goods and services in clan networks is based on "ascription and affection" whereas in clientelism and patronage stems from economic need.⁵⁰ One claims that as the boundaries between need-based client-patron relations and those among the members of clan networks are quite elusive and subtle. On the other hand it is hard to claim that clientelism and patronage in politics are exclusively the need-based phenomena. The same criticism would go with her definition of corruption as an informal and illegal practice of "gaining public goods and decisions for money".⁵¹ As it will be exemplified further in trading political preferences as well as public

⁴⁶ Particularly in Kyrgyzstan one can often find villages named after the tribe. For example "Toolos" or "Naiman" are the names of tribes within the large tribal conglomeration Itchkilik. These names were "successfully" revived after the break of the Soviet rule.

⁴⁷ Luong, 52

⁴⁸ Ibid 61

⁴⁹ Ilkhamov, 71

⁵⁰ Collins, 38

⁵¹ Ibid 39

offices and decisions for cash or other type of “hard currency” has been the common practice between the clan members.

The best way of describing the way the clans participate in the politics is to deliberate on the structure of the political regime of the country. As it was suggested by the clan pact framework, proposed by Collins, clan networks reinvigorated in the wake of independence in early 1990-s in response to overall weakened state in terms of its ability to maintain political and legal order as well as provide basic social and economic services.⁵²

However of course that was not literally a sudden capture of state and political power by some esoteric solidarity group right after the collapse of the Soviet rule. By many accounts clans were deeply embedded in the structure of the Soviet state in Central Asian countries.⁵³

The extent to which they took part in the politics and the character of interaction among each other varied depending on the type of immediate political situation (*konjuktura*). At times of strife against primordial, pre-modern identities, launched by different soviet party leaders – particularly at times of Stalin’ purges and Gorbachev’ fight against corrupt territoriality (*zemlyachestvo*), they are reported to have gone underground and reduced their impact on local political and economic affairs. They discerned as more or less definable and capable local political actors at times of Brezhnevite policies of “stability in cadres” and minimalist intervention to the Union’s borderlands. The pattern of staffing the first positions in the Union republics on the part of the Kremlin featured balanced appointments of local elites as well representatives of the “center” to conduct some oversight.⁵⁴ This “breath of independence” aroused first sprouts of patronage and clientelism among the party elites in the Central Asian. Usually the post-Soviet and the international scholarship exemplifies this on the case of

⁵² Ibid 50

⁵³ Particularly these evidences are found in the volumes by Kathleen Collins and Pauline Jones Luong in which the former scholar describes them in terms of “clans” and the latter in terms of “regional identities”.

⁵⁴ Collins 102 -107

patronage network developed by the rule of Sharaf Rashidov, mainly the “Brezhnevite era” first secretary of Uzbek Communist Party for the scales of “state-administered corruption” over production of cotton. It is reported that Rashidov revived “the feudal patterns of vassal – suzerain relationships” characteristics to pre-colonial Central Asian khanates. Particularly he practiced granting to his clan members public offices which let the latter to “benefit privately from the part of local resources”.⁵⁵

This type of governance also flourished in Kyrgyzstan under Turdakun Usubaliev who led the local branch of communist party for about thirty years. He is the one thought to be the “patriarch of clan politics” in Kyrgyzstan as he crowded out his administration with the members of so - called Kochkor⁵⁶ clan from his home Naryn province.⁵⁷ After a brief decline of clan-politics in Kyrgyzstan under Gorbachev led anti-corrupt campaign and the first years of independence during late 1980-s and early 1990-s the informal institutions in the governing of the state have become prevalent.

The political leadership incapable of overcoming informal rules of clanship which spawned shortly after the collapse of the communist rule let the clan-based and regionalist patronage groups crowd out entire political system of the country. It is suggested that by mid 1990-s the first Kyrgyz president Askar Akaev’s democratic agenda encountered enormous resistance on the part of old communist party functionaries and the leaders of clans, which actually often overlapped, considering that at least previous forty years of communist rule in the country accommodated clannish patronage institutions. As the backlash seemed to produce a challenge to Akaev’s power base he started to rely on his own clan networks.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ilkhamov, 74

⁵⁶ Interestingly Kochkor clan is more associated with the localist network (after the geographic name of the district) rather than affiliation to some primordial clannish-tribal network

⁵⁷ Collins, 116

⁵⁸ Ibid 225

Akaev and his supporters resorted to a forgery to dissolve the parliament and introduce amendments to the constitution. The constitutional amendments granted him a firm upper-hand position over other power institutions. New parliamentary structure set in the constitution and the elections produced the composition which by definition could not challenge the president's domination over other institutions. Thus, besides faulty act against the legislature Akaev let the first offence against relatively balanced constitutional arrangement of the political system.⁵⁹

The executive branch was crowded out with Akaev's clientele composed of his relatives and crony whose ability to urge for access to economic resources was defined in terms of proximity to the public offices to oversee flow of funds of various origins. That may be ministries and state committees which govern privatization process, investment, tax and customs flows. Such opportunities may also be earned from the positions of province and district administrators which provide access to local level state assets as well as to budgeting process.⁶⁰ One may find media narratives about the foreign aid siphoned by high rank public officials to foreign bank accounts, or about high rank law-enforcements benefiting from involvement in drug trafficking. The access to the resource distribution and policy making thereon is believed to be earned on the basis of informal pacts between clan elites.⁶¹

There is no detailed account on the role of informal institutions as well as on privatized character of judiciary system except for the kin ties of the chief of the constitutional court to the president, which let him interpret the constitution arbitrarily on a number of rules of governance.⁶² The courts' total dependence from the office of president is the common and

⁵⁹ Collins 227

Luong describes the same context from the point of "transitional bargaining game" (TBG) which according to the scholar took place over defining of the electoral rules right after independence between the president so-called "regional elites". At that the latter largely overcame and set the electoral rules which as she tends to think were to the detriment of democratic transition rather favored narrow localism and regionalism.

⁶⁰ Collins, 241 - 243

⁶¹ Ibid 225

⁶² Ibid

grieving narrative provided by media and civil society institutions. Though the procedure of appointing of judges for the Supreme and the Constitutional Courts involve the executive and legislature, set guarantees of non-interference to their operation and seem quite transparent and stipulating independence, particularly the Supreme Court end up being blamed of pervasive corruption and the Constitutional court accounted for executing political orders of the presidency.⁶³ The courts of lower hierarchy in popular opinion are associated with outright bribery and punitive exercise. Besides given their appointment and dismissal are totally contingent on the Office (Administration) of President they are replete with vested interests and become a common vehicle of attaining necessary results concerning either elections or economic disputes.

The dominant pattern of parliamentary elections on a single mandate basis with a majority votes representation made it easier to vie for a parliamentary seats without relying on any formal institutional means such as political party affiliation or ideological and programmatic standing. The candidates simply resorted to vis-à-vis contacts with the electorate in their home locale. In the situation of entire socio-economic deterioration and political and cultural disorientation they failed to capture public opinion with viable stance or program except for those which appealed to the interests of particular region and clans.⁶⁴

Basically impoverished communities were in favor of clientelistic exchange of goods and services. To put it in an example, the popular loyalty and votes have been gained in exchange of garments, food, cash and tremendous feasts. Members of parliament fulfilled untypical job allocating resources for infrastructure and aid to their clientele in home villages and districts. As

⁶³ Oleg Pankratov: "The Constitutional draft of Kyrgyzstan is either a dream of dictator or a torpedo for "an Isle of Democracy" (Project novoi redaktsii konstitutsii Kyrgyzstana – mehta diktatora ili torpeda dlya ostrovka demokratii), *Narodniy reporter – New Agency* (September 24, 2007), available through: http://www.for.kg/ru/public_reporter/25/

⁶⁴ Suggested by Jack Bielasiack, "The institutionalization of Electoral and Party Systems in Post-communist States", *Comparative Politics*, 34/2 (Jan., 2002), 191

it is accurately suggested by Bielasiak, because the ideas do not capture segments of mass public, political opportunities are expensive.⁶⁵ The seats in the Kyrgyz parliament gradually became attainable by those who could afford them given the expenses. Thus already the second assembly by February 1995 was pervaded by people of business who made their fortune in commerce, former governmental officials, reportedly enriched by rent-seeking.⁶⁶

One argues that the legislature turned on the one hand to a place for lobbying mainly business interests of those who composed it. This took sharp and ugly forms as the executive branch consolidated power and authority to the detriment of the parliament. Members of parliament had to acquire good skills in pressuring and bribing officials in executive-branch agencies.⁶⁷

On the other hand the legislature functioned as representative body of the society patched into clans. Almost every member of parliament enjoyed strong support of his/her beneficiary or, as it is here referred to - a clan. It can be argued however, that the members of parliament in fact at least formally tried to reshape such archaic patron-client relations into more or less modern and civilized patterns of party-constituents relations. They either joined to already existing parties or created their own. Both party-attached and the partlyless leaders pursuing a parliamentary seat would formally adhere to some political platform. These political platforms followed general templates appealing to universalistic values, listing the consequences of economic reforms and the standard set of measures to be taken to address them. But as it was already suggested ideological and programmatic standings were reduced to the level of supplementary means of advertisement.

⁶⁵ Ibid 190

⁶⁶ Zhoomart Ormonbekov, *Mifologia politicheskikh partiy v Kyrgyzstane* (The Mythology of political parties in Kyrgyzstan), 12 July, 2007 <http://www.perspect.org/print.php?action=news&ndir=1&nid=104>

⁶⁷ Suggested by M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: the Failure of Open Politics*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 77

The Bratton and Van de Walle transition framework applied to Kyrgyzstan

In the following section I look into the most considerable attempt to transform neopatrimonialism in Kyrgyzstan. In February –March of 2005 fraudulent parliamentary elections lead to fierce social discontent against the actions of Central Electoral Commission and the courts which failed to oversee the event. Moreover they were accused of conniving at the massive violations of the electoral code, and what is more were blamed for supervising the violations. Later the resentment was framed as a demand against the president Akaev to step down. Initiated in the southern provinces of Jalalabad and Osh the administrative and police compounds were taken under control of masses almost all over the country. Finally a massive rally ended up with a swift ousting of the president and his administration.⁶⁸

These events step by step align with the framework laid out by Bratton and Van de Walle:

- “Political change from neopatrimonial regimes originates in social protest”.⁶⁹
- “Neopatrimonial elites fracture over access to patronage.”⁷⁰
- “Elite political pacts are unlikely in neopatrimonial regimes.”⁷¹
- “In neopatrimonial regimes, political transitions are struggles to establish legal rules.”⁷²
- “During transition from neopatrimonial regimes, middle class elements align with the opposition”.⁷³

Indeed in Kyrgyzstan, to express it in the way scholars put, at first glance “shrinking economic opportunities, declining living standards, particularistic and exclusionary patterns of

⁶⁸ ICG, “Kyrgyzstan: after the revolution” (Bishkek/Brussels: ICG, May 4, 2005), page 6-9

⁶⁹ Bratton and Van de Walle, 460

⁷⁰ Ibid 462

⁷¹ Ibid 464

⁷² Ibid 466.

⁷³ Ibid 467

reward lead to social unrest demanding removal of incumbent leaders”⁷⁴. Mass upheaval ousted the incumbent government as the resources were exhausted to the point where “it can no longer maintain loyalty of the civil servants and the military”.⁷⁵

In fact there was nothing special in these accusations of electoral fraud as they have been indispensable element of all kinds of electoral events. It is more plausible to take Bratton and Van de Walle’s point on the critical role of “outsider elites”. The variety of clan leaders in their time removed from the opportunities to benefit privately from public resources and disfavored in the ongoing parliamentary elections managed to cooperate in consorted action and advanced against the incumbent ruler employing “liberalization” and “democratization” rhetoric. Thus they succeeded to arousing and mobilizing “previously leaderless social masses” against the “corrupt regime”.⁷⁶ The “arousing and mobilizing masses” would also involve generous feed-up with cash, food and liquors.

As for the possibility of pacts between the confronting opposition and the incumbent group, now three years later one would find evidences that there was an opportunity for the camps to negotiate. However one believes that given the impetus gained from the stolen elections the winner-takes-all logic prevailed among the regime challengers on the one hand. On the other hand the incumbent rulers were largely disconnected with the real situation and lost the levers to control thereon.

While consistent with Bratton Van de Walle’s prediction Kyrgyz “revolution” featured demands to establish legal rules of political competition, they fell inferior to “revolutionaries’ ” strife over the spoils of the overthrown regime. The calls for review of the content of the

⁷⁴ Ibid 460

⁷⁵ Ibid. In Kyrgyz case the role of military was rather diminutive, what really mattered is the loss of the control over the demoralized police

⁷⁶ Suggested by Bratton and Van de Walle, p 462. As an immediate observer of the events in the south of the country the author would often hear “revolutionary” leader’s calls for quitting with the dominance of the northerners and restore “historical justice” implying Brezhnevite regionally balanced representation in the political power.

constitution as well as of electoral rules sunk in the routine of redistribution of public assets.⁷⁷ The larger part of the population including the holders of large businesses either did not have time to react or just took the stance of passive observers to the rebels' benefit.

Summary

For tentative conclusion, one claims that the Kyrgyz political regime manifests clear features of neopatrimonialism. Public offices are appropriated by clan leaders backed by their network both in the office and the constituency in their home locale. The public activity patronage and clientalist interests often prevail over the national interests. At the same time the regime is grounded on a recognized power and authority of political leadership with a substantial deal of separation of power which maintains on the basis of regular elections on the one hand and on the other hand by providing minimum welfare. The state functions based on tangible bureaucracy and law-enforcement and policing institutions.

The legitimacy of the use of power separation concept applied to Kyrgyz political system is quite relative and contingent upon the actors it either favors or harms. It does not fulfill the function of self-check and self-limitation nor does it bring the power under rule of law. It may be asserted that the existing power separation fulfils the function of check and balance with regard to permitted access to the resources between allied or competing patronage networks.

It is evident that the clan is not the only category that matters in the regime but what really does is its capability to co-exist and accommodate to the formal institutions. Though Collin's account suggests a well-rooted animosity between the clans networks and the state; and on the other extreme Luong argues that "the state managed to transform social and political organizations and distinctively blurred the boundaries between the two", one would describe the

⁷⁷ ICG, "Kyrgyzstan: a Faltering State" (Osh/Brussels: ICG, December, 16, 2005), 4

relations between the two as accommodation.⁷⁸ In this regard one finds quite relevant Ilkhamov's argument that Central Asian neopatrimonialisms benefit from the adoption of state ideology and a selective use of law and bureaucracy, partly inherited from the soviet system partly borrowed from the Western countries.⁷⁹

Kyrgyz neopatrimonialism has also created exclusionary and non-transparent patterns of resource control and distribution. Access to political resources has been gained through patronage networks and predominantly by informal trading of political preferences. Such essential tools of democratic governance as electoral process and political parties were devaluated and discredited for being accommodated by informal clan politics.

The Kyrgyz "revolution" has not produced any systematic change in the political regime nor did it change the patterns of governing nor did it lead to state consolidation. Moreover there was no considerable change of elites. Mainly the new incumbents while reshuffling some part of the public corps basically accommodated the beneficiaries and the clientele of the ancienne régime. Therefore the Kyrgyz neopatrimonialism while having taken the transformation pathway described by Bratton and Van de Walle does not produce any transition neither in terms of incentives behind it nor in terms of the effects on the regime.

In the light of the discussed issues and the conclusions drawn in this chapter as a kind of alternative I propose to look at the capacity for institutional influence on the social base of neopatrimonial regime in the country. Namely what is to be studied is the strength of patronage and clientelist networks; their propensity to change under new formal political institutions. The Kyrgyz context has recently offered this opportunity. The regime of current ruler set a new frame

⁷⁸ Collins, 11-12; Pauline Jones Luong, "Introduction" in Pauline Jones Luong, *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies From Soviet Rule To Independence* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, 2004): 4

⁷⁹ Ilkhamov, 67

of political participation by introducing new electoral norms. And immediately these rules were applied in the parliamentary elections in December 2007.

The new procedures prescribe elections on the party list and ballot distribution based on proportional representation as opposed to former single member district and diminutive political party participation. It is expected that this pattern would help reducing the role of informal solidarity networks on politics and in general enhance the formal participation in governing of the country.⁸⁰

One believes that the Kyrgyz party system as a quite embryonic domain was catapulted to “full-fledged” politics. Therefore this research necessitates a short piece of analysis of nascent party system in the country.

⁸⁰ Askar Dzhakishev, “Vybery 2007 goda: nachalo konca diktatury klanov” [“2007 elections – the end of clan dictatorship”], Open Kyrgyzstan, December 27, 2007 available at: <http://www.tazar.kg/news.php?i=7434>

KYRGYZ PARTY SYSTEM

Most local analysts point at the period in the wake of independence - the years of 1989 – 93(4) as the stage of genuine and promising party building and the emergence of party system in the country. Most of political parties of that time appeared on the wave of “euphoria of liberty and independence”. They mainly featured anti-communist, environment-protection, cultural renaissance and nationalist stances. Some newly-born political parties at their outset were narrowly specialized communal associations and movements which politicized following the spirit of time of liberation. So did for example “Ashar” movement which initially advocated the rights of young people who in response to heavy housing issues spontaneously seized land plots in the suburbs of Bishkek – the capital of Kyrgyzstan. The movements of “Asaba” and “Atuulduk demilge” operated in the range of cultural renaissance movements with discernable nationalistic stance. By early 1990 most of such informal associations were brought in the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DDK) under the general rubric of fighting the Communist Party apparatus.⁸¹ Incidentally one needs to remind that accounting the civil society movements in the country for the cease of Communist Party rule in Kyrgyzstan is arguable.⁸² DDK’s relationship with the ruling party was not consistent and sporadic advance against the communists were mainly confined to the capital.

The independence generated insurmountable contradictions between the building associations within the movement mostly related to nationalist sentiments, ethnic and regional cleavages and all in all lack of well aligned ideology and programmes. In the end the movement patched off to pieces. Basically one may think of the DDK as the entity, in which its building

⁸¹ Vladimir Babak and Demian Vaisman, “Kyrgyz republic: Introduction” , in *Political Organization in Central Asia and Azerbaijan*, ed. Vladimir Babak, Demian Vaisman, Aryeh Wassermann (FRANK CASS, London Portlan, OR, 2004), 185 - 190

⁸² Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia’s Second Chance* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 3-4

associations were pulverized and crystallized as political groupings, which later claimed the status of political parties. By the time they started to split from the larger movement to independence they had already acquired certain party attributes such as clearly expressed ideological stance, program and stable set of members. By the present time of the parties born by DDK only a few remained on political surface. Among them most noticeable are Socialist party „Atameken” (Homeland), nationalist parties „Asaba” and „ErK” (Kyrgyz acronym for Free Kyrgyzstan).⁸³

Kyrgyzstani party building experience in 1990-s accurately fits in the theoretical perspective of *tabula rasa* provided by Jack Bielasiak. He posits that according to that framework the failure of setting a viable and competitive party system in the area was conditioned by three factors. First, communism quite eliminated socio-economic differences and monopolized politics, which lead to erosion of intermediary institutions capable of organizing group interests. Second, bewilderment and uncertainty created by market transformations made political preferences feeble. Third, “economic social, political and cultural innovations necessitated multiple tasks that made difficult the selection of most salient issues by electorate”.⁸⁴ To this one may add that unlike in some of Eastern European countries communist party in Kyrgyzstan failed to transform, to set agenda and mobilize population being distanced from the resource distribution. For some time it was virtually banned and was almost criminalized by the new rulers.⁸⁵

Here it is worth of mentioning Pauline Jones Luong analysis of Transitional Bargaining Games in Central Asian countries. In her analysis of the bargaining process over the choice of electoral system in Kyrgyzstan in the onset of independence, she mentions that traditionally the process of decision making on any significant issue had always been dominated by the dichotomy

⁸³ Babak and Vaisman, 185 - 190

⁸⁴ Jack Bielasiack, 190

⁸⁵ Babak and Vaisman, 189

of Northern and Southern political interests. She suggests that the central leadership always had to get the agreement both from the leaders of the South and the North. At that, the regional leaders of minor importance had to assume subsidiary roles. It is fairly suggested that as the political parties drastically lost capacity for independent influence on decision making and were placed in the framework of that inter-regional/interclan deal and assumed subsidiary role of supporters and conductors of clannish politics.⁸⁶

For the purpose of plenitude of description of the Kyrgyz party system one should add the accounts provided by the local analysts. Muratbek Imanaliev, former minister for foreign affairs provides three reasons. First, is the distorted understanding of the concept of political party in terms of its role and goals in entire post-Soviet area including Kyrgyzstan.⁸⁷ What one suggests is that the concept of party was not perceived as an institutional condition which can accommodate and channel needs and interests. The concept of party has been associated with the CPSU, the supra-state body ruling over all aspects of life in the society, the bearer of uncontestable authority.⁸⁸

The second problem according to Imanaliev is that the party founders totally lack party-building experience. That is why most of political parties in the country are established as a type of simplified political associations with the elements of traditionalism. Most of new parties are scanty-member quasi-political associations created or reinforced right before the parliamentary elections with the purpose of promoting their leaders to the legislature. They were customarily organized by relatives and crony. Sometimes they could attract or be created by middle rank or former high rank public officials or by business and commercial groups. Right after the

⁸⁶ Pauline Jones Luong, "Establishing an Electoral System in Kyrgyzstan: Rise of the Regions", in *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, ed by Pauline Jones Luong (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 159 - 160

⁸⁷ Muratbek Imanaliev, "Stanovlenie Partiynoi sistemy v Kyrgyzstane" ["Formation of Kyrgyz Party System"], *Institute for Public Policy Analysis online*, 20 April 2006, <http://www.ipp.kg/ru/analysis/144/> (last entered April 18th 2008)

⁸⁸ Ibid

“revolution of march 24” in 2005 one could observe creation of political associations labeled as parties led and inspired by criminal and quasi criminal elements.

The third problem with the local party building is that the state fell reluctant of supporting political parties despite its declarations favoring the development of any type of democratic institutions. Moreover it did a lot to impede the development of strong and sustainable parties.⁸⁹

Imanaliev does not elaborate further on those conditions which impeded proper institutionalization of political parties. It can be inferred that the ruling groups did not want to encourage party building either because they considered strong parties as an additional destabilizing factor in a weak state and favored dealing with uncoordinated clans or they simply sensed direct threat to their power base. The state failed to set at least normative grounds to induce the development of political parties and other civil society institutions. While the parties were constitutionally guaranteed an opportunity to participate in politics they were left on their own in defining the mechanisms of being represented in the power structures. The reasons why the regime changed its attitude to party politics in the country will also be discussed as I proceed to analysis of the new electoral rules.

At the moment there are about 5-7 sustainable political organizations one may label a political party at a stretch together with those which appeared from DDK in the wake of independence. First, that is because they managed to survive, and not only remain afloat, but show substantial activity in the political life of the country during entire post-independence time. Second, these parties, if not famous, but are well-recognized among the population. Many of them are recognized for their opposition to the government. Thus one may argue that the political spectrum can be described in terms of pro and contra governmental party affiliation rather than in

⁸⁹ Ibid

terms of ideological and programmatic preferences. Some of them manage to accommodate their programmatic and ideological standpoints with those of traditional western party families.

However along with them during last seventeen years of independence approximately one hundred political parties appeared in the political space of the country. Both the big and the small parties suffer from the same decease. They do not have stable and solid social base, neither do they have clear and viable mechanism of participation in real decision making.

OUTCOME OF ELECTORAL REFORM: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Some historical background and the discussion of the electoral change

In my analysis I discuss the impact of changing electoral rules on the dynamics in the informal dimension of Kyrgyz neopatrimonialism – patron-client relations of clanship, tribalism and regionalism. While the previously discussed frameworks stress on the role of informal institutions, specifically of patronage and clientelism as the “superstructure” of neopatrimonial regimes, their reflection on the possible impact on these founding institutions remains on the margin of their analysis. As it was mentioned the Kyrgyz context has provided this opportunity to look at the resilience of informal political patronage and clientelism against formal institutional effect.

The change of electoral rules had been on the agenda long before the current electoral reform took place. The disputes over reconfiguration of the electoral system and providing the political parties substantive institutional opportunities to influence policies intensified back in 2002, when the president Askar Akaev initiated last of his four constitutional amendments. These controversies have always been tied to the demands to review the constitutional authorities of the executive.⁹⁰

On the one extreme the members of Constitutional Conference, convoked by Akaev specifically for amending the constitution, frequently voiced out the demands for turning the country into a parliamentary republic. However the views claiming that for parliamentarism the country lacks a mature party system prevailed. Moreover most actors were preoccupied with

⁹⁰ Nur Omarov, “Konstitucionnaya lihordka po-kyrgyzski: chto v peredi” [“Kyrgyz Constitutional rush: what is ahead?”] APN online, June 2007 available at: <http://www.eol.kg/site/docs/Russian/Constitutional%20Changes/Constitutional%20rush%20in%20Kyrgyzstan.doc> (last entered on April 18, 2008)

concern that parliamentarism was not the type of governance appropriate for the country bearing regional and clannish factionalism as well as unpredictable interethnic relations.⁹¹

However the president besides loosening the grip on power made first step towards granting the political parties an opportunity to influence the policy making.⁹² The new rules prescribed unicameral parliament with 18 % of seats to be held by parties elected by proportional representation.⁹³ As Akaev attested in his last address to the legislature, by those amendments the political system approached to parliamentarism.⁹⁴ And there was a lot of merit in his words given intensive promotion of “pro-president” dominant party “Alga Kyrgyzstan” led by his daughter who was predicted for the post of the speaker. In fact the list of candidates nominated by the dominant party for running to parliamentary elections was composed of the Akaev’s extended clientele, high rank public officials, relatives and cronies as well as local “oligarchies”, who benefited from proximity to the ruler. Even though the dominant party was highly discredited for involvement in high scale violations of the electoral code traditionally a major election monitoring organizations OSCE called it “more competitive than the previous ones”. On the other hand the new electoral rules did not disturb the old vote-for-cash patterns of vote earning.⁹⁵

After the coup in March 2005 the demands for review of the constitutional powers of the presidency and consequently for the change electoral system were reinforced. The new incumbent government reluctant of changing the old power configuration resisted for two years to the pressure exerted from the civil society leaders allied with political parties and the “outsider

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ ICG, “Kyrgyzstan: after the revolution” (Osh/Brussels: ICG, May, 4, 2005), Introduction

⁹⁴ “President has no intention of changing the constitution” (Izmenyat’ konstitutsiyu president ne nameren), *Delo* #, (March 2, 2005), available through: <http://delo.to.kg/2005/8/04.shtml> (last entered on April 18, 2008)

⁹⁵ ICG, “Kyrgyzstan: after the revolution” (Osh/Brussels: ICG, May, 4, 2005)

elites”.⁹⁶ The two-year controversies resulted in three constitutional reforms of which the latter one more or less gained the gloss of legitimacy as it was adopted in a national referendum. In fact the constitutional reform did not affect the overwhelming power of the presidency rather, made the authoritarian trends less subtle than in the previous variants.⁹⁷ Detailed discussion on implications of the constitutional changes concerning the powers of president is not in the scope of this paper. Rather I will pass directly to discussion of the new electoral rules included in the amendments and the electoral code which were submitted on the referendum.

The electoral reform constitutionally provided the new institutional opportunities to political parties to take the absolute control over the legislature. Moreover according to the new procedures a party faction attaining more than 50 % of the seats in the legislature is authorized to form the government. The electoral rules establish proportional system of balloting with a double threshold of which the first is 5 % national minimum of electorate and the other is ,5% of national electorate ballots to be attained in each of seven administrative districts and separately two cities of national importance, Bishkek and Osh.⁹⁸ The electoral law also regulates the structure of the political parties in terms of participation of women, youth and electoral and ethnic groups.⁹⁹

While the president Bakiev took the same path in “bolstering” democratic institutions as Akaev, they differ both in incentives and strategic calculations. Basically they converge in only way, that Bakiev pushed by civil society and political party leaders in early post-“revolutionary” months also convoked a constitutional conference to dissolve it with no visible outcome. While the former leader’s attempt to open up the system in response to slipping legitimacy and support

⁹⁶ Kubatbek Baibolov, “Stoit li provodit’ mitingi kogda opponenty ne hotyat slyshat’ drug druga”, [“Does it make sense rallying when opponents do not want to listen to each other”] Institute for Public Policy online, June 20, 2007 available at: <http://ipp.kg/ru/analysis/234/> [last entered on April 18, 2008]

⁹⁷ For example in neither of the six preceding amendments the presidents decrees were elevated to the status of law; on of the constitutional norms authorizes the president to establish national agencies; the president is also authorized to establish state committees and agencies insubordinate to any governmental bodies but the president personally. On the top of all the amended constitution dropped the penalty for power usurpation.

⁹⁸ The clause 54 of the Kyrgyz constitution available at: http://www.president.kg/files/docs/project_const.doc and the clauses 69-73 of the Kyrgyz Elctoral Code available at: http://www.24.kg/f/news/kodex_vibory.doc

⁹⁹ Clause 72 of the Electoral Code of the Kyrgyz Republic

among the local political elites, the latter's actions inform on incentive to strengthen his grip on power.¹⁰⁰

In an address to the nation Bakiev claimed that the issue of constitutional power arrangement had fallen a prey to a “political strife”. It was decided at will to put an end to contentions over the issue for the sake of “stability and social cohesion” and submitted his own amendments to the referendum which “shares and takes in consideration the opinions and beliefs of the most of the political parties’ and civil society leaders”. At that Bakiev stressed that the parliamentary elections on party list and based on PR is the pivot of the constitutional reform. Besides justifying this in terms of anti-clan and anti-regionalist stance he clearly articulated, as many local pundits see it, his prevailing incentives.¹⁰¹

Bakiev seemed annoyed with obstinacy of the parliamentarians independently elected by a single mandate district rule. Behind the accusations of “social uncontrollability” one could catch president’s irritation by the deputies’ considerable authority to impose a scrutiny over the operation of the executive.¹⁰² These assumptions are quite plausible considering that the government had started to actively advertise the privatization project of vast state-controlled water-energy enterprise. Water energy has been regarded not only the strongest pole for economic growth but the issue of national/regional security as the country is situated at the upstream in the region which suffers from water and irrigated lands scarcity thus is one of the major providers of irrigation as well as electricity. The backlash against the privatization would be expected on two grounds. First would originate from those who would remind about the

¹⁰⁰ Evidences on this divergence are found in the volumes by Baibolov and Omarov

¹⁰¹ Syrgak Abdyl'dayev, “Yasno chto prezidentu s etim parlamentom dal'she ne poputi” [“It is clear that the president is not going to move forth with this parliament”], *Oshestvennyi reiting online*, October 26, 2007, available at: <http://tazar.kg/news.php?i=6668&sea=%E8%E7%20%E2%EA%F0%E2%E5%ED%EE> (last entered on April 18, 2008).

It is not quite clear though what connotation was attached to this expression assuming that “political struggle” between and among groups has always been an important element constitution making.

¹⁰² President Bakiev's address to nation on September 19, 2007. Available at: <http://www.president.kg/press/vistup/2595/> (last entered on April 18, 2008)

previous ill-managed privatization of state enterprise marked with wide scale rent-seeking, squander and embezzlements, and the second would come from the economic interests of the new “bourgeoisie” mainly concentrated in the parliament who would seek to bargain with the ruler over the access to the privatization process.¹⁰³

Moreover in many cases the dealings between the executive and the legislature over legislations, policies and appointments would take the form vote-for-cash business.¹⁰⁴ This might have suggested Bakiev’s rough offence against the “narrow interests of rent-seeking entrepreneurs”¹⁰⁵ in the parliament. It was stated that the country needs a parliament formed “responsible parties”. And to secure that responsibility “the parties should be able to strip the deputies of their mandates”¹⁰⁶. This statement was converted to the norm in the electoral rules prescribed mandate imperative for the party factions in legislature.¹⁰⁷ From bad to worse, one week after the rules were promulgated through the referendum, Bakiev announced that he would establish and support a political party on which he would “rely in his reform endeavors”¹⁰⁸.

Thus from the outset of practical implementation of the new electoral rule it has become apparent that the “pro-president” party coupled with absolute support of loyal Central Electoral Committee, courts and local administrative units committed to draw the “necessary figures”, will dominate over the legislature.

However while it is clear that the regime quite succeeded in preserving the power arrangement which kept the locus of influence over the entire political system in the hands of one

¹⁰³ Bolot Zhunusov, “The rule of goat-tearing” [Pravila kozlodraniya] *24.kg news Agency*, April 7th 2008 available through <http://www.tazar.kg/news.php?i=8463>

¹⁰⁴ “Omurbek Tekebaev – Lichnya istoriya [Omurbek Tekebaev – Personal Story] *Akipress information Agency* available at: http://www.akipress.org/_htm/tekebaev.htm

¹⁰⁵ President Bakiev’s address to nation on September 19, 2007. Available at: <http://www.president.kg/press/vistup/2595/> (last entered on April 18, 2008)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ The Constitution of the Kyrgyz republic available at: http://eng.president.kg/constitution_ev/const_ev/

¹⁰⁸ “Bakiev announces creation and support of party Akzhol”, *OKO.kg News Agency*, October, 16, 2007, available through: <http://www.oko.kg/2007/10/16/k.bakiev-objavil-o-sozdanii-i.html>

ruling body, it was believed that the new electoral rules opened the “Pandora box” setting the ground for institutional eradication of the social base for the neopatrimonial regime.¹⁰⁹

The 2007 parliamentary elections: coming to terms with the electoral reforms

In the next section based on the data and the evidences from different local and international actors I will argue that the nascent party system not only accommodated the new electoral rules but showed certain advance against patron-client relations in the society which had constituted the core of the existing regime. After the electoral norms were adopted the common discourse of the reaction was that it was considerable advance towards democratization. The regulations were arranged in a way that bolster parties’ national recognition and pave the way for development of strong voter identification with political parties rather than with clan and regionalist networks.

Although the presidency as a strong ruling body elected in general elections managed to retain the control over the entire political system in terms of influencing the policy making and deciding on important appointments and dismissal, these changes is often regarded as a considerable breakthrough in challenging the regime which had favored personalist rule and pervasive patron-client relations.¹¹⁰ The arrangements set by the new electoral norms are thought to be capable of democratizing the regime in following respects.

In the first place it is argued that the new rules set the conditions for liquidation of scanty-member quasi- political formations formed basing on either locality or kinship ties. This in turn would weaken the institutional politicization and promotion of regional and clan factionalism

¹⁰⁹ Askar Dzhakishev “2007 elections – the end of clan dictatorship” [Vybory 2007 goda: nachalo konca diktatury klanov], Open Kyrgyzstan, December 27, 2007 available through: <http://www.tazar.kg/news.php?i=7434>

¹¹⁰ Ibid

intrinsic to Kyrgyz society.¹¹¹ Having endorsed to this argument I do not deny that traditional institutions and interactions thereon are often rooted in specific type of socio-economic structure, in Kyrgyzstan characterized by inequalities along a number of important aspects.

The proportional system of ballot counting and double threshold seem to considerable reduce the reliance of regional and clan notables on their clientele but push them on the one hand to manifest a good public performance record and formulate viable ideological and programmatic standing to absorb popular attention. On the other hand the new patterns of balloting also push the trading of political support on the part broader population as the basic tool of expressing “political preferences” to the margins of entire political process. The electorate will get accustomed to taking decisions on ballot place not based on how much he earns or on what region or the tribe the bidder represents but on what action plan he offers. These circumstances coupled with the requirements concerning the structure set in the electoral code produces both considerable impediments and disincentives for purely economic interests to vie for the legislature which had considered primarily as a vehicle to legal protection and access to rent-seeking deals.¹¹²

Because the party factions in the legislature would be composed of deputies of different background in terms of social class, professional affiliation as well as regionalist and clannish solidarities one could hardly expect that narrow considerations will prevail in the operation of the government.

After the president Akaev more than once articulated his intention to bolster the role of political parties and eventually lead the country to parliamentary republic in the last years of his rule, the number of political formation claiming the status of political party reached to sixty

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Ibid

five.¹¹³ After the coup, with the mounting demand for political reforms the idea of party-centered government “soared in the air”. By the time the reform was undertaken it was apparent the parties were to be represented in the new arrangement in any way. Thus the number of political parties crossed one hundred.¹¹⁴

As it was suggested in the third chapter the concept of political parties is irrelevant to most of organizations for they lack capacity to fulfill the functions associated with political parties. Aware of their incapability of meeting the requirements of the new electoral system they merely dropped out from the parliamentary contest merged with the large ones. Of more than one hundred political formations, 22 submitted applications to vie in the electoral campaign. Twelve complied with the technical requirements.¹¹⁵

I will not describe the full performance of all competing parties rather, will focus on five of them. They are “Akzhol” [Bright Path] (created by the president), Ata-Meken [Homeland], Social-Democratic Party “Kyrgyzstan” (SDPK), Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan (CPK), Ar-Namys [Honor and Dignity]. Apart from Akzhol which emerged two months before the elections, the other four parties were defined as the forerunners mainly in terms of ability to attract sufficient numbers of voters to overcome and probable “management” of the electoral process.¹¹⁶ These parties have been the oldest and most enduring political organizations with substantial (for the local accounts) membership record. They were believed to possess sufficient resources to

¹¹³ Muratbek Imanaliev, “Partiynoe Stroitelstvo v Kyrgyzstane” [“Party-building in Kyrgyzstan”] in Muratbek Imanaliev ed., *Politicheskie Partii Kyrgyzstana [Kyrgyz Political Parties]* (Institute for Public Policy online, Bishkek 2006) 54 available at: http://ipp.kg/files/other/pol_part.pdf (last entered April 20th, 2008)

¹¹⁴ Mels Omarov, “O chelovecheskom faktore v Kyrgyzskoi politike”, [“On the Human element in Kyrgyz politics”] Kyrgyz-Russian University Institute for Strategic Analysis and Prognosis, January 9th, 2008 available at: <http://tazar.kg/news.php?i=7506&sea=%EF%EE%EB%E8%F2%E8%F7%E5%F1%EA%E8%E5%20%EF%E0%F0%F2%E8%E8> (last entered on April 23, 2008)

¹¹⁵ Mission of OSCE election observation, “Zayavlene o predvoritel'nykh vyvodakh i zaklyucheniyyah” [“Statement of preliminary conclusions”] CA-NEWS (KG) December 18, 2007 available at: <http://tazar.kg/news.php?i=7302&sea=%EF%E0%F0%EB%E0%EC%E5%ED%F2%F1%EA%E8%E5%20%E2%FB%E1%EE%F0%FB>

¹¹⁶ Suggested by Institute for public Policy review on Kyrgyzstan Prior to Parliamentary Elections, *IPP Kyrgyzstan Brief: November-December 2007*, 16-20, available at: <http://www.ipp.kg/files/publications/KBrief%20nov-dec07.pdf>

handle the country-wide elections. And finally they were associated with prominent personalities which is an added value for any political party in this context. These predictions basically were realized. Akzhol received 46.99 % of votes; 5.05 % went to Social-Democrats and Communists received 5.12 %; Ata-Meken having gained 8.29 % controversially “failed” to pass regional ,5 %. One argues that Ar-Namys did not manage to pass neither of thresholds because, one would argue, of poor campaigning pattern.¹¹⁷ I will elaborate on this point in the next sections.

Before discussing the performance of each party there is an important note to make. The political parties in Kyrgyzstan can not be described in terms ideological spectrums like in traditional “Western” party systems. That is, the fact that while, for example, Ata-Meken and SDPK put themselves in center-left, the Communist party is by definition associated with the ultra-left standing; pro-presidential Akzhol articulates neo-liberal values, the political landscape is more described in terms of pro and counter to the incumbent ruler, either they are pro-presidential or oppositionist.¹¹⁸ The following analysis of the parties’ programmatic standing elaborates further on these specificities of the party system which were reflected d in the electoral process.

Of these parties Akzhol, Ata-Meken, and Arnamys made the information on the party platform and programs available as well as on the record of their deeds by developing own websites. Though the consumption of internet products have not been widely spread in the Kyrgyz society and the party web-site does not affect its popularity drastically, it appears to inform about its commitment and capacity.

¹¹⁷ Institute for public Policy review on Kyrgyzstan Prior to Parliamentary Elections, *IPP Kyrgyzstan Brief: November-December 2007*, 21, available at: <http://www.ipp.kg/files/publications/KBrief%20nov-dec07.pdf>

¹¹⁸ Muratbek Imanaliev, “Partiynoe Stroitelstvo v Kyrgyzstane” [“Party-building in Kyrgyzstan”] in Muratbek Imanaliev ed., *Politicheskie Partii Kyrgyzstana [Kyrgyz Political Parties]* (Institute for Public Policy online, Bishkek 2006) 54 available at: http://ipp.kg/files/other/pol_part.pdf (last entered April 20th, 2008) 52-55

What follows is a brief comparison of parties' programmatic goals and objectives. Akzhol's program, in fact, offers mainly reformulated extracts from the president's last address to the nation. The common thread is commitment and loyalty to existing regime leaving political struggle aside which is reflected in the commitment to focus on "consolidation of Kyrgyz statehood and national culture... contribution to economic development and enhancing living standards of every Kyrgyz citizen".¹¹⁹

Interestingly enough the party action plan word for word repeats the names of state controlled enterprises in its call for withdrawal of the state from strategic economic sectors such as water-energy, telecommunications, agriculture and gold mining and preaches for letting "local investors" work on them. Consistent to president's national appeal the program expresses "tiredness" of protracted contentions over power and authorities between the branches of power. At that at the margins of the program one can find commitment to "full-fledged democracy and holding the government and the president accountable in before the nation".¹²⁰

Ata-Meken party labeled as a "forerunner" "hard"¹²¹ [radikalnaya] opposition party by local pundits and the leaders of other opposition parties,¹²² besides a clearly leftist stance, in its program goals and objectives demanded the change of existing power configuration pointing at its three basic failures – corruption; patronage and nepotism; personalist rule. They propose seemingly minor changes in the existing constitutional arrangement which would make the power separation better defined and make the power itself more responsible and subject to "rule of law". Based on its view of the best type of power configuration it elaborates on main sectors of state governing which does not seem quite different from those of its competitors either in the pro or

¹¹⁹ Akzhol party platform available at: <http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/show.php?tp=tx&id=806>

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Suggested by Anthony Clive Bower "Parliament and Political Parties in Kazakhstan" *Central Asia – Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Programme*, April 2008, available at: <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/Silkroadpapers/0804Bowyer.pdf>

¹²² Particularly, public discourse has assessed as such by Feliks Kulov a "heavyweight" veteran opposition leader (Party Ar-Namys) and Bakyst Beshimov, and Edil Baisalov, the leaders of Social Democratic Party "Kyrgyzstan"

contra camps. Notably they reject vigorously the projects of strategic sector's privatization. Instead they lay out a framework for improved state management over those enterprises.¹²³

Kyrgyz Social-Democrats (SDPK) is the other party known for its leftist stance and fluctuant soft opposition to the regime. The predominant tone of its program is also defined by the commitment to political reforms to enhance better state governing and the “rule of law”. The action plan proposed is also no difference from that of the other socialist party Ata-Meken.¹²⁴ To the question why the parties would not go to the elections with joint ticket to boost its chances, Edil Baisalov - one of the party chairs, says that, on the one hand, there are substantial differences in the platforms. On the other hand the party is of more constructive stance against the incumbent government.¹²⁵ It is speculated that the regime guaranteed this ticket solely to SDPK long before the parliamentary elections as its leader Almazbek Atambaev, formerly toughest opponent to the regime compromised his stance for the post of prime-minister.¹²⁶ And one could assume that the government could not tolerate its merger with the “hard” oppositionist Ata-Meken.

Communist's platform is traditionally replete with Marxism-Leninism terminology and quite nostalgic to times and values of Soviet internationalism. Consistent with that mood the platform attempts to align its values with the present situation. It preaches for enhancing integration process within the former Soviet Union. It also propagates for strengthening traditional popular assemblies “to increase the role of workers and common people in decision

¹²³ Ata-Meken party platform, available at: <http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/show.php?tp=tx&id=801>

¹²⁴ SDPK party platform available at: <http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/show.php?tp=tx&id=804>

¹²⁵ “Kommentarii i tochki zreniaya po tekushemu partiynomy stroitelstvu v Kyrgyzstane” [“Comments on current party-building in Kyrgyzstan”] *Akipress News Agency*, October 17, 2007 available at:

<http://tazar.kg/news.php?i=6505&sea=%DD%E4%E8%EB%FC%20%C1%E0%E9%F1%E0%EB%EE%E2>

¹²⁶ Daria Malevanniaya, “Ketsinozavy ne v tsene” [““Ketsin”-o-saurs are no longer praised”] *MSN-news online*, January 18, 2008 available at: <http://www.msn.kg/ru/news/21453/>

making”. In the rest the action plan represents quaint and ambiguous intertwine of orthodox Marxism and social-democratic stance.¹²⁷

And finally the platform of Ar-Namys [Honor and Dignity] party, which is considered one of the largest oppositionist organizations turned to be quite parsimonious in terms of policy proposals but was replete with “honesty and transparency” terminology. What makes it distinct is commitment to establish a parliamentary republic “which will put an end to tribalism and clanship”.¹²⁸ One may argue that the party represents a vivid example of immature political formation that mainly capitalize on the personality of its leader. Moreover one can claim that referring to this party as oppositionist is highly erroneous as its preference is as volatile as its leader’s political standing is. Feliks Kulov is the leader of the party, a former high-profile public official, one of the prominent post-Soviet “prisoner of conscious” in Central Asia which earned him incredible public support. However he was first co-opted by the new ruler after the coup for the time being and than was discredited and marginalized. As one Ar-Namys regional leaders acknowledged many members slipped away from the party as Kulov’s popularity decreased.¹²⁹

The 2007 parliamentary elections: the party campaigning patterns

Those were the platforms which the political parties messaged throughout the country in the electoral campaign. As it was mentioned, the party-building started a while before the new electoral rules were promoted, as it was apparent that they would be provided considerable authority in governing of the country. Thus by the time of parliamentary election each of the forerunner parties had its branch office in each of the seven administrative provinces (oblasts)

¹²⁷ Kyrgyz Communist Party platform available at: <http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/index.php?tp=tx&id=785>

¹²⁸ Ar-Namys party platform available at: <http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/show.php?tp=tx&id=802>

¹²⁹ Vyacheslav Temirbaev, “Vybory i Partii” [“Elections and parties”], MSN – News online, December 21, 2007, available at: <http://www.msn.kg/ru/news/21216/>

with the main offices in the capital city Bishkek. Presidential party Akzhol, though created two months before the parliamentary elections managed to co-opt a number and big small parties in the regions and the capital. Notably it managed to submerge two of the most formally organized and advertised parties with a “centrist”¹³⁰ stance - “Sodruzhestvo”¹³¹ [Commonwealth] and “Republican Labor and Unity Party”¹³² (RLUP).¹³³

Apart from that and for sure more importantly, according to media reports Akzhol was considered as a party of public officials and civil servants. This manifested itself in two ways. The list of the party nominees was replete with names of former and present high-rank and profile public officials, culture and science celebrities, NGO leaders, successful businessmen and large capital holders. The party also managed to co-opt some of the former and present opponents to the regime. On the second dimension local district and province administrators were tasked to manage and coordinate the promotion of the party among the population.¹³⁴

Besides employing whole administrative corps the party had an upper-hand position in using mass media. Because private and independent media is diminutive and often is a subject to state coordination it lacks sufficient reach to the population yet beyond the capital city. It is

¹³⁰ What should be born in mind is that the “centrist” position implies neutrality verging with loyalty to the regime rather than reference to “traditional” left vs. right stance

¹³¹ Mainly associated with the “pro-Russian” position as well as promotion of the rights of Russian minority; particularly stands for dual citizenship with Russia and preserving Russian language as the second official language.

¹³² Associated with presidents brothers Zhanysh and Zhusup Bakievs

¹³³ Suggested by common media-discourse, for example see: Barmet Akaeva, “Palramentskie vybory v Kyrgyzstane stanut dlya oppozicii ekzamenom na vyzhivanie” [“Parliamentary elections become a survival test for the opposition in Kyrgyzstan”], Moskovskie novosti, November 23, 2007, available at:

<http://tazar.kg/news.php?i=6985&sea=%EF%E0%F0%EB%E0%EC%E5%ED%F2%F1%EA%E8%E5%20%E2%FB%E1%EE%F0%FB>

¹³⁴ Among them are one former chair of Constitutional Court; twelve former high rank public officials of minister and deputy minister level. See for example: Madina Maratova, “V Kyrgyzskiy prlament snova stremyatsya bogatie I znamenitie” [“The rich and the famous again rush for the Kyrgyz parliament”] Delovaya nedelya, November 16, 2007 available at:

<http://tazar.kg/news.php?i=6940&sea=%EF%E0%F0%EB%E0%EC%E5%ED%F2%F1%EA%E8%E5%20%E2%FB%E1%EE%F0%FB>

reported that the state controlled and state funded TV channels, radio and newspaper were mainly at Akzhol's disposal throughout the electoral campaign.¹³⁵

Another strategy employed by Akzhol was direct interaction with its constituency. Aware of the fact that the party platform did not much differ from other parties proclamations and that people did not have time and opportunity to introduce with all the platforms, they greatly staked on publicity and visibility. Their "visibility" patterns in the regions mainly featured colorful banners with fancy appeals and slogans as well as free of charge pop-concerts. In the large cities their campaign was more sophisticated and included round tables and work-shops for civic activists and media representatives to discuss "sore points". The youth branch of the party was recognized for active "green campaigns" [subbotniki] in the city neighborhoods of Bishkek and Osh, the two Kyrgyz largest cities.¹³⁶

Parties' regional trips differed from the previous electoral campaigns in that the party leaders were not assigned alone to advertise in their home districts or villages. Rather, they chose to travel in teams manifesting "unity and cohesion". In every location media reports they articulated with the ideas, goals and objectives set in their platforms. In the places where they found difficult to assemble necessary audience they had to join with the pop-celebrity bands traveling around the country visualizing the party banners.¹³⁷

One important observation in this regard is that the pro-presidential party had considerable difficulties in absorbing public attention and attracting audience for its regional trip in the northern provinces. In several cases the party activity in the area encountered frank animosity from the population. That was manifested in a number of popular rallies and protests against persistent advertising of the pro-presidential party on the part of local administrators [akim, ayil

¹³⁵ Institute for public Policy review on Kyrgyzstan Prior to Parliamentary Elections, *IPP Kyrgyzstan Brief: November-December 2007*, 21, available at: <http://www.ipp.kg/files/publications/KBrief%20nov-dec07.pdf>

¹³⁶ Daniar Karimov, "Poddaika paru, Partiynnogo PRa" ["Add to the fire of party PR"] 24.kg News Agency online, available at: <http://24.kg/election/2007/12/05/70307.html>

¹³⁷ Ibid

okmotu]. But main reaction to the party's campaign in the northern district was parsimony of participants to party gatherings. Most likely that aware of weak support from the population of this part of the country they were urged to rely on boosting on the part of working high-profile public leaders.¹³⁸

The situation was contrary for the campaign of the main and the oldest oppositionist party Ata-Meken. The party is led by Omurbek Tekebayev, "professional" oppositionist, popularly associated with neither clan - regionalist allegiances nor as the owner of any considerable wealth.¹³⁹ However while the party list looks quite representative in terms of the regions its image as of "progressive", anti-regime and "socialist" created by widely-acknowledged "russified" civic activists and academicians, it is has recently been increasingly associated with the "north". This image consolidated after its ambivalent and tentative merger with "rightist" mainly "urbanized", capital-based party Akshumkar and its leaders, large business holders Kubatbek Baibolov and Temir Sariev associated with the northern clans.¹⁴⁰

Ata-Meken, while being received amicably in the northern provinces in terms of both number of participants attended to their meetings with constituency and reaction to their appeal faced considerable difficulties in the southern provinces. The party offices in the southern provinces of Osh and Batken were repeatedly attacked and ravaged and local party activists were beaten either by ordinary people or criminal elements; the party posters were either torn of or

¹³⁸ Ibid. So did the high rank officials in Bakiev's Administration. For example it is reported that the vice-prime-minister spend four days in his home Talas, a tiny northern province to advertise the presidential party Akzhol. In the other case the minister of finance was detected in another northern province Naryn to persuade his kins to vote for Akzhol.

¹³⁹ Originally from the south of the country though

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Mirzakhilil Razaev, former (2006 - 2007) director of Early Warning System under "For Tolerance International" (Bishkek- based NGO)

prevented from being disseminated. The attendance to meetings with the party leaders was poor in terms of number of participants and the issues raised and discussed.¹⁴¹

The other three parties – Social Democrats, communists and Ar-Namys used the similar strategy and methods of messaging their objectives to people. The basic differences in the campaigning patterns, which also concern the above discussed Ata-Meken, were conditioned by their substantively limited access to media resources and inability to rely on the assistance of local self-governances and administrations. Apart from leaders' regional trips parties "crowded out" streets and neighborhoods of cities and towns with activists and propagators with batches of party posters and fliers. Small tracks and motor-cars with loud-speakers would drive around messaging calling to vote for this and that parties.¹⁴² Notably media gives no record on any outright hostility or violation of rights against these parties in neither of the regions.

To go on with the data on difference in cross-regional perception of parties, in the next section I will bring up the results recently released by Central Electoral Commission (CEC) which unfolds the figures on cross-province basis. Remarkably the CEC does not release the results in terms of percentage of votes the parties attained nor does it provide information on the results on each ballot place which it used to do in previous elections.¹⁴³ While the entire electoral process was assessed in rather negative tones by international institutions, apart from those sent by post-Soviet countries representatives, the fact that they were recognized encourages me to use it in this analysis.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Nargiza Yuldasheva, "Ata-Meken zayavlayet o povsemestnyh davlenii i ugrozakh v adres chlenov partii" ["Ata-Meken reports about wide pressure and threats against the party members"] 24.kg News Agency, available at: <http://24.kg/election/2007/12/03/70063.html>

¹⁴² Daniar Karimov, "Poddaika paru, Partiynnogo PRa" ["Add to the fire of party PR"] 24.kg News Agency online, available at: <http://24.kg/election/2007/12/05/70307.html>

¹⁴³ See annex 1; also available through <http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/show.php?tp=tx&id=843&PHPSESSID=29ed4ab6fdaed79df45732baf6be9b22>

¹⁴⁴ Particularly OSCE claimed it was a "missed opportunity" and the US embassy described it as a "limited progress". The respective abstracts from their reports are found at: ¹⁴⁴ Institute for public Policy review on Kyrgyzstan Prior to Parliamentary Elections, *IPP Kyrgyzstan Brief: November-December 2007*, 22 - 23, : <http://www.ipp.kg/files/publications/KBrief%20nov-dec07.pdf>

In drawing assumptions I will not compare the number of votes among the parties. Rather I compare each party's performance in each district to check with the previous proposition that suggest that the popular preferences vary depending on the region the ballots were cast south and north. Thus in case of pro-presidential Akzhol the 68 % of its votes were gained in three southern provinces. At that in each of these southern provinces the party managed to draw far more than half of the total voters' support. The largest and the richest province in the north, Chui created 13%; 7,6 % were produced by capital city. And 20 % were formed by other three northern provinces.¹⁴⁵ The last diminutive figures are quite remarkable in the light of aforementioned hard attempts by high-profile public officials to gain constituency by direct appeal to people their home provinces. It is also remarkable figure contradicts to popular narrative about well-managed and fraudulent elections.

The first speculation suggested by these data is that the north of the country is in tougher opposition to the party created and supported by the president is from the south and whose administration is "dominated by southern elites"¹⁴⁶. But such assumptions is loosened by the evaluations provided by election monitoring conclusions by international and local organizations which state that the gross violations of electoral norms committed in the southern provinces of Osh and Jalalabad. Particularly they expose the multiple ballot throw-ins as well as multiple voting.¹⁴⁷

The results of voting for major oppositionist party Ata-Meken as well as for communists also provides figures suggesting on region-contingent preferences. Thus Ata-Meken gained around 68 % of its total votes in the northern provinces and 18 % in the capital city which also

¹⁴⁵ See annex I

¹⁴⁶ Syrgak Absykdaev "President is not on the common way with this parliament" [Presidentu s etim parlamentom ne po puti], *Obshchestvennyi reiting online*, October 26, 2007, available at: <http://www.tazar.kg/news.php?i=6668>

¹⁴⁷ for example see OSCE mission's conclusions available at: <http://tazar.kg/news.php?i=7302&sea=%EC%E8%F1%F1%E8%FF%20%CE%C1%D1%C5>

can be attributed to the north. Remarkably 8 % for Ata-Meken was produced by southern province Jalalabad which is huge figure compared to other two provinces.¹⁴⁸ One may attribute this to the fact that Jalalabad is the home province to the party's leader Omurbek Tekebaev and hosts infrastructural base for the party by way of independent middle-range TV channel and newspaper aligned with the party as well as strong office facilities and staff.¹⁴⁹

Communist basically did well in southern provinces of Osh and Batken as well as in capital city in the north. Whereas performance in capital city can be attributed to elder-age voters nostalgic for Soviet communist rule, 67 % produced by the south may tell about strong region-contingent voting.¹⁵⁰ While the communist rule in economically backward south is also associated with stability in welfare and “economic prosperity”, what really matters is that it's the home for the late well-recognized party leader Absamat Masaliev and his son who inherited the leadership in the organization. Remarkably, despite the element of orthodox Marxism in its platform many of its members in the first ten including its present leader are associated with large businesses.¹⁵¹

The region-contingent voting does not hold with the Social-Democrats and Ar-Namys. In contrary mainly capital-based parties earned most of its votes in the south.¹⁵² One needs to mention that during the campaign these parties suddenly and substantially softened their opposing stance against the regime and its main party Akzhol which actually did not avert a failure for Ar-Namys led by, as it was mentioned, Feliks Kulov who spend several years in prison on allegedly political reasons. This mainly resulted from bewildering ideological volatility of the

¹⁴⁸ See annex I

¹⁴⁹ Personal account

¹⁵⁰ See Annex I

¹⁵¹ Interview with Mirzakhilil Razaev, former (2006 - 2007) director of Early Warning System under “For Tolerance International” (Bishkek- based NGO)

¹⁵² See annex I

party and its excessive reliance on the “martyr” image of its leader, rather than proposing viable action plan.

And the final point suggested by data is that the parliamentary elections produced almost 74 % turnout according to CEC.¹⁵³ While the independent monitors report on the variety types of turnout boosting techniques such as multiple voting and vote throw-ins they agree on voter’s activity.¹⁵⁴ Critical point of this is that the turnout was not affected or conditioned by traditional trading of preferences in a way of cash-for-vote or huge local feasts on the eve of elections nor was it for infrastructural projects rendered by clan local notables. Rather, one may assume that the votes were cast for everything but monetary inducement. On other possible options I will argue in the next summary section

Summary

Thus what follows is the basic tentative summary of the data and the findings it yields. While the party platforms articulated mainly similar action plans there were major rifts at least in two issues. First, concerns the views on the degree of separation and decentralization of power. And the other relates to the policies over strategic industry sectors and the patterns of ownership. This rift basically coincides with existing pro and con government dichotomy in the local political landscape. While the mere fact of setting relatively well-aligned party platforms can hardly explain the prospects of transformation from personal rule one may speculate that as the party politics grow mature, the factors of clanship and tribalism will yield the place to policy and idea preferences.

¹⁵³ Annex I. The CEC has never released the figures on the turnout. I derive it from the numbers provided in CEC cross-regional voter account.

¹⁵⁴ Institute for public Policy review on Kyrgyzstan Prior to Parliamentary Elections, *IPP Kyrgyzstan Brief: November-December 2007*, 23 - 28,; <http://www.ipp.kg/files/publications/KBrief%20nov-dec07.pdf>

This belief is reinforced in the light of withdrawal from cleintelist exchange of service and resources as the basic means for political support on the part of both contenders and voters. These elections have also demonstrated important examples of that the authority of high-profile official notables may turn dysfunctional in their search for support on the part of their kin.

However the research suggests that the system has been undergoing a transformation which is flawed at least in two major aspects. First there are clear indications on the attempt to “utilize” institutions of party politics and elections for specific goals of the regime. The ruling body established a “super” political party and created maximum favorable conditions for its landslide victory by marginalizing basically its opponents from the electoral process. The outcomes of this step are hardly predictable. But one argues that it will be affected by varying stability of the ruler vis-à-vis highly heterogeneous composition of the “pro-presidential” party in relatively independent legislature. However, so far the ruler holds a manageable dominant faction in the legislature, which contributes to his power base by providing gloss of legitimacy to the regime’s actions.

Second, the campaigning process and the election results have revealed substantial region-contingent preference on the part of the population. South north regional rift coincided with pro and con relations to the regime. It was revealed that the most of the votes attained by the pro-presidential party were cast in the south and the oppositional Ata-Meken was supported by the north. The same region-contingent preference was observed with regard to the communists. This is regardless of the fact that the party leaders formulated a broad programmatic appeal and articulated universal values of national cohesion and unity.

One finds hard to explain how a political party with discernable neo-liberal(-ist) standing managed to capture predominant votes in largely traditionalist and economically backward regions in the south whereas one could expect that grieving memories of “neo-liberal” early

1990-s would produce a backlash. There might be similar contention over the drastic failure of leftist Ata-Meken and relatively good performance of the Kyrgyz Communist Party and the Social-Democrats all in the same region. The population did not show sensitivity to political party's ideological stances and proposed action plans. It can be concluded that parties' capitalization on personalities associated with them gained them more success rather than relying on ideological and programmatic standings. Whereas the context manifests a clear capacity for competitive and socially grounded party politics, sub-ethnic and mainly regionally-based identity values prevail over rationally grounded interests and preferences of social groups and classes.

CONCLUSION

In this paper informed by the studies on African political context it has been argued that the Kyrgyz political regime presents a clear type of neopatrimonialism. The political regime features a congruent operation of two types of domination: traditional, based on personal loyalty and traditional kinship and fictive kinship ties, with rational bureaucratic, based on impersonal legal norms. On the one hand the regime is founded on a recognized official power and authority of political leadership, on the basis of regular elections. On the other hand public offices are appropriated by traditional informal patronage networks which are in local and many scholarly discourse are labeled as clans.

It was argued that similar to neopatrimonial regimes elsewhere patronage and clientelism is the grounding element of the Kyrgyz political regime. Basing on the local public discourse and scholarly studies I articulate these institutions' self-manifestation in terms of clans. At that I suggest at multifaceted and fluid nature of clans in terms of their identification and the functions they fulfill. For analytical utility I chose to side with insights provided on the issue by Collins and Ilkhamov.¹⁵⁵

The role of clans was critical in the development of exclusionary and non-transparent patterns of resource control and distribution. Access to political resources has been gained through clan networks and predominantly by informal trading of political preferences. Such essential tools of democratic governance as electoral process and political parties were devaluated and discredited for being accommodated by informal clan politics.

It has been argued that while the “transition” framework proposed by African experience accurately predicts the attempts for change in Kyrgyz regime and its dynamic, in the context

¹⁵⁵ Please refer for details to chapter II

under consideration, it can not be defined as a transition. While one endorses to the point that “the political changes are conditioned by mechanisms of rule embedded in the ancien regime”,¹⁵⁶ these mechanisms should be approached from different perspective.

Originally this thesis develops with regard to the amount of political competition and participation. The coup in Kyrgyzstan exemplifies that these conditions turn irrelevant for the character of change in this country. Rather what really matters is to what extend the formal institutional arrangement is congruent with the informal institutions of patronage and clientelism, the core of Kyrgyz neopatrimonial regime. It has been suggested that the recently launched electoral reform has the capacity to strip the regime of its broader social base as well as to breach the traditional and informal ties between the elites. In this paper I argue that the change in formal institution of elections is able to devaluate informal institutions of patronage, the integral elements of neopatrimonialism.

Party politics in the country is taken as the basic unit of analysis in addressing the main question of the research. It is argued that the electoral reform catapulted embryonic party system in fact to represent the population with which it had quite ambiguous and subtle connections. The Kyrgyz party system is on the one hand a product of structural and institutional problems intrinsic to the “countries in transition”. On the other hand its development has been largely conditioned by neopatrimonial nature of the regime and the society. The political parties are largely associated with the small scanty-members quasi-political formations created around personalities and clan networks. They would arouse predominantly at elections and lacking strong institutional support had played diminutive role in the politics.

However at the other extreme local party system has been represented by several formations that survived since the heydays of various movements and social organizations which had

¹⁵⁶ Bratton and Wan de Walle, 454

mushroomed in the wake of liberalization and independence in the early 1990-s. They have managed to develop and preserve clear ideological stance and maintained considerable membership record. Their ability to accommodate with the electoral reforms as well as their actions in the following parliamentary elections has become the testing ground for the research.

It has been largely confirmed that the new electoral process has been a considerable offence against the traditional informal institutions. Both the broader population and the groups vying for public offices basically rejected the cleintelist exchange of service and resources as the basic means for political support. Along with this parliamentary elections have demonstrated important examples that the authority of high-profile official notables may turn dysfunctional in their search for support on the part of their kin in home locales.

Generally the political parties managed to formulate a common appeal to their constituency throughout the country. In doing so they applied every available opportunity to bring their message to the population. Remarkably party elites did not express campaigning behavior contingent on the regional or locale preferences. Instead in their consorted action they tried to show unity and cohesion and rejection of old patterns of gaining and inducing constituency. Relatively high turnout in the parliamentary elections suggests that the population was sensitive to their message.

However the research has suggested that ideology and largely the action plans proposed by the political parties have turned to be irrelevant tool of gaining constituency. Rather, the North-South identity values prevail over rationally grounded interests and preferences of social groups and classes. This does not necessarily point at the resilience of informal political norms of patronage and clientelism. Rather one deals with the (re-)establishment of sub-ethnic cleavage which may constitute a rigorous political identity. As the local political participation grows

sophisticated, this type of social mobilization can evolve to party politics capable of channeling popular interests along regional lines.

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Annex I

Results of the elections to the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic [Zhogorku Kenesh], December 16th 2007 (by provinces, and cities Bishkek and Osh)

	Population	Participated	«Ata-meken» [Homeland]	«Erkindik» [Liberty]	«Novaya sila» [New force]	«Turan»	«Ar- Namys» [Honor and Dignity]	«SDPK» [Social democratic Party]	«ErK» [Kyrgyzstan free]	«Glas naroda» [Folks voice]	«Aalam» [Universe]	«Asaba» [Standard]	«Ak zhol» [Bright way]	«CPK» [Communist party]	Against all
Kyrgyz republic	2753727	2033961	228125	25753	5823	55628	44048	188585	28315	12074	13502	23459	1245331	140258	6481
Batken Province (south)	224050	169611	3665	2823	187	1169	467	9414	1565	897	1089	772	106453	39376	350
Bishkek (north)	359838	209148	42095	3294	1679	6283	15604	10378	2456	3166	1442	2028	94933	22950	1280
Osh (south)	133821	116237	590	1394	148	2728	1421	31123	2318	481	466	716	67590	5376	292
Jalalabad province (north)	494635	398776	20071	5556	549	6296	850	23348	8080	2295	889	7357	310160	9760	898
Issyk-Kul Province (north)	233431	141162	38148	770	553	5086	1753	12647	1230	295	4083	3973	68022	3252	416
Naryn Province (north)	145570	94069	28013	575	260	5036	1652	6213	1125	201	506	1593	45028	2608	268
Osh Province (south)	600851	522753	7179	8880	353	12160	8947	56262	8359	3304	1484	3310	363125	44840	857
Talas Province (north)	118553	77043	25069	796	219	6264	1296	11603	1016	478	915	1284	25980	1191	116
Chui Province (north)	442978	305221	63295	1665	1875	10606	12058	27597	2166	957	2628	2426	164040	10905	2004

<http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/show.php?tp=tx&id=843&PHPSESSID=29ed4ab6fdaed79df45732baf6be9b22>