Dear PPW participants,

This paper is based on my dissertation. The dissertation is about state formation in post-Soviet Central Asia, but there are parts that focus on protest mobilization. I'm trying to turn those parts into a journal article. This is the first draft. As it stands now, the theoretical contribution is limited to the literature on this particular region. I'd like to find a way to speak to a broader audience and contribute to the literature on protest movements more generally. I'm hoping this workshop can help with that. Any other comments and reactions are also welcome, of course. Thanks so much for taking the time to read this. Look forward to discussing.

Best,
Dave

State Structure, Local Social Ties, and Protest Mobilization in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan
DRAFT COPY

Dave Siegel
The Graduate Center, CUNY

April 14, 2016

I. The Puzzle

Since becoming independent in 1991, the former Soviet Republic of Kyrgyzstan has witnessed two revolutions, in March 2005 (the "Tulip" Revolution) and April 2010. The overthrow of two successive presidents by street protests in just five years is exceptional by any measure. But in Kyrgyzstan, it is widely acknowledged that the opposition is divided, lacks ideological cohesion, and has multiple leaders from different regions of the country (Huskey and Iskakova 2010). Kyrgyzstan's "opposition"—to the extent that it can be described as a singular entity—consists of "disorganized" groups linked to different localities, "which have not articulated a program for wider political change beyond pressing for the interests of particular regions" (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005). This has made Kyrgyzstan's revolutions outliers among the other post-Soviet "Colored Revolutions," where opposition leaders have been described as united, ambitious, and backed by activist civil society groups in the capital city (Tudoroiu 2007; Bunce and Wolchik 2010: 67-72).

If Kyrgyzstan is unlike the other post-Soviet cases in which incumbents were chased from office, it is even more unlike those where such movements failed entirely. Notably, other countries in the region have had precisely the kind of opposition that might reasonably have been expected to succeed. In Kazakhstan, for example, the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DVK), which formed in November 2001, should have been in a strong position to challenge the central

government. Leaders of the DVK were well organized, had vast amounts of independent wealth to fund their activities, and articulated a clear agenda for reform (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005). Yet, the movement accomplished little. Indeed, the DVK, though well financed and organized, enjoyed little public support, particularly outside of the urban center of Almaty. By contrast, opposition leaders in Kyrgyzstan—though territorially diffuse and poorly organized—represent their local communities and have strong support in their home regions (ibid.). The upshot is that opponents of the central government in Kyrgyzstan have frequently seized and maintained power while their counterparts in Kazakhstan end up in jail or exile.[1]

The success of protest and insecurity of national elites' tenure in Kyrgyzstan has often been explained by highlighting elite competition for scarce patronage resources (Engvall 2007, 2011; McGlinchey 2011; Hale 2015). But by focusing on elites in the capital city, these accounts tell us relatively little about grassroots mobilization in the periphery, which is where most contentious events originate, as noted above. Thus, a second body of work focuses more on the patronage relationships between and among local elites and local communities, rather than among national elites alone (Radnitz 2005, 2006, 2010; Khamidov 2006; Temirkulov 2010). Kyrgyzstan's revolutions were staged in the capital city, but neither of them began there. In both instances, regional elites and local officials mobilized clients in remote areas—typically friends, family, and acquaintances from their home villages and districts—in battles with central authorities over access to public office (ibid.).

What is missing in this work is recognition that Kyrgyzstan's two national-level revolutions reflect a style of center-periphery contention that has become almost normal, even if it rarely manifests itself at the national level. In numerous instances before, between, and after

[1] The DVK was quickly defeated when its two co-leaders where arrested and imprisoned.

the two national-level revolutions, regional and local elites—often local state officials themselves—have mobilized supporters from their home villages to sack incumbents and occupy high-level state administrative offices in their province or district. Sometimes pretenders to office have been arrested by central authorities; though in many other instances, the central government has conceded, leaving local favorites to claim the highest-level regional administrative offices, which formally represent the central government in the regions, not the populations living there.

In May 2013, for example, the state-appointed governor of Jalalabad province was chased from power when 200 protestors stormed his office and installed a new "people's governor" in his place, Meder Usenov (Abdyraeva 2013). A school director in the region recounted the events, saying simply that, "the old governor was too subordinate, he dances to the tune of the prime minister, so they [the people] fired him."[2] Usenov occupied the office for only a few days before being arrested by state authorities. But, in response, Usenov's local supporters came out in even larger numbers, setting the stage for a broader conflict.

A popular local leader in Jalalabad, Bektur Asanov, endorsed Usenov and his supporters and urged the central government to concede. "It seems to me," Asanov said, "that you must take into consideration the demands of the people. I will tell you honestly, if they do not let [Usenov] go, there will be no stop to the unrest in Jalalabad (Kasmalieva 2013). Notably, Asanov himself claimed power as the "people's governor" of this same province, replacing the state-appointed incumbent in 2010, with the backing of his local supporters. Asanov held the position for nearly two years. While central authorities have the formal legal authority to appoint whomever they want to this position, it seems they do not always have the power to do so.

---

[2] Interview with author, October 16, 2013.

In this instance, the authorities prevented Usenov from becoming governor, but they did offer a major concession by releasing him from jail. Six months later, they made a second concession when the incumbent governor, Zhusubali Toromamatov, seemingly rattled by the incident, went to Bishkek with a request: "I asked [Prime Minister] Satybaldiev to transfer me to a different job – closer to Bishkek" (Dzhumasheva 2014).[3] Central authorities then replaced Toromamatov with Zhusubek Zheenbekov, a popular local leader who had twice been elected by informal people's assemblies as the "people's governor" of Jalalabad—in both March 2005 and April 2010—and once briefly resisted attempts to remove him from this position in January 2006.[4] Thus, when Zheenbekov was formally appointed as the governor of Jalalabad in March 2014, it was the third time he was selected for the post, but only the first time he was legally appointed by Bishkek.

Chasing state appointed incumbents from office and replacing them with local favorites is common enough in Kyrgyzstan that a word has been coined to describe it: *Ketsinizm* is the phenomenon of demanding that an official leave his or her position.[5] One villager from Jalalabad province explained it plainly, "if we don't like the [district] *akim* or the governor, we can tell him to go to hell!"[6]

What should be clear is that protest mobilization in Kyrgyzstan—in both national revolutions and in more common conflicts over access to regional offices—is highly localized. This leads to a series of questions. What are the ties that bind local officials and other regional elites to local communities, and why are ordinary people willing to protest on their behalf? What

---

[3] Bishkek is the capital city of Kyrgyzstan.

[4] In fact, it was Zheenbekov's usurpation of this post in 2005 that was the proximate event that sparked the Tulip Revolution (Radnitz 2010: pages).

[5] *Ketsin*! is the imperative "leave!" which is a ubiquitous demand heard at public rallies against incumbent authorities throughout the country. The suffix *–izm* has the same meaning as its English counterpart, -ism.

[6] Interview with author, Bazar Korgon district, Jalalabad province, October 17, 2013. An *akim* is the head executive at the district (*raion*) level, one level lower than the provincial governor.

are the social dynamics animating these relationships? And, since local officials themselves are the forefront of protests against higher-level regional and national authorities, where can we draw the boundaries between state and society?

As noted above, the leading accounts of these events have focused on patron-client ties between local elites and their home communities, which have been mobilized against the central government. Notably, these accounts tend to depict ties between patron and client in rational, material, and instrumental terms. Radnitz, for example, argues that independently wealthy local elites strategically develop client bases in the regions as an "investment" in self-defense against a predatory state (2010). When the state threatens their wealth or security, local elites can call on their clients to protest, based on the contract-like obligations created by their prior exchanges. In Radnitz's language, these local elites are not simply socially embedded; rather, they are elites who can muster the agency to socially embed themselves.

Indeed, nearly every account of clientelism and social relations in Central Asia—much of which offers some account of the revolutions—depict them as having a rational, instrumental, and material underpinning. Face-to-face personalistic relations between patron and client are utilized to solve the problems of uncertainty and a lack of trust between individuals engaged in market-like exchanges and interactions (Collins 2003; McGlinchey 2011; Hale 2015).

But, purely rational accounts of these social relations, and of the protest mobilization that they can facilitate, seem to miss important social dynamics that underpin these events. They also give patrons outsized agency, ignoring not only the agency of their clients, but the structural conditions that make the patron-client ties notably localized and tied to particular places.

First, the repertoires of protest employed tend to suggest deep levels of commitment that reflect genuine moral outrage rather than the fulfillment of a contract-like agreement. As Lewis

argues, both the Tulip Revolution and the Aksy protests of 2002, in which local protestors successfully forced the government to reinstate a beloved local deputy to parliament, "involved genuine political protest, informed primarily, but not only, by local concerns. It represented not merely some manufactured discontent (or protestors being paid to demonstrate, as was sometimes alleged), but deep levels of social and political anger" (Lewis 2008: 267). In fact, the core of the protestors in the Aksy events were from their MP's home village; a number of went on hunger strike, one of whom died as a result (Olcott 2005). Others were shot and killed by government agents in the protests that ensued.

Likewise, in the earliest stages of what became the Tulip Revolution, most protesters in the south trekked to Osh—the region's administrative center—on foot, a two-day journey for some (Fuhrmann 2006: 22). The willingness to take such extreme actions on local leaders' behalf suggests a level of personal commitment and moral outrage that cannot be easily reduced to the instrumentality of a cost-benefit analysis (Jasper 1997). This harkens back to Scott's observation that personalized social ties between patron and client are not merely instrumental, but can create "as firm a bond of affection and loyalty as that between close relatives" (Scott 1972: 94).

Moreover, patrons throughout Kyrgyzstan appear unable to secure support from local populations except in their own native villages and districts. Radnitz notes that ordinary villagers tend to be wary of "outsiders" and view elite patronage as a "cynical ploy" when elites' ties to the community were limited to instrumental material contributions alone (2010: 89). That is, clients tend not to support patrons from outside of their own community. People would "remain immune to the appeals of nonlocal(s)," thus leading to a "double standard" based upon a particular elite's own local origins (ibid.).

If patron-client ties in Kyrgyzstan are non-fungible and immovable, it means that elites are not entirely free to choose how, whether, or where to build a support base of clients. Moreover, it suggests that there is something about a locality itself and the way that villages are organized that facilitates or strengthens the social ties between local leaders and their co-villagers; namely, a structural mechanism that ties patron and client together within a locality. I make the case for one structural element in this paper—the structure of the state itself, particularly its organization at the village level.

One key point follows from this: patrons cannot create a client base where and when they want one. A more socially grounded and structural view of these relationships reminds us that the "patron" is rarely an abstract and faceless figure. In fact, clients do not fight for "patrons" at all; they fight for their brother, sister, cousin, nephew, aunt, uncle, close personal friend, or lifelong acquaintance. As the classic literature on clientelism reminds us, the ties between patron and client are distinguished from other forms of hierarchical social relations because they are animated by personalized social dynamics. As Powell notes, the affection, trust, and reciprocity embedded in patron-client ties are precisely what make them different from merely coercive or instrumental kinds of relationships (Powell 1977). The bond between patron and client is sometimes defined by "mutual devotion," not merely "mutual advantage" (Scott 1972: 94).

This reframes how we think about the "favors" that patrons do for their clients. Are they best conceived as rational investments or as social obligation? Put concretely, do local elites "invest" in localities instrumentally, in order to construct client bases, or do they send money and other gifts to their locality because they have social obligations to help the family, friends, and

acquaintances who live there? I suggest here that local elites do not rationally embed themselves at all, but are stuck to the place in which they already happen to be socially embedded.

Where do these obligations come from? How and why do these relations form, and why do we see them in Kyrgyzstan but not in other Central Asian states? Why are the ties of clientelism forged in the patron's native village and not someplace else? My central argument is that patron-client ties at the local level in Kyrgyzstan are shaped and reinforced by the institutions of local government. The institutions of local government provide a structural basis for the regularized and repeated interactions between local state officials and their co-villagers; these institutions embed local officials within their own communities, not only living and working among their family, friends, and life-long acquaintances, but regularly activating these ties in performing their institutional responsibilities, as I demonstrate below. Kyrgyzstan is unique among other Central Asian states because it decentralized authority to the village level after independence, largely through the guidance and tutelage of western international donors.

In addition to focusing on the affective nature of these social relations, this approach also suggests that this style of clientelism is endogenous to state development in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, the lines between state and society are blurry, and in flux (Migdal 2001); in fact, in many ways, it is precisely these lines that are being contested. Who can hold what office, who will they represent, and how will they be selected? These are the issues at stake when people sack and seize the state's administrative offices. In the struggle that ensues, local state officials not only play in different arenas—both within the state and against it—they challenge national authorities' very ability to determine which arena they are permitted to play in (Duyvendak and Jasper 2015). Thus, the cases described here are not merely episodes of "contentious governance," which pit state officials against each other over issues of policy (Verhoeven and

Broer 2015); rather, they are conflicts between and among state officials and local populations over the structure of the state itself.

II. The Institutions of Local Government and Local Social Ties in Kyrgyzstan

The dense social networks of overlapping social ties between local officials and ordinary people in Kyrgyzstan were forged, strengthened, and reinforced by the institutions of local government. The institutions of local government promoted these local social ties in two different ways. First, they made it more likely that well-established local favorites would come to office in villages where they had lived their whole lives, among their family, friends, and life-long acquaintances. Second, local government institutions made village officials dependent on that same community for carrying out the everyday tasks of solving village problems. In short, these institutions forged state-society relations in such a way that local social ties were incorporated into the state itself at the local level.

Significantly, Kyrgyzstan was one of the few post-Soviet states to decentralize state administration and develop a system of local self-government. It did so, in part, because it was heavily dependent on international aid organizations throughout the 1990s and adopted many of their preferred policies and institutional designs (Baimyrzaeva 2005, 2010, 2011). After briefly describing the reforms to local government that were instituted in Kyrgyzstan beginning in the early 1990s, I provide evidence for the effects that these institutions have had in producing and reproducing personalized social relations between local state officials and the communities that they govern. Indeed, the formal institutions were not nearly as significant as the effects that they had on informal social relations and state-society relations at the local level (Helmke and Levitsky 2004).

Before proceeding with evidence for this claim, it is important to contextualize Kyrgyzstan's system of local self-government within its broader state structure. While it might be normal for local officials and local communities to have deep and overlapping social ties in democracies or federal states (and especially in federal democracies), Kyrgyzstan is a non-democratic unitary state. In fact, at all levels of state administration above the village—in more encompassing districts, provinces, and regions—state officials are appointed as the formal representatives of the central government and are not supposed to represent local communities or their interests. Thus, the institutions of local government that I describe here are not only unique among other post-Soviet Central Asian states, but are even unlike the other structures of state administration within Kyrgyzstan itself.

Kyrgyzstan's institutions of local government were created after 1991.[7] Article 7 of the state's first constitution (1993) provided the foundation for this system, stating that, "local self-government in the Kyrgyz Republic is exercised by local communities, which govern issues of local significance according to the law and at their own initiative." The language for this provision was adopted from the European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985) (Fattakhov 2013: 8).[8] These vague constitutional provisions for local self-government were further developed through subsequent legislation and presidential decrees, which were adopted between 1994 and 2009.

Importantly, these new institutions provided for the election of village-level authorities. In 1994, President Akaev issued a decree that established local councils (*ayil kenesh*) at the village level with members chosen through direct elections (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2001: 527).

---

[7] Local government refers here to the lowest level of public administration, in villages and small cities. The institutions of local government are the formal rules and organizations that structure the roles, responsibilities, powers, and processes of the government and its officials at the lowest level of the state.

[8] The European Charter, however, describes the rights of "local authorities," not "local communities" (see Article 3, Section 1).

Then, in 1996, again by presidential decree, executive administrative offices (*ayil okmotu*) were established in villages (Alymkulov and Kulative 2001: 527-528). As under the Soviet system of appointments, the head of the *ayil okmotu* was initially appointed by the top executive (*akim*) of the district in which the village was situated, with the approval of the village council. But, between 1996 and 2001, direct elections for *ayil okmotu* were rolled out in different localities; by 2001, all 453 *ayil okmotu* were directly elected by local populations (UNDP 2012: 121). After coming to power in 2005, President Bakiev created a system of indirect elections instead, which began in 2008 and have remained in effect since then (ibid.: 124). Currently, the *ayil okmotu* is elected by the village council, the members of which are chosen from among the local community.

The election of officials at the local level had at least one major observable effect on local social ties: it made it more likely that a life-long village inhabitant would enter local government, rather than an outsider appointed from a different village, or even from a different district or province. This means that the social ties between village-level officials and their co-villagers are more likely to be built upon preexisting relationships in multiple spheres of ordinary life.

The twice-elected *ayil okmotu* (and lifelong resident) of Seidikum in Kyrgyzstan described how "the election system makes it almost impossible that someone will come from outside. The election system is localized and people try to elect someone who is from here."[9] The director of a local school from a different village in this same district—who also happens to be a member of the local council—said plainly that "[people] try to elect only friends and

[9] Interview with author, October 4, 2013.

relatives."[10] The *ayil okmotu* of Bazar Korgon, claimed that there was a law requiring that candidates are local residents – "people cannot be elected if they don't live here, so outside people cannot come."[11] This means that local officials in Kyrgyzstan are likely to enter office in their own village, where they already have multiple and overlapping social relationships with the friends, family, and acquaintances that they have accumulated over a lifetime.

In Kyrgyzstan, the prior occupation of village-level officials confirms what we might expect under an electoral system for selection and representation. A list of all *ayil okmotu* in three provinces in 2013 includes individuals who were previously taxi drivers, school teachers, war pensioners, school directors and deputy school directors, farmers and former *kolkhoz* workers,[12] deputies of the corresponding local council, private business owners, and the "temporarily unemployed" (itself, perhaps, the most common occupation in Kyrgyzstan's villages).[13] Any informal roles that a person might play within the community—as a village elder (*aksakal*), clan member or leader, or other respected notable—are not accounted for in official record keeping. These data suggest that local officials are not only more likely to be known personally by village residents, as discussed above, they are often ordinary people themselves, coming from within the village's social fabric, and with relatively few ties to political and administrative elites from the outside the locality.

The single most common occupation for currently serving *ayil okmotu* in Kyrgyzstan, however, is as *ayil okmotu* of the same village. This indicates that, by 2013, village officials enjoyed relatively stable tenures. In 196 different village administrations across three provinces,

[10] Interview with author, October 16, 2013.
[11] Interview with author, October 7, 2013. He was not able to provide the name of this law and I was never able to verify that it exists.
[12] A *kolkhoz* is a Soviet-era collective farm.
[13] This is for all 196 *ayil okmotu* in Issyk-kul, Batken, and Chui provinces (*oblasts*). The list was acquired from the State Agency on Work with Local Self-Governance in Bishkek.

103 (or 52.6%) were headed by an incumbent village official, either the *ayil okmotu* or former member of the village council; that number is 125 (or 63.8%) if we include individuals whose prior position was within the district-level administration within the same district as his or her village. By contrast, only six individuals (or 3.1%) were previously the *ayil okmotu* of a different village, while fourteen others (or 7.1%) can be identified as having held their prior job in a state administrative position at the provincial-level or in Bishkek. Indeed, as I began to suggest above, the vast majority of non-incumbent *ayil okmotu* in 2013 held what we might call "ordinary" local jobs, including as school teachers, taxi drivers, and farmers. 40 individuals—20.5% of all *ayil okmotu* in three provinces—fall into this category. Thus, we can say that incumbent village officials and ordinary people, taken together, held office as *ayil okmotu* in 143 out of 196 local governments across three provinces (73%) in 2013.[14]

Given that village officials are likely to be ordinary village inhabitants, it is not surprising that a 2012 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study shows that the vast majority of residents in all provinces of Kyrgyzstan recognized the name of the heads of local government structures (heads of *ayil okmotu*, mayors, and deputies of local councils) in their own locality. The numbers varied across provinces, but there was a clear majority in every one.

Table 1. Percentage of Residents Who Recognize the Name of Village/City Local Officials by Province[15]

Chui oblast ….. 94.1%
Naryn oblast ….. 90.7%
Talas oblast ….. 88.5%
Issyk-Kul oblast ….. 78.7%
Batken oblast ….. 71.6%
Jalal-Abad oblast ….. 70.4%
Osh oblast ….. 60.1%

[14] The prior occupations of 11 individuals were not indicated.
[15] UNDP 2012: 51.

Nationwide, the percentage of Kyrgyzstani citizens who knew their representative in the local council hovered around 50% between 2007 and 2011 (UNDP 2012: 50-59). The report also stresses the face-to-face nature of these relations, describing them as highly personalistic:

> …in every village, the elder is a personal acquaintance, and every [village] leader is known and familiar to his constituents. A survey, conducted as part of [the] research for this Report, confirms that three out of four Kyrgyz citizens (75%) personally know their mayor or head of the village municipality [*ayil okmotu*] (ibid.: 50).

Other evidence shows that these ties are both affective and multiplex. Speaking about the *ayil okmotu* of Bazar Korgon—Zholchiev Abdykadyr—members of the community invariably utilized a prism of longstanding personal acquaintance.[16] "All his life he has worked with people here," noted a woman selling produce in the bazaar, "even before he was *ayil okmotu* everyone knew him for the work he did on the *kolkhoz*."[17]

Others knew him more directly. The vice principal of the local school said, "I've known Abdykadyr for a long time, ever since we were students on the collective farm…he has done a lot for the community."[18] A currently unemployed man recounted both his own work history with Abdykadyr and the patron-client ties he is known to have with others in the community: "we worked together on the *kolkhoz* and I know him well—as the *ayil okmotu* he is very well liked because he helps poor people and gives them money during the holidays."[19] The reason this man knew about these disbursements of money is that his elderly aunt was one of the recipients, creating another layer of ties between him and Abdykadyr. Whether this money came from state coffers, from Abdykadyr's own pocket, or from some other source was not known by

---

[16] This *ayil okmotu* is situated within the district (*raion*) that bears the same name. It is located in Jalalabad province (*oblast*).
[17] Interview with author, October 25, 2013.
[18] Interview with author, October 30, 2013.
[19] Interview with author, October 17, 2013.

anyone, a fact that speaks to the blurry distinction between the *ayil okmotu*'s formal public responsibility and his private personal obligations.

I relay these accounts not because informants thought their personal relationship with the *ayil okmotu* was noteworthy, but precisely because it was so unremarkable.[20] No discussion about Abdykadyr was confined to his role as the "*ayil okmotu*" because Abdykadyr was not known to people only in this way. For example, an *aksakal* (village elder) in Bazar Korgon perked up when he heard Abdykadyr's name and said, "he is a great man, an honest man, and a hard worker." Surprisingly, this comment was made in the context of a broader discussion about how irredeemably corrupt and dishonest state officials are in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The officials singled out for corruption, though, were in Bishkek. Local officials are regarded differently. In this particular case, the *aksakal* revealed that Abdykadyr's father had been a lifelong friend his, and he considered Abdykadyr to be like one of his own sons.[21] To the *aksakal*, Abdykadyr cannot be placed in an abstract category like "state official" (whom he identifies as corrupt) because their personal relationship is far broader, richer, and deeper than this, defined by a lifetime of interactions. As these few examples serve to illustrate, Abdykadyr is not only the *ayil okmotu*; to some he is also a former colleague, a classmate, a patron, or the son of a lifelong friend, among many other things. This is what it means to say that local officials in Kyrgyzstan have deep and overlapping social ties with members of their communities.

This does not mean that local-level elections in Kyrgyzstan are an idealistic form of democracy, and we need not assume this in order to reach the conclusion that village inhabitants

[20] A contextual and methodological note: Some of these accounts came from long formal interviews while others random encounters, some of which were short and casual. Both are representative of a larger sample of interviews conducted in this locality, where I spent a total of two months, from mid-September to mid-November, 2013.
[21] Interview with author, October 14, 2013.

will make competitive candidates. Even if local elections function strictly according to the logic of classic political clientelism, local candidates will have advantages over outsiders. Local patrons, after all, will be in a strong position to win by mobilizing their clients who, as the classic literature on clientelism suggests, are likely to also be their families, friends, and other acquaintances (Schmidt et al. 1977; Gellner and Waterbury 1977; Eisenstadt, S. 1981; Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984). It also needs to be noted that local elections do not always result in a clear consensus over who the *ayil okmotu* should be; however, they do make it likely that whatever contest ensues will be between different local people, not between a local person and an outsider.

While the territorial origins of local officials is one way of looking at their social ties to local villagers, it may not be as important as the institutional demands of their jobs in fostering new ties and strengthening old ones. It is not only who the local official is, but also how they do their job that brings them into interaction with ordinary members of the community. This, too, is partly determined by the institutions of local government, which shape what kinds of responsibilities local officials have, and whether and how they interact with the local population in carrying them out.

Importantly, the institutions of local government in Kyrgyzstan facilitate and even require local officials' to politically activate and utilize their own local social networks. This is because of a final component of local government reform after 1991: the establishment of an independent local budget. This allows village-level officials in Kyrgyzstan to secure revenue and spend it how they want, without the approval or input of authorities in Bishkek. Yet, due to a limited tax base at the local level, most of the money that village officials can secure comes from international donor organizations. Significantly, these donor organizations require ordinary village inhabitants to pay for part of any project themselves—either in labor, cash, or in-kind

contributions—to secure funding (Earle 2005). In practice, securing this "local contribution" means that local officials are continually activating their local social networks to carry out the everyday tasks of village governance.

Reliance on local contributions was already a practice by March 1996, when the president recommended that local governments "mobiliz[e] inhabitants for relief and restoration programs" (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2001: 528). But, by requiring local contributions in exchange for badly needed funds, international donor organizations have helped to institutionalize this practice more deeply.[22]

The local contribution that donors require is typically nominal, sometimes as little as five percent of the cost of the project. This is because the purpose of the local contribution is not merely to raise revenue, but to encourage direct community involvement in local governance (Earle 2005). To the parties involved—donors, officials, and ordinary people alike—this is known as social mobilization. As a project coordinator from ARIS put it, "The main goal of our projects is not the implementation itself, but to teach local communities to rationally use the wealth of the country. We teach them how to use the money that they collect themselves for the improvement of infrastructure and for maintaining pastures […] we're interested in social mobilization, which is why we work at the local level, in the village."[23]

Similarly, the objective of the World Bank's First and Second Village Investment Projects (2004-2006 and 2006-2014, respectively), which distribute money directly to *ayil okmotu* and localities, is not only to help develop local infrastructure, but "to assist the Recipient

---

[22] Arguably, the practice of mobilizing voluntarily labor has a long history in Central Asia. The Soviet-era *subbotnik* and the "traditional" Kyrgyz practice of *ashar* both entail voluntary labor contributions to the community. What is unique in the post-Soviet period is that the institutions of local government in Kyrgyzstan formalized and institutionalized these practices while those in other post-Soviet Central Asian states did not.

[23] Interview with author, August 5, 2013. ARIS is an independent, non-state financial institution that provides funding to villages and local communities throughout Kyrgyzstan. It was founded in 2003 through an initiative started by the World Bank and formalized by presidential decree.

with improving governance and capacity at the local level" (World Bank 2014: 29).[24] The Bank's International Development Association (IDA) notes that its projects in Kyrgyzstan "generate community-level capacity for tackling local development concerns" by focusing "at the grassroots level" and "helping communities and local authorities work together" (IDA 2015).

This creates an integral role for the *ayil okmotu*, who is typically at the forefront of this mobilization, activating his or her local social ties to secure the local contribution—both cash and labor—in order to obtain the funds from donors needed to fix roads, schools, and other village infrastructure. ACTED, an international NGO that provides resources for village infrastructure projects, relies on local communities to do all of the labor themselves. An ACTED project coordinator noted that, "this all requires community work and community mobilization, and the *ayil okmotu* is at the center of this mobilization. We cannot ask villagers to do these things. It is the *ayil okmotu* who goes into the community and explains the project and gathers support and makes the mobilization happen."[25]

Likewise, Marat Usupov, the Director of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization in Kyrgyzstan, describes how the organization worked with local officials to build medical aid stations in remote villages: "the *ayil okmotu* takes a very active role in the governance of their territories and we rely on them to execute the projects. We do not have a staff to build the aid stations. This labor must be provided by the *ayil okmotu*. In most cases they must recruit volunteers, and generally they are successful at doing this."[26] An Aga Khan project manager in Osh noted that all of its assistance programs are "joint implementation projects" that depend heavily on the ability of local officials to activate their personal social

[24] This project was implemented by ARIS at a cost of $49.9 million.
[25] Interview with author, September 2013.
[26] Interview with author, June 2013.

networks; local officials "play a big role in making this other side [of the joint implementation] work, in mobilizing contributions."[27] One high-level USAID official noted, "some *ayil okmotu* have gotten quite good at generating their own streams of revenue based almost purely on their personality and connections. These officials have the ability to initiate their own projects and act on their own without consulting the central government."[28]

As this testimony suggests, the *ayil okmotu* will not succeed in securing funds for local projects if he or she does not have a base of support from within the community, which includes the *ayil okmotu*'s own friends and family, in addition to other personal acquaintances. The *ayil okmotu* of Tuluikun (Kara-Suu district, Osh *oblast*) described multiple projects sponsored by ARIS, which provided 95% of project costs in exchange for a five percent local contribution. "Before beginning any project we have to go into the community and talk to people. People must agree in advance to help—to give money, or to agree to work—otherwise the project will not happen." He added that ARIS could never do this themselves. "It would be difficult, very difficult because you must know the people—I've lived here my whole life."

As one villager in this region noted, "the *ayil okmotu* cannot do it himself. There is no way he could do anything without local contributions. If he is going to solve any problem at all he must get local support – he is dependent on people to do anything."[29] Another villager described how "the *ayil okmotu* does his best, but he cannot do much without local help. These days most of the main jobs are done by common people."[30] Thus, reciprocity is built into the institutional relationship that the *ayil okmotu* has with local communities and the social relationships that *ayil okmotu* maintain with co-villagers are politically activated and

---

[27] Interview with author, October 2, 2013.
[28] Interview with author, July 15, 2013.
[29] Interview with author, October 1, 2013; Bazar Korgon *ayil okmotu*, Bazar Korgon *raion*, Jalalabad *oblast*.
[30] Interview with author, October 4, 2013.

institutionalized through the process of village governance. One study even frames local governance in Kyrgyzstan as a collective action problem and describes the *ayil okmotu* as the solution (Ibraimova 2009: 136-7).

But, one external donor, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has played an additional role, helping to build community-based organizations that participate directly in the activities of local governments, alongside the *ayil okmotu*. This activity started in 1998, and intensified between 1999 and 2001; it continued until the Tulip Revolution in 2005, a year after President Akaev, seemingly enamored with the program, declared it to be the "Year of Social Mobilization and Good Governance" (IMF 2004: 16). As a spokesperson at UNDP explained:

> First of all, we built capacities of the heads of *ayil okmotu*, of municipal servants, we tried to explain to them what social mobilization would give them. And, of course, many of them were able to see it with their own eyes. The community-based organizations [program] had a micro-capital component through which we granted a number of funds, big funds, to local communities, and through these community-based organizations they rehabilitated their own infrastructure, or built new objects of infrastructure. However, we didn't only want people to rehabilitate infrastructure. We wanted people to govern, to manage that infrastructure after it was built or rehabilitated.[31]

Between 1994 and 2000, the UNDP spent a total of $12.5 million on its decentralization initiatives in Kyrgyzstan (McGlinchey 2011: 93); in the period from 2000 to 2004, they spent $8.1 million (OECD 2006).

Likewise, USAID has helped to promote local self-government institutions and also to shape how those institutions function. A former member of the USAID-sponsored Urban Institute in Bishkek described these changes. "There is a very big difference between the apparatus of the *ayil okmotu* today compared to 1996 […]; the educational and training programs

---

[31] Interview with author, August 6, 2013. Likewise, a UNDP report notes that "with the support of the UNDP and other international organizations, [Kyrgyzstan] is working on the establishment of community organizations and local development foundations that work closely with [local self-government] structures. The process of social mobilization and the establishment of community organizations and local NGOs allows the involvement of the population in the management of issues of local significance" (UNDP 2012: 34).

for *ayil okmotus* and their employees has increased their capacity…this was because of the work of donors."[32] A USAID report notes that the organization has been "engaged actively in strengthening the policy and legal framework for local self-government, while working directly in and with local self-governments to enhance their ability to make good use of the authority and resources that they have" (Conway 2008: 7).

Even in the absence of third-party financial support, local budgets are so small that the mobilization of the local population is often the only viable way to tackle local initiatives. Sometimes the local contribution is the only contribution. The *ayil okmotu* in a Kyrgyz village succeeds at fixing the road when he knows enough people whom he can call on to shovel dirt and rock.[33] In a village not far from Karakol city (Issyk-kul *oblast*), a group of villagers worked with the *ayil okmotu* to build a pond on a large abandoned plot that had recently been transferred to municipal property. Together they dug out a sizeable pond and even stocked it with fish.[34]

The practice of activating local social networks to obtain the local contribution is routinized enough that even private companies have adopted the practice when working at the village-level. In 2007, for example, the *ayil okmotu* of a remote mountain village described how he was able to secure cell phone service for the area by appealing directly to the major telecommunications companies in the country, MegaCom and Beeline. He convinced them to build towers within range of the village, but to do so he had to provide money, food, housing, and labor from the village itself. As he recounted:

> These mobile companies did not realize that we had so many people who would start using their services, but I told them how many we had. In order to agree, we had to provide the company workers with housing and food—many lived in my house and in my brother's house. And we also had to provide a lot of local

---

[32] Interview with the author.
[33] This scenario was observed during fieldwork in Naryn province, June-July 2013.
[34] Field notes and subsequent correspondence (June 2013; February 2014).

> people who helped to carry dirt and brought and removed other materials from the construction site … the company themselves brought the major equipment and other workers.[35]

In sum, local authorities in Kyrgyzstan have access to financing independent of the central government. However, this money comes with strings attached, strings that tie local officials to the communities that they govern. This is not to say that conditionality creates social ties between local officials and local communities; rather, it makes those social ties a crucial aspect of village governance, in effect institutionalizing them within the state at the local level.[36] Put simply, the practical aspects of village governance require local officials to activate and utilize their own social networks on a daily basis, thus further strengthening those ties while simultaneously politicizing them. In this way state formation at the local level in Kyrgyzstan has entailed the strengthening and reproduction of overlapping social ties and patron-client relations at the local level, in villages and small cities.

III. The Contentious Politics of Regional Appointments

As the prior section shows, the social ties between local officials and local communities in Kyrgyzstan are not merely part of traditional rural society, the deliberate product local elites' calculated strategies, or part of the Kyrgyz "mentality," as they are sometimes described. Rather, these social ties are endogenous to the state itself, formed, strengthened, and reproduced by the institutions of local government. The institutions of local government embed local officials within their own communities and require them to mobilize friends, family, and life-long acquaintances on a regular basis.

---

[35] Interview with author, August 2013.

[36] Earle argues that donors' emphasis on local mobilization stems from the mistaken Western view that post-Soviet states lacked any grassroots community-oriented social fabric simply because they did not have well-developed "civil societies" in the neoliberal sense. Thus, the "community-based" approach to solving local problems was linked not only to donors' focus on political decentralization, but also "civil society" development (Earle 2005; see also Petric 2005).

How does this explain protest mobilization against the central government? Like politicians of all kinds, local-level leaders often have ambitions to secure higher-level offices. They may have started as a teacher, taxi driver, or farmer, but tenures as *ayil okmotu* or as deputies in local councils can reshape career trajectories, especially for those who are good at their jobs and have substantial local support. As they enter higher state posts, they take on different official responsibilities, but also have new and expanding sets of resources with which to assist their co-villagers. In addition to offering greater material resources, access to higher-level state posts comes with appointment powers, enabling those who hold them to dole out jobs to family, friends, acquaintances, and other clients from one's home village.

Through surveys and multiple interviews with prominent state elites, the authors of one study find that "status among one's own relatives and local community" was more important than any other factor in explaining how elites are motived to do their jobs and why they seek to obtain high-level state posts in the first place (Huskey and Iskakova 2010: 246). The authors conclude that "all politics is very local in Kyrgyzstan, where the most powerful geographical attachments are not to the nation, or to the north or the south, or even to one of the country's seven regions, but to one's district or village" (252). Speaking generally about local officials who later get promotions, one unemployed man in Osh province commented that, "of course they will work for all of Kyrgyzstan, but at some level, even if it is minor, they will help their hometown or the community in which they were raised."[37]

In Kyrgyzstan, however, nearly all state offices above the village—at the district-, province-, and national-levels—are appointed positions, formally determined by officials in the capital city. This sets the stage for the contentious politics of appointment in districts, provinces,

[37] Interview with author, October 25, 2013.

and in the capital city itself, where local communities' and central authorities' expectations clash about what these offices are for and in whose interest the officials appointed there are supposed to work. A lawyer in Bishkek described the nature of this conflict:

> When there is a person who is appointed by the central government that the population does not accept they will just bring their own person and say "get out of here, our person will work here." If the prime minister is smart enough he will appoint from the local level. But, if he is not smart, he will of course choose his own person, and it will again bring such a situation when people will just remove him.[38]

As this testimony suggests, the distinction between local versus non-local appointments lies at the heart of these politics. Meanwhile, the institutions of local government have shaped expectations and strengthened the local social networks that facilitate social mobilization. This same lawyer described how central authorities used to try an appoint people from one region to another, "but now the development of local self-government is pushing the other way […] the previous *ayil okmotus* become *akims* because they know the structure, the people, and how to organize themselves."[39]

Socially embedded village-level officials are seen by local communities as the representatives of local interests, and those most deserving of district and provincial level posts. One *ayil okmotu* argued that, "only the *ayil okmotu* knows the problems in the village and so it would make him the most effective *akim* [of the district]. Even when there is someone who is more qualified and educated people want someone who is local. In every region, in every village, people will only support someone who is from their community."[40]

The deputy of a local council in Bazar Korgon district said, "instead of increasing the status of the *akims* and governors [as the prime minister had proposed], it is better to increase the power of village authorities because only local-level officials know the needs of the population.

---

[38] Interview with author, August 28, 2013.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Interview with author, October 4, 2013.

Only we work directly with the people."[41] A village elder in a different village noted, "the *akim* does not really work in the village or know about village issues. The *ayil okmotu* should have this power!"[42] Likewise, a school director asked, "What is the governor for? We don't need him. We have an *ayil okmotu* and that is enough."[43]

A program manager of a local NGO in Bishkek noted that, "there is this regionalism in Kyrgyzstan. If you are not from this region the people will not accept you […] it is almost impossible. The central government is very weak."[44] A former official in Bishkek bemoaned local resistance to outside appointments. "People for sure will prefer someone from their own locality, but this is not right […] there is a stereotype that a person who comes from a different region is not interested in helping to develop the region that they work in. But this is a stereotype, and we should break it by explaining to people what is best."[45]

Frequently, contentious politics between center and periphery revolve around the right (or desire) of prominent local elites and officials to hold or maintain their offices. Huskey and Iskakova recount the testimony of one state official who said that, "if you part with your post [*dolzhnost'*], your life has ended [*propala tvoya zhizn'*]…. If you aren't a big official, it means that it's over, it's the end of the world [*u tebya vse, konets sveta*]" (2010: 246). The authors note that this is related to "the desire of former politicians to get back in the game" if they lose or are otherwise removed from office (ibid., fn. 30). Similarly, Ramas argues that regional transfers of cadre during the Akaev era, from 1991 to 2005, caused resentment and bitterness among regional

---

[41] Interview with author, February 5, 2014.
[42] Interview with author, October 14, 2013.
[43] Interview with author, October 16, 2013.
[44] Interview with author, August 6, 2013.
[45] Interview with author, January 25, 2014.

officials, leading them to become increasingly active in the opposition movement that culminated in the Tulip Revolution (Ramas 2013: 136).

Social Mobilization as Protest Mobilization

The opening section of this paper described several instances in which ordinary villagers were mobilized to help local elites sack and occupy higher-level state offices. Often (though not always), this mobilization was led by local state officials themselves, many of whom are current or former village-level officials. I recount some cases here in greater detail, highlighting the specific roles played by local officials themselves.

The Revolution in April 2010, like the Tulip Revolution of 2005, was sparked by local or provincial officials mobilizing supporters against the central government for access to state posts. The first major event was the arrest of Bolot Sherinyazov, a lifelong native of Talas province. In 1994, Sharinyazov served in the local council of Manas district, where he was born (Pushkin village). In 2000, he was elected to the national parliament, a position he often used to bolster his standing in his home region against central authorities.[46] In April 2010, when he was the vice-president of the opposition party *Ata Meken*, he was arrested just before he could participate in an informal referendum on President Bakiev in Talas province, set for April 6. The arrest, which his supporters saw as politically motivated, jeopardized his seat in parliament and, thus, "served as a stimulus for mass mobilization" in the area as "people protested to protect the leader" (Temirkulov 2010: 597).[47]

[46] For example, in 2008, Sherinyazov led a march to protest against President Bakiev's agreement to cede disputed territory to Kazakhstan. Taunting the president, he said "It would be better if they shot me. I'm ready to die for these lands" (Kanazarov 2008).
[47] Like many of the other figures outlined above, Sherinyazov ultimately bested central authorities. After Bakiev fled the country, the new transitional government named Sherinyazov its new Minister of Internal Affairs. Thus,

Local protestors assembled in front of the provincial administrative building demanding Sherinyazov's release. When the governor of the province, Beishenbek Bolotbekov, attempted to calm the situation, the crowd "stormed the administration building and took the governor hostage" (Gullette 2010: 91). They then took over the local Ministry of Internal Affairs offices, and the Minister of Internal Affairs, Modomusa Kongantiev, was "also taken captive and savagely beaten" (ibid.). Bolotbekov, a native of Naryn province, and Kongantiev, who was dispatched directly from Bishkek, were both outsiders with no supporters in the region.

By the end of the day, the crowd had illegally elected a new "people's governor" of Talas, Koisun Kurmanalieva.[48] Kurmanalieva was born in Orto-Aryk village, in Talas district, Talas *oblast*, and lived and worked in the region for her entire career. Importantly, most of her work took place within the local village government of Dolon.[49] From 1987 to 1994, she served on the executive committee of the Dolon village soviet, the Soviet-era predecessor to the village councils that were established in 1994. She then served on her village council while simultaneously working as the head of the Dolon village board (1997-2002). For all of the late Soviet period and the first 11 years after independence, Kurmanalieva was a village-level official in the same village in which she was born.

It was her strong local social bases that enabled Kurmanalieva to take control over the governor's office in 2010. Though the governor is an official representative of the central government in Talas and central authorities have the formal authority to select whomever they

---

just two weeks after his initial arrest, he and Bakiev had virtually traded places. Sherinyazov held the post until July 2010 when he announced his intention to seek a seat in parliament.

[48] A different group of demonstrators chose a different people's governor, Sheraly Abdyldaev, from the Manas district of Talas province. Abdyldaev spent most of his career working as a mechanic, but throughout the 2000s held various posts in the Manas district administration and also became the Chairman of the Talas provincial council (2003-2005) and Deputy Head of Talas province (2005-2006). How and why Kurmanalieva emerged as the outright victor cannot be determined here. Though Bishkek did not select either candidate, it is possible that they resolved potential conflict between the two of them. Within weeks the government confirmed Kurmalalieva as governor and appointed Abdyldaev as Minister of State Property.

[49] Dolon *ayil okmotu* consists of three villages, Kurmanalieva's home village (Orto-Aryk) and two others.

want, Kurmanalieva was chosen by her local supporters, without Bishkek's input. The transitional government—which came to power as a result of the revolution that followed these events—confirmed her appointment only after the fact. Nevertheless, she held the post for five years before resigning in April 2015.

Kurmanalieva was not the only local person who took control of regional state offices at this time. She was simply the first. In the course of the April Revolution—as in the Tulip Revolution before it—similar events unfolded in other provinces and districts throughout the country. One report notes that opposition groups everywhere were "occupying the buildings of local organs of power in the regions" (Fergana 2010a). Local people occupied administrative buildings in Tokmok city (Chui *oblast*), and in the district-level *akimats* in Chui (Chui *oblast*), Bazar-Korgon and Aksy (both in Jalalabad *oblast*) (Fergana 2010a).[50] A village elder from Bazar-Korgon described what happened: "People went right away to the *akimchilik*. Everyone there was appointed by Bakiev and people just went ahead and chose their own people instead … people elected themselves, just regular people from Bazar Korgon. When they kicked out the *akim* we chose a new one, Kuban."[51]

Similarly, in Sokulu district (Chui *oblast*), an "alternative 'people's *akim*'" (*narodnyi akim*) was "appointed" by the population (Fergana 2010a). Protesters there also demanded the release of "their fellow local" (*ikh zemlyak*) from Sukulu, Temir Sariev, an opposition leader whom the government had detained (Fergana 2010b).[52] In Naryn *oblast*, protestors stormed the provincial governor's office "demanding a change of the mayor of Naryn [city] and the *akim* of

---

[50] An *akim* is the executive head of a district-level administration, one level lower than the provincial level. An *akimat* (Russian) or *akimchilik* (Kyrgyz) is the formal name of the *akim*'s administrative building, akin to a local town hall or city hall.

[51] Interview with author, October 14, 2013.

[52] As typical of a pattern in Kyrgyzstan (and in marked contrast to Kazakhstan), Sariev went on to obtain even higher positions in the state. From 2010 to 2012 he served as Minister of Finance. In 2015, he was appointed Prime Minister.

[Naryn] *raion* to their side" (*TsentrAziya* 2010). They then selected an "alternative 'people's' governor," Adyl Esenbekov (Fergana 2010b). Esenbekov held the post for four months.

Prominent local officials have not only mobilized their co-villagers to seize control over state offices that they were not appointed to. Sometimes, they mobilize them to maintain control of an office that they already hold, resisting the central government's lawful authority to fire, replace, or transfer them. The most prominent of these examples involved Melis Myrzakmatov, the mayor of Osh city—the "capital of the south"—from January 2009 to December 2013. During his tenure he gained a reputation for his fierce independence and outright refusal to obey policies set in Bishkek. When the central government sought to fire him for insubordination in August 2010, thousands of his supporters protested until they relented. He continued to hold his post for nearly three years after this, serving under a government that had the legal authority to fire him, but that lacked the actual power to do so.

Myrzakmatov's case somewhat complicates the framework I presented above. First, Osh city has a hybrid administration. Formally, it has *oblast* (provincial) status, meaning that it is equal to other provinces and not subordinate unit within the province that it is territorially situated in (Osh *oblast*).[53] As a city, Osh is governed like other cities and villages, according to the framework of local self-government. Yet, when Myrzakmatov was first chosen as mayor in 2009, the rules for selection in Osh and Bishkek cities were the same as those for governors, not *ayil okmotu* or mayors.[54] At least initially, then, Myrzakmatov was appointed by the president, not elected by the population.

---

[53] It is simultaneously the administrative center of Osh *oblast*.

[54] Unlike other units of local self-government, the laws governing the selection of mayors in Bishkek and Osh are determined by parliament and have been subject to change over time. The mayors of these two cities have variously been directly elected by the population, directly appointed by the president, or indirectly elected by the city council. In itself this is evidence for the fact that the selection of regional officials is deeply contested, as central authorities have never secured uncontested appointment powers in Kyrgyzstan's two largest cities.

Related to the status of Osh as a city, Myrzakmatov's local social ties are undoubtedly more complex and less complete than his counterparts in villages and smaller cities. As noted above, Myrzakmatov was directly appointed by the president. In addition, Osh city has a population of approximately 230,000. That makes it significantly larger than any village and precludes the possibility that Myrzakmatov personally knows all or even most of the city's residents. Moreover, Myrzakmatov is a Kyrgyz nationalist in a city that is ethnically divided, further complicating his ties to the population.

At the same time, Myrzakmatov is a local person who has lived and worked in Osh his entire career. He was born in Kara-suu *raion*, the district that territorially encompasses Osh city, in a village called Papan, which is located approximately fifteen miles from the city center. He attended Osh Technological University, took his first job in the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Osh *oblast* (located in Osh city), and then worked as a state tax inspector in Osh city. Later, he was elected to parliament as a representative of his district.

President Bakiev appointed Myrzakmatov as mayor of Osh city in 2009. But, unlike the many other Bakiev appointees who were deposed during the revolution in 2010, Myrzakmatov cleverly organized his supporters to help takeover the office he already held. Rather than defend his office as its incumbent, he effectively did what Kurmanalieva did in Talas, and what Zheenbekov had twice done in Jalalabad. The difference in Myrzakmatov's case was that there was no outsider to depose. He was already a popular local leader, and he succeeded in holding his office because he was able to mobilize a large crowd of friends, family, and acquaintances to rally in support of his tenure. According to Timur Kamchibekov, Myrzakmatov's deputy, the mayor "gathered a group of his people, his supporters, his relatives and they demanded that Myrzakmatov [be kept on], that the people are for Melis Myrzakmatov and the people demand

that he [continue] to work as mayor and not leave his post" (Pannier 2010). Thus, even though he came to office as a Bakiev appointee, he only continued to hold it as a "people's mayor," making him like other "people's governors" of the post-Bakiev period.

When a new transitional government took power after President Bakiev fled in April 2010, Myrzakmatov regularly relied on his powerful local support base to thwart subsequent efforts to fire him. When rumors swirled in July 2010 that authorities in Bishkek planned to remove him, Myrzakmatov warned that, "only the people can decide the question of my leaving office" (Pannier 2010). In August 2010, when central authorities did decide it was time to replace the mayor with their own appointee—in accordance with their formal legal authority—nearly 3,000 people rallied in the streets of Osh until the government backed down. Myrzakmatov, speaking to the crowd that had assembled in front of City Hall, proclaimed defiantly "I am going nowhere. I am with the people. I am with you" to which the crowd responded by chanting "victory, victory" (Brooke 2010).[55] He later wrote that the government

> …needed a person who would unconditionally execute all of their orders and who would crumble like glass beads in front of them. In my opinion, the population of the city would never have accepted another person, whom the transitional government appointed as mayor (Myrzakmatov 2011: 74).

Myrzakmatov did not merely hold his appointed office against the wishes of central authorities. He argued that the government in Bishkek had no legal authority to replace him or tell him what to do. When asked in an interview with a Russian newspaper, "why didn't the authorities [*vlast*] pressure you and try to force you to leave?" Myrzakmatov replied, "behind me stand the people. If they say: Melis, you are wrong, I will leave. But directives from the

---

[55] According to his written account, the government first asked him to resign voluntarily. When he demanded that the president sign a formal order removing him from his post, they sweetened the deal by offering him other positions to detach him from his local supporters in Osh: "They offered me a few embassies, Minister of Natural Resources, the Agency of Forest Management, [and] the Director of State Material Resources. They told me to pick one of these positions […] I said to myself, even if I am left without a position, I will be together with my people. I answered [to the president]: 'Roza Isakovna I am not one of those who will throw himself at a position like a dog at a bone, not one who is satisfied with slop. If you want, fire me right now, I won't be offended'" (Myrzakmatov 2011: 75).

transitional government do not have any legal force in the south" (*Kommersant* 2010). A colonel of the *militsia* in Osh City, who repeatedly described Myrzakmatov as "just a simple person," explained that, "because the people support him, he can stand up to them [central authorities]. When the central government says the wrong thing, he stands up to them and says it to their faces. He doesn't listen to them."[56] Another city resident noted that the central government "has to be very careful with the mayor"; they "cannot just use force to take him out" because "they know that if they did this they would have their own problems. If people support the mayor that is it."[57] He went on to describe the broader implications for Bishkek's appointment authority in the regions:

> There should be a lesson learned for the government. They need to understand that they cannot mess with local people. Local people should know better and do know better and this is good precedent for the shaping of policy on this issue [regarding appointments]. They have to care, they must listen to people at least about whom they appoint. They should be afraid of what will happen if they don't.[58]

After the government's failed bid to replace Myrzakmatov in August 2010, he continued to hold his office for another three years. During his tenure he "continuously ignored the central government by exerting full power in his 'territory' and often oppos[ed] decisions coming from the capital city" going so far as to propose the creation of his own independent police force in 2011 (Osomonov 2011). This case underlines the lack of control central authorities have over their own cadre and their ability to appoint whom they want, where and when they want to. In repeated contests with central authorities over who would control Osh city, how they would be selected, and what orders they were going to carry out, Myrzakmatov seemed almost invincible.

---

[56] Interview with author, September 30, 2013. The colonel also described how Bishkek's appointment of *militsia* heads had been shaped by the mayor. Even though the Minister of Internal Affairs has the full authority to make these appointments, they consult with Myrzakmatov and defer to his demands: "There were situations when there was tension between the head of the *militsia* and the mayor, and the mayor protested and continually called the Ministry to complain and finally the Ministry fired him. The mayor is like the owner of a house—he is the owner of the city. He is extremely powerful here." This, too, is another example of a constraint on the central government's formal appointment authority.
[57] Interview with author, October 30, 2013.
[58] Ibid.

IV. Conclusions

If local elites can forge clientelist networks of self-defense through the instrumental provision of resources, it is not clear why they are bound to their locality. After all, money is universal and can used anywhere within the state's territory. The fact that local elites in Kyrgyzstan seem bound to their locality suggests something deeper about a place that creates the ties that bind. The institutions of local government provide one plausible mechanism. The institutions of local government in Kyrgyzstan make it more likely that someone from within the village's social fabric will come to power in local government and that, once in power, will rely on the social mobilization of village residents for everyday tasks. Thus, the social ties between local officials and members of the community are forged, strengthened, and reinforced by the processes of local governance.

Additionally, this suggests that local officials may not contribute to the community purely out of rational self-interest. If their goal is to establish a base of clients by providing resources, this activity need not be limited to one's own native village or region. Rather, in one's own village we can expect local officials to have social obligations to provide assistance to family, friends, and long-time acquaintances. In this context, local officials might provide for their home village because they have a social obligation to do so. Indeed, in rational-instrumental terms, opposition figures in Kyrgyzstan have no more incentive to strategically cultivate a client base in poor rural areas than their counterparts in neighboring countries. Yet, we do not see the same kind of patron-client ties form in the periphery of these other states. In fact, to the extent that opposition movements have mobilized in other states in the region, they have tended to do so from within the capital city. This includes both the successful cases of

revolution—in Georgia and Ukraine—but also the unsuccessful ones, like the Democratic Movement of Kazakhstan (DVK).

If the fragmented and disorganized nature of protest activity in Kyrgyzstan is partly a product of state structure, then this stands at odds with more traditional ways of understanding the power of social movements. The classic resource mobilization literature suggests that size, scale, and success of social mobilization will depend on the availability of resources like money and organization (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Yet, cohesive organization scarcely exists in the cases described above. Moreover, as noted in the introductory section of this paper, opposition movements have been much more organized and better financed in neighboring Kazakhstan, where they failed.

As other work has shown, the power of protest movements cannot be understood in abstract or isolation, but in relationship to the kind of state power that it is interacting with (Boudreau 2004). The way in which state leadership interacts with a movement shapes how it evolves, whether and how it is are organized, and defines not only what is transgressive or passé, but what is effective or ineffective. The cases presented in this paper, however, suggest that it is not only purposeful state strategy that defines the power and success of the opposition; it can be an inadvertent outcome of state structure itself.

Put more concretely, Kyrgyzstan's opposition is fragmented and disorganized because state structure provides space at the village-level for local cadre to build local support bases and mobilize them. Just as the structures of local self-government give villages autonomy from the central government when it comes to questions of governance, it also provides ample room for resistance to central directives, including policies related to cadre appointment. In this context, a cohesive and centralized opposition is less likely to form in the capital city. Moreover, there is

no reason to believe that if such an opposition did emerge that it would be particularly effective or successful. Central authorities might be better positioned to manage an opposition that is centralized and organized in the capital city itself.

By contrast, highly centralized, organized, and will-financed opposition movements might only have power in relation to certain kinds of states. For example, the reason why Kazakhstan's well-financed and highly organized DVK failed while its disorganized and fragmented counterpart in Kyrgyzstan succeeded is because these movements encountered dramatically different kinds of states. State attributes like the level of bureaucratic centralization and cadre control at the local level partly determine where an effective opposition movement can function and flourish, and what kind of opposition movement will be a successful one. In sum, oppositional organization as a power attribute is not something that can be evaluated in the abstract; it must be understood in interaction with state power and structure.

Work Cited

Abdyraeva, Aiganysh. 2013. "*Gorkenesh Dzhalal-Abada Provodit Vneocherednoe Zasedanie v Svyazi s Situatsiei Samovolnogo Naznacheniya Oblgubernatora,*" *KNews*, June 1, 2013. http://www.knews.kg/action/32658_gorkenesh_djalal-abada_provodit_vneocherednoe_zasedanie_v_svyazi_s_situatsiey_samovolnogo_naznacheniya_oblgubernatora/ last viewed March 30, 2016.

Alymkulov, Emil and Marat Kulatov. 2001. "Local Government in the Kyrgyz Republic," *Developing New Rules in the Old Environment*. Igor Munteanu and Victor Popa, eds. Budapest: Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative.

Baimyrzaeva, Mahabat. 2005. "Institutional Reforms in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Eurasian Studies Review*, Vol. 4, No 1: 29-33.

-----. 2010. *Shortcomings of Institutional Reform in Public Sector Governance: The Case of Kyrgyzstan*. PhD Dissertation, University of Southern California.

-----. 2011. "Kyrgyzstan's Public Sector Reforms: 1991-2010," *International Journal of Public Administration*, Volume 34, Number 9: 555-566.

Boudreau, Vincent. 2004. *Resisting Dictatorship: Repression and Protest in Southeast Asia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Brooke, James. 2010. "Kyrgyzstan President Loses Showdown with Southern Mayor," *Voice of America* (August 19), http://www.voanews.com/articleprintview/124192.html last viewed May 18, 2015.

Bunce, Valerie J. and Sharon L. Wolchik. 2010. "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes," *World Politics*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January): 43-86.

Collins, Kathleen. 2003. "The Political Role of Clans in Central Asia," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 2.

Conway, Francis. 2008. "Kyrgyzstan Decentralization Assessment," *USAID Decentralization and Local Government Program in the Kyrgyz Republic*.

Duyvendak, Jan Willem and James M. Jasper, eds. 2015. *Breaking Down the State: Protestors Engaged*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Dzhumasheva, Aida. 2014. "Zhusubali Toromamatova *Snyali s Posta Polpreda v Dzhalal-Abadskoi Oblasti*," *Vechernii Bishkek*, March 3, 2014. http://www.vb.kg/doc/264082_jysybali_toromamatova_sniali_s_posta_polpreda_v_djalal_abadskoy_oblasti.html, last viewed May 11, 2015.

Earle, Lucy. 2005. "Community Development, 'Tradition' and the Civil Society Strengthening Agenda in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey*, Volume 24, No. 3: 245-260.

Eisenstadt, S.N. and Rene Lemarchand, eds. 1981. *Political Clientelism, Patronage and Development*. Beverly Hills and London: SAGE Publications.

Eisenstadt, S.N. and L. Roniger. 1984. *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Engvall, Johan. 2007. "Kyrgyzstan: Anatomy of a State," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 54, No. 4, July/August, pp. 33-45.

-----. 2011. *Flirting with State Failure: Power and Politics in Kyrgyzstan since Independence*. Silk Road Paper, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Program.

Fattakhov, Bakhtiyar. 2013. "*Stanovlenie Mestnogo Samoupravleniya v Kyrgyzstane*," *Mamlekettik Zhana Munitsipaldyk Kyzmat*, No. 15-16 (16), November 13, 2013.

Fergana. 2010a. "*Kyrgzstan: Idet Shturm Doma Pravitelstva v Bishkeke, Zdanie UVD v Talase Zakhvachevo, Oppozitsiya Zakhvatyvaet Zdaniya Raionnykh Administratsii*," *Fergana*

Informatsionnoe Agenstvo. April 7, 2010. http://www.fergananews.com/news/14393 last viewed May 8, 2015.

Fergana. 2010b. "*Kyrgyzstan: V Naryne Izbran Alternativnyi 'Narodnyi Gubernator,' V Bishkeke Gotovyat Shestvie, v Chuiskoi Oblasti Perekryvayut Trassu,*" *Fergana Informatsionnoe Agenstvo*, (April 7), http://www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=14388&mode=snews last viewed June 11, 2015.

Fuhrmann, Matthew. 2006. "A Tale of Two Social Capitals: Revolutionary Collective Action in Kyrgyzstan," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 53, No. 6, pp. 16-29.

Gellner, Ernest and John Waterbury, eds. 1977. *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*. London: Gerald Durkworth and Co. Ltd.

Gullette, David. 2010. "Institutionalized Instability: Factors Leading to the April 2010 Uprising in Kyrgyzstan," *Eurasian Review*, Volume 3 (November).

Hale, Henry. 2015. *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

Helmke, Gretchen and Stephen Levitsky. 2004. "Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* (December), Vol. 2, Issue 4: 725-740.

Huskey, Eugene and Gulnara Iskakova. 2010. "The Barriers to Intra-Opposition Cooperation in the Post-Communist World: Evidence from Kyrgyzstan," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 3: 228-262.

Ibraimova, Asel. 2009. *Legal and Institutional Framework for Empowerment of Rural Communities in the Kyrgyz Republic*. Zurich: LIT Verlag.

IDA. 2015. "IDA At Work: Community Driven Development. Local Infrastructure Investments Improve Life in Kyrgyz Villages," http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/IDA/0,,contentMDK:21358516~menuPK:4754051~pagePK:51236175~piPK:437394~theSitePK:73154,00.html last viewed January 26, 2015.

IMF. 2004. "Kyrgyz Republic: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Progress Report," *IMF Country Report No. 04/200*. July 2004.

Jasper, James M. 1997. *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Junisbai, Barbara and Azamat Junisbai. 2005. "The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan: A Case Study in Economic Liberalization, Intra-Elite Cleavage, and Political Opposition," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol.13, No. 3: 373-392.

Kasmalieva, Aizada. 2013. "*Kto Vy – 'Narodnyi' Gubernator Meder Usenov?*" *Radio Azattyk*, June 4, 2013. http://rus.azattyk.org/content/kyrgyzstan_jalal_abad_opposition/25006303.html viewed May 11, 2015.

Khamidov, Alisher. 2006. "Kyrgyzstan's Revolutionary Youth: Between State and Opposition," *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Summer-Fall): 85-93.

Kommersant. 2010. "*Direktivy Pravitelstva Ne Imeyut Na Iyuge Yuridicheskoi Sily*," No. 151, (August 19), http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1489447 last viewed May 19, 2015.

Lewis, David. 2008. "The Dynamics of Regime Change: Domestic and International Factors in the 'Tulip Revolution,'" *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, Nos. 3-4, pp. 265-277.

McCarthy, John D. and Mayer N. Zald. 1977. "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No. 6: 1212-1241.

McGlinchey, Eric. 2011. *Chaos, Violence, Dynasty: Politics and Islam in Central Asia*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Migdal, Joel S. 2001. *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Myrzakmatov, Melis. 2011. *B Poiskakh Istiny*. Bishkek: "Turar."

OECD. 2006. *Geographical Distribution of Financial Flows to Aid Recipients, 2000-2004*. Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development.

Olcott, Martha Brill. 2005. "Lessons of 'The Tulip Revolution,'" Testimony prepared for the Commission of Security and Cooperation in Europe," April 7.

Osomonov, Joldosh. 2011. "Osh Mayor Wants Own Municipal Police" *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5670, viewed February 1, 2013.

Pannier, Bruce. 2010. "Ahead of Kyrgyz President's Visit, Osh Mayor Claims People's Support," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. http://www.rferl.org/content/Ahead_Of_Kyrgyz_Presidents_Visit_Osh_Mayor_Claims_Peoples_Support/2113525.html viewed May 18, 2015.

Petric, Boris-Mathieu. 2005. "Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan or the Birth of a Globalized Protectorate," *Central Asian Survey*, Volume 24, No. 3: 319-332.

Powell, John Duncan. 1977. "Peasant Society and Clientelist Politics," *Friends, Followers, and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*. Steffen W. Schmidt, Laura Guasti, Carl H. Lande, and James C. Scott, eds. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

Radnitz, Scott. 2005. “Networks, Localism, and Mobilization in Aksy, Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey*, Volume 24, 4: 405-424.

-----. 2006. “What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17 (2), 132-146.

-----. 2010. *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Ramos, Ruben Ruiz. 2013. “The institutional persistence of patrimonialism in the Kyrgyz Republic: Testing a path dependency (1991-2010), *Institutional Reform in Central Asia: Politico-economic Challenges*. Joachim Ahrens, Hermen Villem Hoen, eds. Routledge.

Scott, James C. 1972. “Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 66, No. 1, pp. 91-113.

Schmidt, Steffen W., Laura Guasti, Carl H. Lande, and James C. Scott, eds. 1977. *Friends, Followers, and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

TsentrAziya. 2010. “*V Naryne Vosstavshie Izbrali ‘Narodnogo Gubernatora’ Adila Esenbekova*,” (April 7), http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1270623120 last viewed June 11, 2015.

Temirkulov, Azamat. 2010. “Kyrgyz ‘revolutions’ in 2005 and 2010: comparative analysis of mass mobilization,” *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (September): 589-600.

Tudoroiu, Theodor. 2007. “Rose, Orange, and Tulip: The failed post-Soviet revolution,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 40: 315-342.

UNDP. 2012. *Human Development as the Focus of Local Self-Governance*: *National Human Development Report of the Kyrgyz Republic.* United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Verhoeven, Imrat and Christian Broer. 2015. “Contentious Governance: Local Governmental Players as Social Movement Actors,” *Breaking Down the State: Protestors Engaged*. Jan Willem Duyvendak and James M. Jasper, eds. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: 95-110.

The World Bank. 2014. *Kyrgyz Republic Partnership Program Snapshot*. (October 2014).