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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract <p>This Master's thesis seeks to explain the reasons why some autocratic regimes remain stable for long periods of time, whereas others experience greater degrees of instability. The task is approached through a comparative case study approach, where three Central Asian countries that share multiple historical and cultural characteristics but differ in their outcomes are compared with one another. The theoretical background of the thesis encompasses well-established theories on governance strategies and legitimation, which are then evaluated against the Central Asian example.</p> <p>Three countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan were selected for the case study. The economic and social characteristics of these countries, as well as the governance strategies adopted by their regimes, were then evaluated in detail. The sources utilized in the analysis included economic and demographic data from the World Bank, survey data from the World Values Survey and reports from international organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Freedom House. Previous scholarship was also consulted.</p> <p>It was discovered that many different mechanisms have kept incumbents in power in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The leaders of both countries have been successful in promoting a narrative of themselves as guarantors of stability, largely accounting for their docile populations. Kazakhstan, with its extensive oil wealth, has been able to co-opt both elites and significant sectors of the population. Uzbekistan has also benefitted from more modest resource wealth, which has facilitated the co-optation of neopatrimonial support networks, as well as the devotion of resources to state security apparatus. More limited resources have, however, forced the Uzbek regime to rely on coercion more extensively.</p> <p>The thesis concludes with the finding that authoritarian failure is a sum of unfavourable circumstances and poor decision making on the part of the autocrat, especially when elite networks are neglected. Like its neighbours, Kyrgyzstan's presidents have largely depended on neopatrimonial networks for support. The limited resources available to the regime, however, as well as their excessive concentration in the hands of the president's immediate family, contributed to elite defections both in 2005 and 2010. These disaffected elites were then able to mobilise large sections of the disillusioned population, suffering both economic hardship and frustration with the corrupt regime. Lacking the coercive capabilities to suppress these uprisings, presidents Akaev and Bakiyev had no option but to step down in 2005 and 2010, respectively.</p>			
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What explains authoritarian success and failure in Central Asia?

Exploring regime stability, economic performance,
and governance strategies

Pihla Ida Annika Pietiläinen

University of Helsinki

Faculty of Social Sciences

Democracy and Global Transformations

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I. Introduction: Why Central Asia?

Democratization in the post-Soviet sphere has been a favoured topic among many political scientists, NGOs and western policymakers ever since the early 1990s. The further we have come from the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the clearer it has become that not all post-Soviet republics are headed towards free and fair elections or open civil societies. One of the regions where democracy has most notably been absent is Central Asia, where the iron grip of Moscow quickly transformed into strong presidential power (Atabaki: 1998).

While all the countries in post-Soviet Central Asia share multiple similar characteristics from the way they became independent to a wide array of demographic and political factors, there are also important differences in the paths they have taken since independence. Emerging from the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, four out of the five countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – were governed by authoritarian leaders, who quickly consolidated their hold on power. Only the poorest member of the Central Asian five, Tajikistan, experienced serious instability when president Rahmon Nabiyev was replaced by Emomali Rahmon during a civil war that lasted from 1992 to 1997.

Since this initial chaos in Tajikistan, leaders in four out of the five countries held onto power successfully until either dying in office (Turkmenistan in 2006 and Uzbekistan in 2016) or stepping down voluntarily (Kazakhstan in 2019). Only in Kyrgyzstan were increasingly authoritarian leaders forced to leave office, both in 2005 and 2010, in addition to which then president Atambayev decided to abide by the 6-year term limit and not stand for office in the 2017 elections. While these leadership changes could optimistically be attributed to the adoption of democratic principles, all of Kyrgyzstan's post-Soviet presidents have reigned with more or less corrupt and authoritarian principles. The question then emerges: Why have the authoritarian leaders in Kyrgyzstan failed to hold onto power, when their counterparts in neighbouring countries have managed to do so?

This paper seeks to answer this question by exploring the commonalities and differences between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, using a comparative case study

approach. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were left out of the analysis for practical reasons, as performing an in-depth analysis on more than three countries is beyond the scope of this paper. Tajikistan's exclusion is also supported by its bloody history and Turkmenistan's by the difficulty of collecting data on the most isolated state in the region.

Out of the three countries under investigation, Kazakhstan performs relatively well on a variety of economic indicators, which makes it possible to analyse the relationship between economic success and regime stability. Much of this success can be attributed to the abundant natural resources – especially oil – that can be found in the country. One of the main points considered in the discussion is therefore the effect that natural resource wealth has on regime survival, both through facilitating the provision of goods to the population and the distribution of spoils among the regimes key supporters.

In addition to economic factors, the paper will focus on the governance strategies adopted by different central Asian leaders, including variables like co-optation, coercion, patronage networks and the ability of each leader to control and shape the narratives surrounding them in nationwide and international media. Drawing on previous scholarship on authoritarian institutions, economic performance, and regime survival, the paper seeks to assess which factors explain the relative political stability of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan as compared to Kyrgyzstan.

a) Research Problem

Many studies within the field of political science point to the differences between democracies and autocracies, highlighting the extent to which democracies perform better on a wide range of indicators. The scholarship on differences within the broad category of autocracies is more limited, however, even though autocracies do vary considerably in terms of the economic outcomes they produce as well as the length of time they persevere. The existing scholarship on autocratic success is highly focused on regime classification and the way in which it affects regime durability; studies show, for example, that military dictatorships tend to fall sooner than civilian ones (Geddes: 1999), and that nominally democratic institutions like parties and legislatures can help regimes to sustain themselves for longer (Ezrow and Frantz: 2011). Economic performance also varies across authoritarian regimes, and the ways in which autocratic leaders react to changes in economic conditions affect the durability of their reign. It seems, for example, that single party regimes can withstand higher levels of economic instability than military or personalist regimes without resorting to excessive repression (Geddes: 1999). The need for establishing political institutions also depends on background factors like the existence of oil and other natural resources: while those regimes that have abundant natural resources can co-opt the population by distributing the excess wealth among them, those without such resources will have to resort to institutions to maintain power (Gandhi and Przeworski: 2007).

This paper explores these findings further in a more detailed way: instead of solely focusing on the type of autocratic regime (military vs. civilian dictatorship, single-party vs. hybrid regime, etc.), it will take a more detailed look into how three of the five Central Asian countries have been governed since their independence and what kinds of outcomes their style of governance has led to. Attention is focused on issues like repression vs. soft-power strategies, autocratic institutions, and the effect of natural resources. The research tasks will include the following:

- Figuring out the extent to which Kazakhstan's relative economic success and vast resource wealth have contributed to regime stability.
- Determining how poor economic performance has affected the stability of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Are they more likely to experience instability as a result?

- Assessing the effectiveness of different authoritarian governance strategies – whether soft-power strategies and co-optation are more conducive to political stability than outright repression.
- Determining whether autocrats need to seek legitimation from the population at large, or whether it is enough to satisfy the needs of a smaller network of supporters.

The research question will be as follows: **What explains authoritarian success and failure in Central Asia? Assessing regime stability, economic performance and governance strategies.**

b) Theory

The theoretical focus of this paper is centred around mid-range theory rather than grand theory or very specific explanation of singular events. Even though the main focus is on a very limited group of countries, the intention is to test whether the lessons learned from their example are reflected in the existing mid-range theories on authoritarianism and economic prosperity. The theories that this paper focuses on encompass elements from both political realism and liberalism: while the focus on regime stability and the survival of authoritarian leaders is a realist concern, focusing on institutions and economic prosperity as drivers of stability is a more liberal approach. The paper does not have an ideological commitment to either one, but instead will follow the evidence and see which explanations it supports. It is entirely possible that elements from both strands can be combined in causally efficacious middle range theories, as is suggested by recent advances in eclectic theorizing (Sil and Katzenstein: 2010).

Much of the research that seeks to explain economic success and regime stability focuses on differences between democracy and autocracy; democracies tend to perform better on a wide range of economic indicators, as well as remain stable for longer spans of time. The direction of the relationship, however, is not straightforward, as economic success can be considered a necessary prerequisite for democracy as well as its consequence. Empirical evidence indeed suggests that democratization is likely to be unsuccessful if the country in question is not economically prosperous enough, while a high level of prosperity makes transition to democracy more likely (Przeworski and Limongi: 1997).

While good economic performance, therefore, can be thought of as an achievement in its own right, it might not be conducive to an autocrat's ultimate desire to maintain power. On the other hand, very poor economic performance can also make the regime unstable, as it increases the likelihood of violent revolt or coup d'état (Tanneberg et al. 2013). One of the main theoretical tasks for this paper is to address this paradoxical relationship between prosperity and authoritarian regime durability to determine whether good economic performance has helped to make Kazakhstan more stable than its less prosperous neighbours.

In their 2003 work *The Logic of Political Survival*, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al. challenge the conventional wisdom that all leaders strive for economic development. Instead, they suggest, it can be a pragmatic, rational choice for an autocrat to purposefully pursue policies leading to economic stagnation (Bueno de Mesquita et al: 2003, p.21). According to the authors, the likelihood of a leader pursuing policies conducive to prosperity depends on institutional arrangements, especially on the size of a "winning coalition" needed to acquire and maintain power. The theory states that in those countries where the winning coalition is small, the leader has a strong incentive to distribute private goods to a select group of supporters, whereas in countries with a large winning coalition the government is incentivized to focus on the provision of public goods for the population as a whole (ibid. p.37). The authors call this selectorate theory: the larger the proportion of the selectorate (those members of the polity that engage in choosing the leader) that is needed to form a winning coalition, the bigger the emphasis on good economic performance will be (as providing public goods is more expensive than providing private goods). As democracies generally have much larger winning coalitions than autocracies, this theory provides a plausible explanation for the generally better economic performance of democracies.

One of the main problems with the selectorate theory is its excessive conflation of democracy with winning coalition size: Clarke and Stone (2008) argue that most of Bueno de Mesquita et al.'s results regarding the effect of winning coalition size on economic performance and other indicators of good governance disappear when controlling for democracy. The calculation of both the size of the selectorate and of the winning coalition are also very difficult to make accurately, especially when it comes to autocratic regimes. This is why the theory is likely to have little explanatory power when it comes to differences between autocracies, for example those in Central Asia. If, however, Bueno

de Mesquita et al. (2003: p.12) are right about leaders requiring a minimal winning coalition to support them being able to purposefully pursue poor economic policy, one would expect that the weak economic performance of countries like Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan does not have a significant effect on their political stability. This is one of the main theoretical claims that will be addressed in this paper.

In addition to economic performance and its impact on regime durability, different theories exist on the types of governance strategies that are most conducive to political stability in authoritarian regimes. Two main ways of dealing with the threat of disposal from office are dealt with in the literature: repression and co-optation. All dictatorial regimes engage in both strategies, but to differing extents, depending on a variety of factors. Military dictatorships and personalistic regimes tend to rely more on repression, but they also tend to be short-lived, either having to concede power to a civilian regime or facing collapse after the death of the strongman (Geddes: 1999). This is because repression is costly: in order to credibly impose controls on a wide range of citizens' behaviour, the leader needs to ensure wide-ranging monitoring and sanctioning of misconduct (Wintrobe: 1990, p.851).

Co-optation strategies, on the other hand, also pose challenges to the leader, as their effectiveness depends on ensuring that commitments are credible. When providing economic spoils to the members of a small clique of supporters, it is not strictly necessary to establish extensive formal arrangements, whereas another form of co-optation - that of providing policy concessions - requires the establishment of legal norms and institutions (Gandhi and Przeworski: 2007, p.1282). This often encompasses some degree of dilution in the amount of power that a ruler has, as policy concessions are only credible when the potential rivals being co-opted can actually trust that they will receive the benefits promised (Magaloni: 2008, p. 716). While establishing party apparatuses and nominally representative legislatures slightly decreases the amount of power that an autocrat has, it also helps him or her to credibly allocate rewards to supporters and thus decreases the chance of being ousted. Combining co-optation through the provision of both economic benefits and political nominations with "soft" repression strategies like administering short prison sentences to political challengers is less likely to induce extensive public outcry in the way that more harsh repression would, which is why autocracies adopting such strategies can be expected to remain more stable (Schatz: 2009, p. 207). This paper will contribute to the theoretical discussion on authoritarian governance strategies by

testing the proposition that co-optation and minimal coercion lead to more stable authoritarian outcomes in Central Asia.

c) Method

The methodological approach of this paper is that of a classic comparative case study, focusing on a set of Post-Soviet Eurasian countries. The focus is on three out of the five Central Asian states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were left out of the analysis, as focusing on a smaller set of countries enables a more detailed investigation within the limited scope of a single paper. The decision to leave out Turkmenistan was also motivated by the lack of reliable data on that country: since it is the most authoritarian and isolated of the five, it is often missing from data sets compiled by international organizations. Tajikistan, on the other hand, was singled out due to the extreme occurrence of civil war, which ravaged the country shortly after independence between 1992 and 1997. If Tajikistan was taken into consideration, too much of the focus would go into exploring the civil war at the expense of other factors that allow for more interesting comparisons.

In essence, the three countries mentioned above were chosen as the focus of the case study because they fit the most-similar research design. All the countries became independent at roughly the same time, detaching themselves from the same socialist empire. They also share a range of other characteristics, including Islam as the main religion, ethnic and linguistic divisions, historically clan-based society and minimal pre-independence experience of self-governance or meaningful political institutions. Regardless of all these similarities, their economic performance differs considerably; while Kazakhstan's Gross Domestic Product per capita (based on Purchasing Power Parity in constant 2011 international dollars) was above 23,000 in 2016, the corresponding figures for Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, respectively, were around 3,300 and 6,000 dollars.

Table 1.1: Summary of GDP per capita for the Central Asian countries:

Country	GDP (PPP adjusted) in 1991	GDP (PPP adjusted) in 2016	Increase (%) from 1991 to 2016
Kazakhstan	11,542.6	23,419.9	102.9
Kyrgyzstan	3,149.9	3,292.0	4.5
Uzbekistan	2,991.4	6,038.9	101.9

Data: World Bank's World Development Indicators

As can be seen from the table above, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have managed to more than double their GDP per capita since their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, while Kyrgyzstan's GDP per capita has only increased slightly in the same time frame. These figures give a rough idea of the economic success that the different Central Asian regimes have attained, but looking at GDP on its own is too simplistic for the purpose of assessing how successful a leader has been. Firstly, the seeming success of Kazakhstan can largely be attributed to oil, which has been the country's major driver of economic development since independence. Also, the meaning of GDP in a socialist country like the Soviet Union and a largely capitalist country like modern Kazakhstan is quite different. In a socialist country with a planned economy, the GDP is unlikely to accurately represent the value of the economy, as the production of goods is not motivated by the market, but rather dictated from above. Furthermore, power was highly centralized in the Soviet Union, and therefore the spoils from the economies of each region, including the then Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, were often going directly to Moscow, making pre-independence GDP figures for these countries inflated. Such "biases of all GDP estimates for transition economies probably overstate the extent of the initial recession" (Pomfret: 2005, p.861), resulting in GDP comparisons being of limited usefulness. This is why the comparison of GDP per capita and its growth since independence only acts as a heuristic starting point for the analysis, which will encompass a wide range of economic and social factors from poverty levels to migration statistics.

Economic indicators like Gross Domestic Product and Gross National Income are useful because they give results that are directly comparable over countries and time, and do not depend on subjective assessment. In contrast, reliable measures of citizens' life satisfaction are hard to come by in authoritarian regimes. Questionnaire results are likely

to be unreliable, as criticising the regime is often severely punished. It is possible to mediate this reluctance to answer honestly through ensuring that respondents can answer anonymously, which is why some data provided by international organizations can be useful. The problem of dubious reliability is also mediated as a result of the cross-country comparison: even if the citizens of authoritarian regimes are likely to avoid voicing open criticism of the regime, it is reasonable to assume that they are similarly reluctant to do so in a wide range of authoritarian regimes. This is why the World Values Survey data will be used in the analysis to estimate roughly how satisfied the citizens of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are with their country's political system and their own economic well-being.

It is also possible to find more easily measurable proxies for the ability of a regime to provide a satisfactory living standard to its citizens. One such measure that will be utilized in the analysis is migration: roughly speaking, a country can be thought of as a desirable place to live if it attracts migrants, while a regime that is unable to provide adequate opportunities for its citizenry is likely to experience higher levels of emigration. As a result of limitations on the freedom of movement by both the country of origin and the destination country, emigration is not possible for all those who wish to leave, especially in highly repressive regimes. In the case of the Central Asian countries, however, looking at outward migration can be especially useful, as the ease of movement between the former members of the Soviet Union is similar across the board. It has been possible, for example, for citizens of the former Soviet Union to move to Russia without a visa, a reality reflected in the high number of Central Asian guest workers in Russian cities (Roudik 2013). While obtaining accurate figures of the number of these guest workers and their countries of origin is difficult, the available data can still provide a useful insight into the readiness of Central Asians to seek a better life away from their home country. In addition, data on remittances that these guest workers send back to their home countries can show how dependent the regimes are on payments coming from abroad.

The aforementioned measures of success: economic prosperity and citizen satisfaction, are central to the wellbeing of the public, but they are not the only ways in which the success of a regime can be measured. In addition to looking at regime success from the point of view of the population, as is the case with such measures, it is possible to evaluate it in a more leader-focused manner. If Bueno de Mesquita et al.'s (2003) selectorate theory is to be believed, for example, it is possible to disentangle prosperity from

successful authoritarian leadership, as alternative strategies producing inferior economic outcomes can be more conducive to the leader's ultimate goal of staying in power. The main dependent variable in this case is regime durability: the length of time that a leader or a regime can hold onto power. This will be the main dependent variable when addressing authoritarian success in this paper, while economic prosperity and citizen satisfaction are evaluated to the extent that they have instrumental value towards this goal. While selecting regime stability as the main determinant of authoritarian success is somewhat controversial from an ethical perspective, the purpose of this paper is not to make moral or ethical judgements, but instead seek to assess authoritarian success from as objective a position as possible. From this perspective, regime durability is the most important variable, as any authoritarian leader can rationally be expected to hold onto power for as long as possible.

Taking regime durability as the main indication of secure leadership in the Central Asian context would have been problematic until recently, since the three countries in question had mostly been ruled by "presidents for life". Some leadership changes have taken place, however, for example as a result of the tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and the death of president Karimov in Uzbekistan in 2016. Addressing the reasons that lead to regime change in Kyrgyzstan will be one of the main focuses of this paper, as the failure of president Akayev to hold onto power in 2005 can be seen as a result of major shortcomings in his ability to effectively employ authoritarian governance strategies. Following up on the developments in Uzbekistan after the change in leadership will also provide deeper insight into the ways in which authoritarian regimes can overcome the challenges posed by the death of a strongman. It is still too early to say how well Kazakhstan's authoritarian regime will overcome the challenge of leadership change, presented by Nursultan Nazarbayev's decision to step down from the presidency in the spring of 2019. The increased frequency and intensity of public demonstrations in the country since then (Radio Free Europe: 2019) certainly suggests that Nazarbayev overestimated his popularity and ability to settle his own succession. The implications of his resignation will provide an interesting case study for future research, but are unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.

When it comes to analysing the authoritarian decision-making patterns and governance strategies in Central Asia, official government documents and reports by international organisations will be studied to determine their policy focuses. The post-independence

history and politics of these countries will also be explored using secondary sources like books and scholarly articles. In order to assess economic performance, political stability, and public perceptions of the regimes data from organizations like the World Bank, the United Nations and the World Values Survey will be utilized. A comparative case study approach, based on the existing theories on authoritarian success, will then be employed in order to identify reasons for the differing outcomes in the three Central Asian countries under scrutiny.

d) Logic of Analysis

Following the introduction, this paper will continue with an exploration into the existing theories on authoritarian regime durability and economic outcomes in autocracies. The theoretical discussion will focus on the different factors that are commonly thought to produce stability in autocracies: economic performance, nominally democratic institutions and governance strategies like repression and co-optation. The possibility of cultivating authoritarian legitimacy is also considered before some conclusions are drawn for the analysis section in mind.

Following the theory section, the paper will provide a detailed case study into the ways that these theoretical findings are exemplified in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The analysis will start with an exploration into the recent history of the Central Asian countries, as well as their current economic and political situation in more detail, establishing similarities and differences in the way they are governed and in the measurable outcomes that these governance approaches have led to. The analysis will conclude with an exploration of the 2005 and 2010 leadership changes in Kyrgyzstan, seeking to uncover the reasons behind these failures of authoritarian governance.

II. Theory: How to define authoritarian success?

The success of a regime can be evaluated through various variables, such as economic prosperity, regime stability and influence in world affairs. The emphasis put on any given indicator of success depends on a set of assumptions regarding the leader's motivation. While it might be tempting to take economic performance as the main determinant of success – it is, after all, one of the easiest to measure with all the comparative data readily available from international organizations – it is not necessarily the most accurate one when it comes to *authoritarian* success specifically. This is because it is not entirely clear whether the best possible economic performance is conducive to the dictator's more fundamental goal: that of maintaining power as long as possible (de Mesquita et al. 2003). While there might be occasional “enlightened despots” who genuinely seek to modernize their country and then relinquish power in favour of a democratic process, the more general trend in authoritarianism seems to go along with Lord Acton's famous saying: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. Once an autocrat has gotten used to the benefits of wielding power, therefore, he or she is extremely unlikely to surrender it voluntarily.

The different standards of success for democrats and autocrats are also reflected in the academic literature on regime types and their effects. Studies that focus on democracies or comparisons between democratic and authoritarian regimes tend to emphasise the better economic performance of democratic countries as compared with autocracies, as well as the better living standards that democracies tend to provide for their citizens (Sen: 1999, Przeworski and Limongi: 1997) Studies on different types of authoritarian regimes, on the other hand, tend to focus on regime stability and reign length of individual autocrats (Geddes: 1999, Gandhi and Przeworski: 2007). As this paper focuses specifically on authoritarian success and failure, the main determinant of success will be regime stability and durability. This does not mean, however, that other measures such as economic performance or the life satisfaction of the population do not matter, as they do affect the stability of a regime and thus the prospects of the autocrat to stay in power. One of the main research tasks of this paper is indeed to shed light on the ways in which economic performance – something that can be seen as a measure of success in itself – affects the stability of an authoritarian regime. In addition to exploring the rather complicated relationship between economic performance and regime stability, this paper

will also address authoritarian governance strategies and their impact on the outcomes that an autocracy is likely to produce.

a) Does economic success impede or strengthen autocrats?

There is no consensus in the existing scholarship regarding the relationship between economic performance and regime stability in autocracies. On the one hand, economic collapse can be seen as a major contributor to instability, as it can drive the population to demonstrate on the streets. Autocracies can also be assumed to be more vulnerable to this threat than democracies, as they do not allow for alternative ways for the people to express their discontent with the regime (Tanneberg et al. 2013, p.115). On the other, autocracies can be thought to be more resilient to economic stagnation, as limited resources only need to be distributed to a small minority of the regime's supporters, not to the population as a whole.

The view of economic success not being important for dictators in their quest to maintain power is advanced by Bueno de Mesquita et al. in their 2003 work *The Logic of Political Survival*. According to the authors, institutional arrangements – most importantly the size of a “winning coalition” needed to acquire and maintain power – affect the utility of striving for economic prosperity. This is because a small winning coalition, which is typical to many autocracies, only requires the distribution of monetary spoils among the key supporters of the regime as private goods, whereas a large winning coalition necessitates the provision of public goods to the population more widely (de Mesquita et al.: 2003, p.37). As it is much less expensive to provide private goods for a select group, the authors suggest that leaders should rationally prefer to have as small a winning coalition as they can (ibid. p.10). Such a small coalition also makes it possible not to strive for economic prosperity – in fact, de Mesquita et al. see policies purposefully leading to economic stagnation as a perfectly rational authoritarian governance strategy (ibid. p.21). This finding that economic success is not always conducive to authoritarian success more generally is supported by a strand of research on democratization, which suggests that countries are much more likely to become democratic as they become more economically developed (Przeworski and Limongi: 1997, p.157). While democratization can be seen as a positive development more generally, it can hardly be seen as an indicator of success for an autocrat, whose ultimate goal is to stay in power for as long as possible.

One of the main problems with de Mesquita et al.'s theory is the insufficient consideration it gives to the masses – those outside of the winning coalition – as they do sometimes step up to influence the political process even in autocracies. As Milan Svobik argues in his 2012 work *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, elite conflicts (those regarding the small winning coalition identified by de Mesquita et al.) form only a part of the challenge to authoritarian survival. In addition to these elite disputes, which Svobik identifies as “the problem of authoritarian power-sharing”, there is “the problem of authoritarian control”, which relates to the population more generally (Svobik: 2012, p.2). While distributing private goods to the members of the small winning coalition might go a long way in solving the problem of power-sharing, it does not help to address the issue of authoritarian control over the masses. This suggests that purposeful economic stagnation might not be as rational a strategy as de Mesquita et al. seem to suggest, as unless the people receive some economic benefits from the regime, they may end up demanding changes in a forceful manner. There are, of course, ways in which autocrats can try to deal with such challenges that arise from popular discontent, including political concessions and different forms of repression that are discussed next.

b) Co-optation vs. coercion

When it comes to the ways in which autocrats deal with challenges to their authority, arising from both within their inner circle and the masses, they have two main options: coercion and co-optation. Both of these strategies are necessary to some extent, but the emphasis differs from one regime to the next, and also relates closely to the debate on the importance of economic performance. This is because some forms of co-optation – or buying off the opposition – are only possible on a large scale if the regime is at least moderately economically successful, or has an alternative source of revenue, such as oil or other natural resources. The literature on the relationship between oil reserves and regime durability indeed suggests that oil-rich autocracies remain stable for longer periods of time, as the easily available proceeds allow for buying off support when needed (Crespo Cuaresma et al.: 2011, p.506). When this is not the case, the dictator needs to do one of two things: establish institutional channels of co-optation, or increase their reliance on coercive measures. But which focus is more conducive to the autocrat's ultimate goal to maintain power?

Much of the literature on authoritarian survival suggests that both the problems of authoritarian control and power-sharing can be mitigated through institutionalised means of co-optation, such as political parties and legislatures. This is because such institutions, while not being genuinely democratic, nonetheless provide an avenue for “coordinating elections and organizing the masses” (Ezrow and Frantz: 2011, p.2), which helps overcome the problem of authoritarian control. The same institutions also help to “co-opt elites by facilitating power-sharing deals and manage elite conflicts by distributing the spoils of power” (ibid. p.2), which helps to maintain the crucial support of the winning coalition. Quantitative evidence also supports this finding that co-optation through state institutions increases the dictator’s chances of survival (Gandhi and Przeworski: 2007), and that military dictators, who have a support base in the army rather than a legislature or a party apparatus, are forced to cede power more quickly than other types of autocrats (Geddes: 1999).

While the creation of these pseudo-democratic institutions can at first seem counterintuitive, as they necessitate relinquishing some degree of power, they can be essential in making the autocrat’s commitment to a power sharing deal credible. This is crucial, as the leader’s supporters will only stay loyal as long as they can reasonably expect to receive the benefits promised to them as a part of the power-sharing arrangement (Magaloni: 2008, p.716). A more straightforward form of co-optation – that of the leader simply offering monetary rewards to his supporters – does not help to overcome the commitment problem inherent in an authoritarian power-sharing scheme, as the risk of defection is too high (ibid. p.719). While this might generally be the case, oil-rich autocrats seem to be an exception, as they have monopolistic powers over a sufficient amount of resources to buy off competitors in any case (Crespo Cuaresma et al.: 2011, p. 507). The analysis section of this paper will focus more closely on the role that oil plays in Central Asian politics, as the presence of considerable oil wealth is a factor that differentiates Kazakhstan from its less resource-rich neighbours.

When co-optation is not possible, or is not practiced for some other reason, the autocrat needs to rely on the use of force to maintain his position. Even though harsh repression might at first seem like an effective way to counter opposition – it does, after all, considerably raise the stakes of rising up against the ruler – there are several problems with an approach that relies too heavily on outright coercion. First of all, coercion is costly, as its threat needs to be made credible through continuous and wide-ranging

observation and sanctioning of misconduct (Wintrobe: 1990, p.851). This can only be achieved through effective, loyal security forces whose upkeep costs a lot and who must also be either co-opted or intimidated into cooperation. Secondly, harsh coercive measures may result in accumulation of grievances that end up corroding the already weak basis of legitimacy in autocracies, thus providing a motivating factor for the population to pursue regime change more forcibly (Tanneberg et al. 2013, p.116).

Harsh repression, therefore, does not seem like an optimally successful authoritarian governance strategy, but “softer” forms of coercion are often necessary alongside co-optation strategies to maintain stability. These subtler ways of making the population aware of the risks involved in contesting the regime are crucial in undermining the opposition’s morale as well as their potential to organize effectively (ibid. p. 119). Unlike the more visible, outright forms of coercion, “soft” strategies that include things like administration of short prison sentences and confiscation of opponents’ financial resources do not carry a similarly high risk of producing public outcry, and are thus more likely to be conducive to authoritarian survival in the long term (Schatz: 2009, p. 207). The analysis section of this paper will assess the degree to which the Central Asian leaders have relied on coercion vs. co-optation, and to what ends. This will include an exploration into the more specific coercion and co-optation strategies adopted by the leaders, as well as the effects that these choices have had on the power position of each autocrat.

c) Authoritarian legitimacy?

While the most common way of thinking about political legitimacy today is closely linked to the democratic ideal of everyone being able to play a part in the political process, it is entirely possible to envision an alternative, authoritarian form of legitimacy. As Beetham states in his 1991 work *The Legitimation of Power*, power can be considered legitimate when:

- i. it conforms to established rules
- ii. the rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate, and
- iii. there is evidence of consent by the subordinate to the particular power relation (Beetham: 1991, p.16)

This definition does not necessarily presuppose democracy, as the people may have other priorities that they value over democratic participation. It can be argued, for example, that populations in developing states with no history of meaningful democratic institutions are prepared to trade political rights for material well-being (Tanneberg et al. 2011, p.124). Thus, linking to the earlier discussion on economic performance, authoritarian regimes can be thought to be legitimate as long as they continue to produce favourable economic outcomes to their citizens. Alongside (or instead of) economic performance, even political stability on its own can be enough to generate a degree of legitimacy, especially if a country has experienced a lot of turmoil in its recent past (Cummings: 2012, p.69).

One of the main problems in determining whether an authoritarian regime enjoys true legitimacy is the difficulty of observing consent. As Beetham (1991, p.27) himself acknowledges, the mere fact that people act in a way that would suggest consent does not always mean that it is present. Instead, people have other reasons to comply with the autocrat's orders, including self-interest in wishing to avoid the possible sanctions that go along with disobedience. Here we return to the debate over the utility of coercion – the greater the threat of coercion, the more likely people are to comply even in the absence of legitimacy. On the other hand, as coercion is always costly, it is in the interest of both the autocrat and the people to seek to establish a legitimate power relation that makes overt coercion unnecessary. As Beetham states, a government that has lost legitimacy “now has only one line of defence, that of force; and it can therefore collapse very rapidly if coercion is insufficient or people believe that those in power have lost the will to use it.” (1991, p.28)

Due to the cost of coercion, it is necessary for authoritarian regimes to seek legitimacy in different ways, in both economic performance and more identity-centred factors. According to von Soest and Grauvogel (2017), authoritarian leaders draw upon six different types of legitimacy claims: foundational myths, ideology and personalism are identity-based legitimation factors, whereas procedures, performance and international engagement focus on more tangible outcomes of the incumbent's rule. All authoritarian regimes are likely to rely on more than one of these claims, but the emphasis on each one differs according to circumstances. The respective importance of each legitimation factor in each of the three countries under investigation is explored further in the analysis section.

The question of legitimacy is to some extent linked to the discussion on co-optation as an authoritarian governance strategy, as it deals with similar kinds of provisions: economic rewards for cooperation with the regime. The difference, however, is that legitimacy goes deeper – it presupposes a wide-ranging agreement with the justifications that the autocrat provides for his power, not just cynical self-interest of taking whatever rewards are offered as they are the best that one can hope for in a suboptimal situation. Looking for ways to evaluate the extent to which the Central-Asian autocrats enjoy legitimacy and to which extent they merely intimidate or bribe their subordinates into submission will be one of the main tasks in the following analysis part of this paper, and will help to address the effects that political legitimacy has on regime stability and therefore on authoritarian success.

d) Conclusions from the theory section

Based on the literature review presented above, it can be expected that the relatively good economic performance of Kazakhstan makes it more stable than the other Central-Asian countries under investigation, as the better financial situation gives the Kazakh leadership more choice in terms of selecting co-optation and coercion strategies. While the literature is conflicted about the effects of economic success on authoritarian regime stability more generally, the importance of oil and other resource wealth on facilitating the creation and maintenance of co-optation networks is reasonably well established. As the basis of success for the Kazakh economy lies in oil, the regime should be even more stable than similarly prosperous autocracies with more diversified economies. Correspondingly, the weaker economic performance of Kyrgyzstan, and to some extent Uzbekistan, should make these countries more unstable, as their leaders have more restricted options when it comes to co-optation.

Looking at the notable cases of authoritarian failure in the region, including Kyrgyz leadership changes in 2005 and 2010 and the bloody Andijan protests in Uzbekistan in 2010, this paper will also seek to find explanations for such failures, guided by the literature presented above. Thus, the economic stagnation and corresponding erosion of legitimacy, as well as inadequate use of co-optation and coercion strategies are expected to have played a significant part in these failures. Similarly, the paper will look at instances of authoritarian success, such as the smooth leadership change in Uzbekistan in

2016 and seek to explain them in a similar vein. The comparative case study approach that is utilised in the analysis will hopefully help to expand the theoretical discussions above, as context often matters a great deal in the social sciences. Because of this context-dependency, all findings are not expected to follow from the theoretical conclusions in a straightforward manner. Instead, alternative explanations for both authoritarian success and failure in the three countries under consideration will likely be discovered in the analysis.

III. Methodology: Comparative case study of three Central Asian countries

Following on from the theoretical findings presented above, the analysis section of this paper will explore both the economic and social realities in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as the specific governance strategies that the leaders of each country have adopted. The purpose of the analysis is to identify both the similarities and – even more crucially – the differences that have led to distinct outcomes in the three countries under examination.

The analysis will begin with a comparison of economic and social realities, including both financial and demographic data. This section will provide a background for the rest of the analysis, as different financial realities are likely reflected in the array of choices that autocratic leaders have when choosing between governance strategies. In addition to purely numerical indicators, the limited selection of available survey data on Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is studied to gain insight into the views that the citizens of these countries hold on their governments. The impact of both economic realities and these public opinion indicators are then discussed in relation to the legitimacy question posed in the theory section, with the purpose of uncovering whether performance-based legitimacy exists in any of the three countries.

After the economic comparisons, the paper will move to governance strategies. The search for authoritarian legitimacy in Central Asia will continue with a discussion of foundational myths and narrative building that leaders have attempted in the region. The usefulness of seeking legitimation from the public is also discussed in contrast to the need

to merely satisfy a key group of elite supporters in alignment with de Mesquita et al.'s selectorate theory.

Moving the focus from the population level to elite networks, co-optation is discussed in connection to the concept of neo-patrimonialism, a mixture of formal and informal patronage networks that are often considered an integral part of Central Asian societies. The focus will then move to institutional arrangements, such as political parties and the presence of international organisations. The emphasis will be on determining whether political institutions are effectively utilized by the Central Asian leaders as facilitators of credible power sharing deals, along with Gandhi and Przeworski's argument presented above. Civil society and non-governmental organisations, both international and domestic, are also discussed as possible counter forces to (and therefore de-stabilisers of) the official order.

Following the discussion on co-optation networks, the paper will take a look at the other side of authoritarian governance strategies: repression. The range and extent of repressive methods employed by the leaders of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is explored and the utility and price of suppression discussed. Some conclusions will be drawn on the relative usefulness of co-optation and coercion in the Central Asian context.

After these more general comparisons, a case study of authoritarian failure in Central Asia will be presented. This will encompass the two leadership changes in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and 2010, as a result of which two increasingly authoritarian leaders lost their power. The findings established earlier in the analysis section will guide the study of these power transfers with the intent of finding out which background factors (economy, public opinion, civil society) contributed to the volatile situation in Kyrgyzstan, as well as which governance strategies (co-optative and coercive) were insufficiently applied. The breakdown of autocratic power in Kyrgyzstan is also contrasted with examples from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan; the riots in Zhanaozen and Andijan begun in a very similar way to the demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan but did not lead to the removal of Nazarbayev or Karimov. A set of conclusions will follow the discussion on Kyrgyzstan's power transfers, summarising the findings of this paper and suggesting directions for future research.

IV. Analysis, part 1: Economic indicators and public opinion

The similarities of the three Central Asian states under investigation allow for an excellent “most similar” case study set-up. At the onset of independence in 1991, all three were reluctant to secede from the Soviet Union. This was clearly demonstrated in the March 1991 referendum held in all Soviet republics: according to the vote, more than 90 percent of the people in all Central Asian states wished for their republic to remain in the Union (Cummings: 2012, p.52). The lack of enthusiasm for independence also affected the limited extent of change in political structures immediately after independence. As Cummings puts it, “the old Soviet container almost seamlessly metamorphosed into one of a new national state” in almost all of the republics (ibid, p.61). Only Kyrgyzstan experienced a more significant break from the past with its post-independence leadership: unlike in all of the other Central Asian states, the new Kyrgyz president, Askar Akaev, was not a former Communist Party First Secretary (ibid, p.61). Along with its neighbours, however, the Kyrgyz political system remained largely centralized and presidential - even after leadership changes in 2005 and 2010. While centralized government and reluctant independence are common to all the three countries under investigation, there are many other factors that distinguish them from one another. One of the most crucial ones is economic performance, the role of which will be examined in the following section.

a) Comparative economic performance since the collapse of the Soviet Union

This part of the paper will assess the economic performance of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan since the collapse of socialism and gaining of independence in 1991. The purpose of the section is to establish the economic framework that defines and limits the options available for each leader; while the economy itself is not assumed to be the main determinant of authoritarian success or failure, it will undoubtedly influence the array of governance strategies that a leader can adopt. As discussed in the theory section, solid economic performance affords the leader with more opportunities for co-optation, as there is more money to be divided among supporters. At the same time, economic performance can provide a degree of legitimacy to the regime, as performance-based legitimation factors are some of the most common ones in any type of authoritarian regime (von Soest

and Grauvogel: 2017). On the other hand, as de Mesquita et al. state, large-scale co-optation of the masses might not be necessary for an autocrat to hold on to power, since only a small proportion of the population, the so-called winning coalition, needs to be co-opted. In order to assess the explanatory power of de Mesquita et al.'s selectorate theory, it is first necessary to establish the comparative economic performance of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan during the post-Soviet era.

Firstly, this section will investigate the general policy directions that each one of the three countries has followed since independence. This will be followed by an exploration into various economic indicators that establish how successfully the economies of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have performed in this period. In addition to simple GDP-comparisons, briefly presented in the introduction, this section will include a discussion on poverty levels, remittances from guest workers and natural resource wealth, all of which can be expected to have significant implications both for the population and the regime. Popular perception of each regime is further explored in the following section, which focuses on survey data from the World Values Survey and the insights it may give into the opinions of Central Asian citizens. Together these two sections set out a background for further discussion on the effects that economic performance and public opinion may have on regime stability.

b) Different directions of economic policy

Since seceding from the USSR in 1991, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have all gradually moved towards a market economy, although with varying degrees of success. The early 1990s were a difficult period for all three newly independent countries, as they did not have separate economic systems prior to independence. Nearly all economic activity was coordinated by the central leadership in Moscow. This was especially true for Kazakhstan, as its vast mineral wealth was wielded by the Soviet government in a way that prevented the creation of complete production chains within the republic. Instead, the oil and other raw materials produced in Kazakhstan were often refined in other parts of the Union (Pomfret: 2010, p. 861). The same was also true for Uzbekistan, although instead of oil the country produced mostly cotton for the needs of the Soviet economy (Sakal: 2017, p.51).

Since gaining independence, Kazakhstan has sought to privatize its industries and to establish functional trade relationships with Russia, China and the West. Although the country's economy is still highly dependent on oil, the government has worked towards diversification with some success, earning international recognition for its economic development. Even as early as 2008 the relatively strong economic performance and efforts at privatization prompted the former UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher to write a foreword to president Nazarbayev's book, *The Kazakhstan Way*, in praise of the autocrat's success in these areas (Nazarbayev: 2008, pp.ix-x). Nonetheless, oil remains the most important single determinant of the country's economic success story, a fact that Nazarbayev himself acknowledges in his book (ibid. p.112).

The path taken by Uzbekistan has differed significantly from that of Kazakhstan. Since gaining independence in 1991, the Uzbek government has pursued a policy of economic independence (*mustaqillik*), which seeks to decrease the country's dependence on Russia and other influential countries (Sakal: 2017, p.49). Especially during the 1990s, emphasis was placed on self-sufficiency in key sectors, such as food, textiles and metallurgy (Shadmanov: 2010, p.43). As with Kazakhstan's different, more internationally oriented approach, Uzbekistan has successfully doubled its purchasing power adjusted GDP since 1991, which attests to the success of Karimov's economic policy. Nevertheless, GDP per capita still remains far below that of Kazakhstan, reflecting a lower starting point, a larger population and more limited natural resources.

As the poorest of the three, Kyrgyzstan has not been able to rely on natural resources or domestic industrial production as key building blocks of its post-independence economy. Instead, the Kyrgyz regime has had to resort to privatization of public assets in exchange for foreign aid from the Bretton Woods institutions (Cummings: 2010, p.126). The initial drive towards liberalisation did not produce the desired outcomes, however, as the country's economy has remained largely stagnant. This lack of success has also led to a reversal of liberal reform, as a result of which the Kyrgyz government is arguably often acting more like a rent-seeker than a facilitator of the private sector (Childress: 2003).

While the change from a planned economy towards a market one has provided new opportunities to a relatively small business elite throughout Central Asia, it has not necessarily benefitted ordinary citizens. The Soviet regime provided universal education and access to healthcare, both of which became more uncertain after independence

(Cummings: 2012, p.123). Neither has a strong middle class been formed in either Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan, and only to a limited degree in Kazakhstan, where large disparities exist between different regions (ibid, p.124). This uneven and incomplete economic development is reflected in poverty and migration statistics, which are discussed further in the following section.

c) Poverty and outward migration

The economic success of a regime, even an authoritarian one, inevitably effects the population in multiple ways. When looking at the World Bank statistics for the three Central Asian countries in question, this can perhaps most clearly be seen in the poverty rates of the respective countries. The two tables below display the poverty rates for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in a selection of years. The first uses a cut-off point of \$5.50 per day, whereas the second is based on a lower cut-off point of \$3.20 per day, thus showing the proportion of people living in even more abject poverty.

Table 2.1. Poverty headcount ratio at \$5.50 per day

Country	1996	1998	2000	2001	2003	2007	2015	2017
Kazakhstan	56.6%	-	-	64.9%	56.3%	24%	8.1%	8.6%
Kyrgyzstan	-	78.1%	94.2%	94.3%	93.0%	71.1%	70.0%	66.4%
Uzbekistan	-	87.3%	96.5%	-	96.4%	-	-	-

Data: World Bank: World Development Indicators

Table 2.2. Poverty headcount ratio at \$3.20 per day

Country	1996	1998	2000	2001	2003	2007	2015	2017
Kazakhstan	24.6%	-	-	32.3%	22.8%	2.9%	0.4%	0.4%
Kyrgyzstan	-	53.1%	77.6%	72.8%	69.1%	36.0%	23.4%	19.6%
Uzbekistan	-	65.5%	86.7%	-	86.4%	-	-	-

Data: World Bank: World Development Indicators

As can be seen from the tables, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty (for less than \$3.20 per day) has drastically decreased in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan since the start of the 21st century. In Kazakhstan the figure is close to zero, however, whereas in Kyrgyzstan almost a fifth of the population fell below this line as late as in the

year 2017. When it comes to Uzbekistan, the lack of data prevents an accurate comparison, as 2003 is the last year for which the poverty headcount is available. The figures for that year, however, are even more dismal than they are for Kyrgyzstan, which suggests that poverty remains a major issue in Uzbekistan as well. The lack of data might also indicate the regime's unwillingness to provide international organisations with inconvenient information about its failure to provide for the basic needs of its population.

This data from the World Bank clearly demonstrates that poverty has been an endemic problem in the three Central Asian countries all through the 1990s and early 2000s - and continues to be one in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to this day. Only Kazakhstan has managed to reduce poverty levels to single digits, and even this has happened as recently as 2010s. Neither does the absence of absolute poverty mean that resources are equitably distributed, as significant income inequalities remain a feature of all Central Asian economic systems.

In addition to poverty levels, net migration can be considered a risk indicator for regime failure, as the capability of the government to provide for the basic needs of its population can be thought to be compromised when large masses of people choose to leave the country voluntarily. There are, of course, problems in studying the phenomenon of labour migration as well, as the exact numbers of migrants from each country are close to impossible to uncover. This is due to the fact that millions of the workers moving to Russia from the Central Asian countries do so illegally (Morgunova: 2014, p. 40). Most of these migrants are involved in unskilled, poorly paid work, which the Russians themselves refuse to perform. The migration is mostly driven by economic factors, as even the poor pay and working conditions that these migrants face in Russia are more than what their home countries can offer (Molchanov: 2013, p. 90). Together with the data on the prevalence of poverty, presented above, the extent of low-skilled migration to Russia can be seen as an indication of how well the regime in question is meeting the basic needs of the population.

Since data on the number of migrants that decide to emigrate is hard to come by, the relative size of the emigrant population can be approximated based on the remittances that guest workers send to their countries of origin. At the same time, measuring remittances as a proportion of GDP can be used to illustrate the dependence of these

countries on foreign monetary flows. The World Bank provides an estimate of the share of GDP that originates from such remittances, summarised in the table below:

Table 2.3. Personal Remittances, received (percentage of GDP)

Country	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Kazakhstan	0.103%	0.095%	0.152%	0.086%	0.103%	0.201%	0.345%
Kyrgyzstan	16.692%	23.799%	26.41%	30.754%	30.032%	29.276%	33.222%
Uzbekistan	5.179%	10.175%	7.266%	10.986%	9.241%	3.676%	15.069%

Data: World Bank: World Development Indicators

As can be seen from the data, the Kyrgyz economy is by far the most dependant on foreign remittances, which made up around a third of the GDP in many years. Remittances also formed a significant part of the Uzbek economy, as between 3.5 and 15% of the GDP was generated from them between 2006 and 2018. The Kazakh economy, on the other hand, does not depend on remittances in any substantive way. This further attests to the success of the Kazakh economy, which has indeed turned into a magnet for migrant workers within the region (Cummings, 2011: 128). But what drives these regionally superior economic outcomes? One of the main explanatory variables - abundant natural resource wealth - is discussed in the following section.

d) The role of oil and other natural resources

Two of the countries that this paper focuses on, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, have significant natural resource wealth, while Kyrgyzstan does not. Especially Kazakhstan, with its large oil reserves, benefits significantly from having a steady source of revenue that is largely monopolized by the state. The effects that this highly lucrative natural resource – or the lack of it – has on the three countries’ economies, and therefore on their governments, cannot be underestimated. As discussed in the theory section, the economy has a significant effect on the leader in an autocratic state, as a large state budget can facilitate the co-optation of both elites and the masses. As oil wealth is often a large part of such budget, its effects on regime durability should not be taken too lightly.

The tables below summarise the share of GDP that three natural resource types: oil, gas and minerals, account for in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Table 2.4. Oil rents (percentage of GDP)

Country	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
Kazakhstan	23.7%	18.4%	14.2%	19.4%	14.3%	6.7%	10.2%
Kyrgyzstan	0.9%	0.4%	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
Uzbekistan	5.2%	4.1%	1.3%	2.9%	2.4%	0.7%	0.9%

Data: World Bank: World Development Indicators

Table 2.5. Natural gas rents (percentage of GDP)

Country	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
Kazakhstan	1.1%	1.2%	2.1%	1.5%	1.3%	0.9%	1.2%
Kyrgyzstan	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Uzbekistan	13.2%	18.5%	16.3%	14.2%	13.1%	5.3%	6.6%

Data: World Bank: World Development Indicators

Table 2.6. Mineral rents (percentage of GDP)

Country	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
Kazakhstan	3.3%	5.6%	3.1%	4.3%	3.9%	2.6%	3.9%
Kyrgyzstan	3.1%	3.3%	7.5%	11.5%	8.6%	6.9%	8.2%
Uzbekistan	4.6%	6.9%	6.8%	9.2%	6.7%	4.7%	7.1%

Data: World Bank: World Development Indicators

As can be seen from the World Bank statistics, oil rents constitute a significant proportion of Kazakh GDP, whereas Uzbekistan benefits from both natural gas and mineral rents. In absolute monetary terms Uzbekistan's resources are, of course, more limited than Kazakhstan's, but they nonetheless make up a substantial portion of the state budget. As

for Kyrgyzstan, only minerals account for a significant portion of the budget, but still for far less than the personal remittances examined above. From the autocratic regime's point of view, natural resource rents are more easily monopolised than remittances, which go directly into the economy. The Kyrgyz regime, therefore, does not enjoy the benefits of as many expendable resources as its neighbours.

Readily available resource rents certainly provide the Kazakh and to some extent the Uzbek regime with resources that they can use to sustain patronage networks or even to distribute among the population. On the other hand, excessive reliance on oil makes a regime heavily dependent on the development of oil prices, which can have devastating effects on the economy when these prices are decreasing (Nurseit and Charman:2018, p.27). The negative effects on the economy also affect the political situation, as can be seen in Kazakhstan after the 2008 economic crisis and the subsequent fall in oil prices. When profits from the oil industry fall, there is less money to be divided among the regimes supporters, and especially the population at large. This leads to growing disparities between the rich and the poor as well as between more and less affluent regions, which may ultimately drive people to the streets.

The government, in turn, must take more stringent action against the disaffected population, as observed in the harsh treatment of protestors in Kazakhstan in the aftermath of the economic downturn (Patnaik: 2016, p. 185). The existence of natural resources does not, therefore, necessarily guarantee seamless co-optation of the population with oil money. While the presence of oil does create better opportunities for buying off support in good times, it also makes the regime dependent on fluctuations in oil prices, and alternative strategies are needed to deal with the socio-economic and political consequences of such fluctuations. Nevertheless, the ready availability of oil revenue provides the Kazakh regime with more room of manoeuvre as compared to its less resource rich neighbours, both in terms of co-opting the population as well as the elites.

e) Measuring public opinion in Central Asia - are economic realities reflected in citizens' view of the regime?

While economic indicators can provide some easily comparable and reasonably objective data on the Central Asian countries, they may not translate directly into popular approval or disapproval of each regime. This is also the case with poverty and migration statistics,

as people may retain patriotic attitudes or even support their country's government while living abroad or in less-than-ideal economic circumstances. Data on public opinion is therefore needed to fill in the gaps left by a purely economic analysis.

As expected, it is fairly difficult to find surveys and opinion polls on Kazakh, Kyrgyz or Uzbek public opinion, especially on political questions like satisfaction with the regime. The most comprehensive set of poll data is presented by Inglehart et al. in the World Values Survey of 2014, in which all three countries are included. The data was collected in 2011, a time when Kyrgyzstan had already gone through two leadership changes, whereas both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were still governed by their original post-Soviet presidents.

As mentioned in the theory section of this paper, survey results from authoritarian countries are unlikely to provide a comprehensive insight into how the population actually thinks, as the fear of getting in trouble for professing the "incorrect" opinions can prevent respondents from answering questions honestly. In addition, the organization performing the interviews might not be able to ask certain types of questions in each location. This is also the case with the World Values Survey, as the most politically sensitive questions were not asked in Uzbekistan, the country ranked as the most repressive among the three (Freedom House, 2011). Nonetheless, the survey can provide some interesting insights into the opinions of Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uzbek citizens on multiple topics, including the ways in which they think about political questions. Even unpolitical survey questions can be useful in assessing the degree of support that the people have for the regime, as general life satisfaction and happiness can arguably be affected by perceived legitimacy or quality of governance.

The tables below summarise some of the most interesting findings from the World Values Survey:

Table 2.7. Self-reported happiness in Central Asia

Country	Self-reported happiness, “very happy”	Self-reported happiness, “not very happy”	Mean satisfaction with life (scale 1-10)	Most people can be trusted	Mean satisfaction with financial situation (1-10)
Kazakhstan	31.2%	11.1%	7.23	38.3%	6.05
Kyrgyzstan	36.2%	3.7%	6.96	36.3%	6.38
Uzbekistan	64.5%	3.3%	7.89	13.9%	4.08

Data: World Values Survey: Wave 6, 2010-2014

Table 2.8. Confidence in government and importance of democratic governance

Country	Confidence in the government: “a great deal”	Confidence in the government: “none at all”	Mean importance of living in a democratic country (1-10)	How democratically is the country governed? (1-10, mean)
Kazakhstan	25.5%	6.3%	8.62	6.84
Kyrgyzstan	13.1%	14.3%	7.89	5.97
Uzbekistan	74.9%	0.7%	8.79	-

Data: World Values Survey: Wave 6, 2010-2014

One of the most striking findings from the above is the seeming disconnect between economic prosperity and self-reported happiness. Both the poverty statistics presented in the preceding section and the mean satisfaction with one’s financial situation reported in the survey place Uzbekistan at the bottom among the three, yet the Uzbek respondents reported considerably higher happiness levels than their Kazakh and Kyrgyz neighbours. This suggests that happiness may be found in things independent of the economic realities, such as family or religious conviction.

Another variable where Uzbekistan is the clear outlier is respondents' confidence in the government: While only 13% of Kyrgyz respondents and a quarter of Kazakh ones reported to have a great deal of confidence in their leadership, almost three quarters of Uzbek respondents claimed to be this confident in president Karimov's administration. At the same time, the Uzbeks placed most emphasis on the importance of living in a democratic country - a finding that seems contradictory in the light of Uzbekistan being the most repressive country among the three. When asked whether having a democratic political system would be a good thing for the country, 62.7% of Uzbek respondents maintained that this would be a "very good" thing, whereas only 43.4% of Kazakh and 28.1% of Kyrgyz respondents supported this statement as strongly. Correspondingly, the support for the idea of having a strong leader was weakest in Uzbekistan, where only 17.1% said that this would be very good for the country, as opposed to 27.2% in Kazakhstan and 41.5% in Kyrgyzstan.

The simultaneous support for democratic governance and the Karimov regime suggests one of two things: either the Uzbek respondents were unwilling to profess criticism of the undemocratic regime, or they actually believed the Karimov administration to be reasonably democratic. While the latter may seem counter-intuitive, the control that the Karimov regime had over the media, public discourse and society at large may have led to a situation where a large portion of the population is convinced of Karimov's democratic credentials (Omelicheva: 2016, p.484). Thus, the World Values Survey results may be cautiously interpreted as evidence of the Uzbek regime enjoying at least a certain degree of popular support, and perhaps even legitimacy. This idea will be explored further in a following section on narrative building.

When it comes to Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, a greater deal of dissatisfaction can be stipulated. Even though the country is, according to Freedom House, the least authoritarian of the three, the Kyrgyz respondents were more sceptical of their government's democratic credentials than Kazakh respondents. The greater desire for a strong leader among the Kyrgyz survey subjects also suggests that the economic and political instability in the country has led to the people appreciating stability more than abstract political rights.

f) **Kazakh and Kyrgyz views on government performance**

In addition to the World Values Survey, opinion polls have been performed in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan by the International Republican Institute, a non-profit US organisation focused on democracy promotion. Unfortunately, the most recent Kazakh poll is from 2011, and the organization has not polled the public in Uzbekistan. The surveys on Kazakh and Kyrgyz public opinion allow for useful comparisons, however, as respondents in both countries were asked many of the same questions around the same time in 2010 and 2011.

Some of the results are summarised below:

Table 2.9. The country is heading to the right direction, percentage of respondents answering “yes”

Country	2005	2008	2009	2010	2018
Kazakhstan	90%	67%	74%	77%	-
Kyrgyzstan	45%	52%	63%	28%	56%

Data: International Republican Institute: Public Opinion Surveys on Kyrgyzstan (2011) and Kazakhstan (2010)

One of the largest differences in survey responses can be observed in the respondents’ answer to the question on whether their country is heading to the right or wrong direction. Between 2005 and 2011, the Kyrgyz respondents were far less optimistic than their Kazakh counterparts, with 28 to 63 percent of “right direction” answers in each wave. The views were especially pessimistic in the year 2010, which saw Bakiev’s displacement from power, as only 28 percent of respondents in May and 30 percent in November were satisfied with the direction their country was heading.

In Kazakhstan, the percentage of respondents considering the country to be heading in the right direction fluctuated between 67 percent and 90 percent between 2004 and 2011, dropping to the lowest point during the global recession in August 2008. These results are largely as expected, as Kazakhstan’s better economic situation is likely reflected in the respondents’ firm belief in the future, while the political instability in Kyrgyzstan, especially in 2010, explains why people might be sceptical about the future of their country.

In addition to general economic questions, the 2011 public opinion survey performed in Kazakhstan includes a set of specific questions on president Nazarbayev's performance and the respondents' attitudes towards the 2011 presidential election, upcoming at the time. The results indicate firm support for president Nazarbayev, as only 10 percent of the respondents answered "yes" to the question on whether the president should resign, and a correspondingly high 90 percent approved of Nazarbayev's way of handling his job. Other government institutions did not fare as well, as the police enjoyed the support of just 47 percent of the respondents and the courts had an approval rating of 49 percent.

While most respondents thus supported the president, many also recognized the faults in Kazakh political system: 34 percent of those polled said that a considerable number of people are afraid to openly express their political views, while 11 percent said that they would not vote in the 2011 presidential election. When asked about their reasons for not voting, the majority of those not going to the polls mentioned either their vote not making a difference or not believing that the election will be fair.

Out of Kyrgyz respondents in the September 2011 poll, only 5 percent said they would not vote or had not yet decided to vote in the next election, signalling a higher degree of involvement in politics. The fear of expressing one's political opinion was an important factor in Kyrgyzstan as well, however, as 48 percent in May and 38 percent in September 2011 asserted that many or most people were afraid of openly expressing their political views. The Kyrgyz respondents were also highly sceptical of the way in which the October 2010 parliamentary election was conducted, as only a third of respondents believed it to have been free and fair.

All in all, the opinion polls conducted by the International Republican Institute highlight important differences and commonalities between the views of Kazakh and Kyrgyz populations. The Kazakhstani respondents seemed more confident in the future, whereas the Kyrgyz felt more doubtful about their country's prospects. Trust in president Nazarbayev's leadership was high in 2010, which suggests that he enjoyed a degree of genuine support at that time. Kyrgyz respondents were not asked about the performance of their president in the 2011 poll, as the country was going through an interim presidency. Nonetheless, the fact that the sitting president was forced out both in 2005 and 2010 suggests that the Kyrgyz were less than satisfied with their leadership. As for Uzbekistan, the lack of polling data again demonstrates the iron grip that the regime has over the

society. Even if there was dissatisfaction, it cannot be measured, let alone voiced openly without fear of repression.

g) Effects of economic performance and public opinion on regime stability

While poor economic performance, high poverty rates or negative net migration may not lead to regime failure on their own, they can be expected to affect the legitimacy of an autocratic government. This is especially likely to be the case if that legitimacy is largely derived from a social contract where the population is prepared to sacrifice their democratic rights for stability and economic well being. The trade-off between civil liberties and material wealth is often emphasised by the Central Asian leaders themselves, as their claim to power largely rests on the presupposition that they provide better economic outcomes than other leaders or regimes. If the autocratic leaders then fail to deliver on the promise of material improvement, a major building block of the regime's credibility disappears (Patnaik, 2016, p.182).

Also, judging by the World Values Survey data on Central Asians' attitudes towards democracy and political rights, the people's willingness to trade off democracy for economic benefits can be questioned. Especially in Uzbekistan, the most repressive of the three countries examined here, respondents saw a democratic system preferable over a strong leader. The whole notion of "buying off" support and credibility through economic provisions rather than representation could therefore be questioned. At the same time, the Uzbek respondents also expressed more confidence in their government than either Kazakhs or Kyrgyz, which suggests that they may already consider Uzbekistan a democratic country. Despite the lack of political rights and the extent of oppression, it is possible that state propaganda and nominally democratic institutions and procedures have convinced a significant portion of the population of the Karimov regime's democratic credentials. The perceived achievements of the autocrat, rather than just the quantifiable ones, therefore, seem to significantly affect authoritarian legitimacy.

Looking at the data from the World Values Survey produces many further questions about the way in which the Central Asian leaders have been able to generate popular support – or at least the appearance of having such support. It is practically impossible to distinguish

the extent to which the favourable answers are a result of fear and self-censorship, as opposed to genuine approval of the regimes. Some indication can be found, however, through exploring other legitimization strategies that the Central Asian leaders have employed. These will be explored in the governance strategies section, which explores the possibility of the presidents enjoying legitimacy through narrative creation, not just based on economic performance.

In addition, the extent to which ordinary people's opinions matter in connection to regime stability is a point of contestation. If we were to believe de Mesquita et al.'s thesis about the negligible importance of providing public goods in a country where the winning coalition is small, poor economic performance should not have a significant impact on the stability of the regime. If, on the other hand, the importance of keeping the population as well as the winning coalition content is higher than the authors suggest, then the widely differing poverty levels and net migration figures can be expected to have a more significant impact on the success of each autocrat. The same is true for public opinion in general: if the population is assumed to have a realistic opportunity and willingness to affect outcomes in an autocratically governed country, then it is vitally important to keep people either satisfied or in check through repression. If, on the other hand, the selectorate theory of de Mesquita et al. is assumed to be correct, more emphasis needs to be placed on the members of the elite. Even in this case, however, economic performance is likely to play a major role, as economic stagnation "undercuts the ability of leaders to maintain their patronage networks" in countries where corruption is widespread (Bunce and Wolchik: 2010, p.49). This point is discussed further in a following section on neopatrimonial and institutional co-optation networks in Central Asia.

Both the population and the elites can be controlled through different governance strategies - mainly various forms of coercion and co-optation - which are discussed in the following section. The availability of different governance strategies depends on the economic performance of the regime, as both co-optation and coercion can be costly. The economic realities established in the above sections are therefore assumed to be reflected in the choices that Central Asian leaders make with regards to either buying off support or using more repressive means to control prospective rivals. The Kazakh leadership with its easy access to oil revenue is therefore expected to use a wider range of co-optation strategies, whereas the Uzbek and Kyrgyz regimes will likely have to rely more on either repression or institutional forms of co-optation.

V. Analysis, part 2: Authoritarian governance strategies in Central Asia

While all three countries under investigation have more or less authoritarian political systems, the degree of repression varies from one country to another. According to international rankings, Kyrgyzstan is the least authoritarian, while Uzbekistan is the most repressive (Freedom House, 2019). Kazakhstan, on the other hand, falls somewhere in between these two, as it is a strong presidential autocracy, but lacks some of the outright forms of oppression present in Uzbekistan. This section of the analysis will assess the effectiveness of these strategies in terms of their contribution towards the ultimate goal of an autocrat: that of staying in power. To achieve this, the ways in which these strategies depend on or themselves affect economic performance, the other main independent variable in this paper, will be assessed. A discussion will also follow on the ways in which these strategies may contribute towards authoritarian legitimacy.

The choice of which governance strategies to adopt will depend on external as well as internal factors. According to Schatz (2006, p.268), Kyrgyzstan's relatively "soft" form of authoritarianism is largely a result of pragmatic decision making by then president Akaev, who calculated that pleasing international organizations by introducing some democratizing reforms would be the most effective way to promote economic development in a resource-poor country. In a similar vein, president Nazarbayev's decision to let international actors play a larger role in Kazakhstan than in neighbouring Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan was largely a result of the need to establish a degree of legitimacy in a rather chaotic post-Soviet setting (*ibid.*). Promoting this image of Kazakhstan as an internationally respected member in the club of independent nations continued to be a key aspect of Nazarbayev's governance strategy till the end of his reign in April 2019. Uzbekistan's Karimov, on the other hand, mainly justified his hold on power through the stabilization argument: he was to be seen as the guarantor of stability, whereas the opposition was portrayed by media as extremists (International Crisis Group, 2016).

The following section will provide a look into the different governance strategies adopted by the Central Asian leaders. Firstly, we will continue exploring the possibility of fostering authoritarian legitimacy through narrative creation. Whereas the above section on the economy focused on procedural legitimation strategies, the following discussion

will explore identity-based factors such as foundational myths and personalism. If the leader can convince the population, through a combination of actions and propaganda, that his hold on power is justified, then he can expect to consolidate his position more effectively (von Soest and Grauvogel: 2017). In a situation where large sections of the population are convinced by this narrative, it may even be possible to argue that the autocrat's rule enjoys a degree of legitimacy.

Even though an autocrat may be able to convince a large portion of the population of his legitimacy, additional governance strategies will be needed to control the remaining elements of society, including competing elites. This is where the two major governance strategies outlined in the literature review – co-optation and coercion – come into play. The most important form of co-optation in the Central Asian setting is arguably the creation of neopatrimonial support networks, which mix elements of formal and informal power. These, as well as more institutionalised forms of co-optation such as political parties and legislatures, will be compared below. Finally, the role of coercion is discussed as a back-up mechanism of autocratic order in Central Asia.

a) Soft Power: Creating a narrative

In addition to economic performance, legitimacy can be sought through identity-based factors, such as ideology, foundational myths and personalism (von Soest and Grauvogel: 2017). Central Asia, with its long history of centralized power, first in the clan's patriarch and then in the communist regime, provides an ideal setting for creating the myth of the strong president. It is no wonder, then, that Soviet legitimization slogans like "All power to the Soviets" quickly turned into "All power to the president" during the early 1990s (Atabaki: 1998, p.42). This rallying cry has been especially successful in Kazakhstan, as we saw from the polling data documenting Nazarbayev's popularity. But how has successful narrative creation contributed to this support? And what about the leaders of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan – have they been similarly successful in legitimising their hold on power?

A key explanation for the success of authoritarian leaders lies in their "ability to construct a convincing, hegemonic discourse that is internalized by key social groups and

contributes to regime legitimacy” (Lewis: 2016, p. 421). According to Lewis (ibid., pp.424-5) there are four central pillars to the official narrative in Kazakhstan:

1. Kazakhstan is an island of stability in an unstable world, and this stability needs to be upheld, even if this means sacrificing other values like civil liberties.
2. President Nazarbayev and the state apparatus are guarantors of this stability and prosperity.
3. The state and the people form a coherent unit, move together towards the goal of stability.
4. State is a manager working towards socio-economic goals, thus turning political issues into technical ones.

In the aftermath of the 2011 Zhanaozen riots, Lewis (p.433) argues, the government successfully utilized a high-risk strategy of sending independent bloggers to the site of the crisis. While the bloggers did report on the casualties and discontent, they also helped to frame the situation through the lens of the official narrative, emphasising the socio-economic roots of the protests and the need for a state-led technocratic solution to the underlying issues. Nazarbayev’s tendency to describe the political as merely economic is also evident throughout his book, *The Kazakhstan Way* (2008), in which he justifies his strong hold on power by emphasising how well he has managed to guide the country through a turbulent time and turn it into a regional economic success story. The plausibility of this narrative is further strengthened by the relative economic success of Kazakhstan, leading to a situation where procedural (economic success) and foundational myth (Nazarbayev as the force behind this success) legitimation factors act together to justify the president’s hold on power.

Like Nazarbayev, Uzbekistan’s first president Islam Karimov was portrayed in the media as a guarantor of Uzbekistan’s stability, as contrasted with an opposition full of extremists (International Crisis Group, 2016). In addition to this personalism-based argument, autocratic legitimacy claims in Uzbekistan have largely rested on ethnic identity and tradition (Schatz: 2006, p.269). This has been made possible by the country’s relative ethnic and linguistic uniformity, as contrasted with its more multi-ethnic and linguistic neighbours. The success of Karimov’s narrative building can perhaps best be observed in the reaction to his death. When the president’s life came to an end in 2016, some Uzbek migrant workers in Russia were asked about their feelings towards him, and they expressed deep sadness about his passing – despite the fact that Karimov had previously called migrant workers lazy opportunists (Current Time, 2016). This gives some

indication of the extent to which official government propaganda has been successful in promoting the image of Karimov as the father of the nation, much the same way that Nazarbayev has been portrayed in Kazakhstan.

In Kyrgyzstan, pre-2005 president Akaev utilized inclusive rhetoric towards the Uzbek minority in southern Kyrgyzstan, thus avoiding major ethnic conflict during his time in power and justifying his position as a guarantor of ethnic harmony (Cummings, 2012, p.86). Akaev was less successful, however, in his attempts to legitimise his rule through procedural justifications, as the Kyrgyz economy remained stagnant despite opening to international markets. Neither did his decision to “embrace liberal ideology as a way of anchoring his rule” work in the way he may have planned, as it led to a relatively active civil society that would eventually play a role in challenging the regime that failed to live up to Akaev’s promises of liberalization (ibid, p.64). Akaev’s successor Bakiev, on the other hand, failed on the ethnic identity front of narrative building as well, as he vocally supported the southern Kyrgyz and failed to offer a coherent national identity that would include the Uzbek minority, ultimately contributing to the ethnic violence that erupted in Osh in 2010 (ibid. p.86).

As with economic performance, the Kyrgyz regime has clearly drawn the short straw on narrative building opportunities. The failure of Akaev and Bakiev to legitimize their rule has – to some extent – been a consequence of economic stagnation, as this makes it difficult to seek legitimation in a social contract where the regime provides benefits to the population in exchange for support. Neither were president Akaev’s attempts to foster legitimacy through a democratization narrative successful, as initiatives like “The Democratic Code” and “Kyrgyzstan – Country of Human Rights” were so clearly not based in reality that they only contributed to an increasing sense of disillusionment (Lewis: 2008, p.272). Unlike in Uzbekistan, where the official narrative has been effectively monopolized by the government, Kyrgyzstan’s relatively free press has played a role in pointing out such inconsistencies and thus complicating the creation of a coherent narrative. The ethnic fragmentation of Kyrgyzstan, especially with regards to the Uzbek minority in the South, has also made it impossible to derive legitimacy from a distinctively Kyrgyz national identity. Unlike Nazarbayev, who has successfully promoted a more civic and inclusive form of nationalism, the ousted Kyrgyz presidents failed to provide a convincing uniting narrative.

b) Co-optation: Neopatrimonialism and political institutions

The societies of Central Asia have often been described as neopatrimonial, suggesting that they combine elements of traditional patrimonial societies with modern, legal-rational bureaucracy (Laruelle, 2012). The boundaries between the public and the private spheres, as well as between the economic and the political, become blurred in neopatrimonial systems, as political power and the ability to generate wealth become interlinked (Peyrouse: 2012, p.347). According to Lewis (2012, p.116) “In these regimes, power lies not so much in formal control over institutions of the state, such as government ministries or the military, as it does in the ability to provide (or block) access to business opportunities or posts in government that allow officials to benefit from corruption.” “Moneymaking opportunities” are exchanged for a cut of proceeds and political loyalty, whereas defectors are kept in check by the threat of imprisonment or loss of business opportunities.

All these factors produce a system where the cost of defection is high and the benefits of supporting the government considerable. This was discovered by The Atlantic journalist Paul Starobin (2005), when he interviewed Nazarbayev’s aide Makhmud Kasymbekov about the regime’s critics in 2005: “Just get them a tasty pie and a good position,” he said, “like mayor of a city, and they will forget about all their opposition views.” If, however, this approach is not sufficient to discourage defection, patron-client relations can be re-negotiated through force. One of the most prominent examples of this in the Kazakh context is president Nazarbayev’s son-in-law’s, Rakhat Aliyev’s fall from grace in 2007, when he was forced into exile after being accused of multiple serious crimes from money-laundering to murder (Peyrouse: 2012, pp.355-6). Similarly, the daughter of president Karimov, Gulnara Karimova, was allegedly forced into home arrest in 2014 after criticising senior Uzbek officials on social media (International Crisis Group, 2016). These examples demonstrate the cost of defection from the elite network in neopatrimonial societies.

While Kazakhstan’s oil wealth has allowed for the creation of a regionally significant business elite that has been incorporated into the neopatrimonial network, the Uzbek version of neopatrimonialism is more significantly based on local actors (Markowitz: 2012). Clans, as “regional and elite powerbases and networks that control access to resources” also play an important role in the Uzbek neopatrimonial order (International

Crisis Group: 2016). Maintaining the support of the clans can even be seen as a major facilitator of peaceful transition following the death of president Karimov in 2016. His successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, had links to all three of the main clans when rising to power, which undoubtedly helped to smooth the transition and prevent the formation of competing elite coalitions (ibid).

Neopatrimonialism is characterised by elites' dependency on the leader, which in turn is brought on by the centralization of wealth in the hands of the government (Ishiyama: 2002). It is most common in rentier states, as resource rents provide an ideal, easily controllable source of wealth for the government to distribute among its supporters. While Kyrgyzstan does not have comparable natural resource wealth to Kazakhstan or even Uzbekistan, it can be argued that foreign aid functions in a largely similar way in facilitating a rentier economy (Djankov et al. 2005). The funds received from international donors are, after all, most often distributed through the government, and can therefore be used by government officials to co-opt elites or to enrich themselves. Due to this, Kyrgyzstan's political system can be described as neopatrimonial, much in the same way as those of its neighbours (Temirkulov: 2010, p.590). The more limited resources, as well as the tendency of Kyrgyz presidents to focus too much of the wealth on their immediate family have, however, led to the collapse of neopatrimonial support networks on more than one occasion. This failure to sustain the neopatrimonial order will be explored further in the section on Kyrgyz leadership changes as a major factor behind authoritarian collapse in the country.

In addition to neopatrimonial support networks, Central Asian leaders have sought to establish more formal co-optation frameworks, such as political parties, which play an important role in autocratic regimes as facilitators of credible power-sharing arrangements (Ezrow and Frantz: 2011). The process of building top-down presidential parties has played an important part in the Central Asian leaders' quest to "monopolize the political space" (Cummings: 2012, p.72). In Kazakhstan, the main institutional co-optation framework is the Nur Otan party, which has received landslide victories in all parliamentary elections since 2007. The success of Nur Otan can largely be attributed to the marginalisation of the opposition, as most Kazakh voters cannot name other political parties, let alone what they stand for (Lillis, 2016). Neither do the two other parties

represented in the Mazhilis (lower house), Ak Zhol and the Communist People's Party, vocally oppose the president or Nur Otan.

In the Uzbek parliament, on the other hand, there are a total of four pro-president parties, which do not differ significantly in terms of their political agenda: that of supporting the regime (Patnaik: 2016). While they do not provide an avenue for genuine political contestation, the political parties in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan do facilitate the creation of credible power-sharing deals among the elite, in accordance with Ezrow and Frantz's thesis on state institutions and autocratic regime stability. In Kyrgyzstan, however, elections have been genuinely contested since multiple political parties were created in the aftermath of the 2005 Tulip revolution. This has made the Kyrgyz regime more susceptible to regime change, as competitive political parties give the opposition more room to organise and therefore make the system more vulnerable (Bunce and Wolchik: 2010, p.48).

Relatively open civil society has also contributed to the fragmentation and relative vulnerability of the Kyrgyz regime. Due to Akaev's decision to seek legitimacy and economic development through international involvement and moving towards a market economy, Kyrgyzstan was forced to allow international organizations more freedom of action than its neighbours. Even as early as the 1990s, this led to Kyrgyzstan having "the only independent printing press" in the region (Cummings: 2012, p.64). Kazakhstan also has a relatively high number of NGOs, but their activities are characterised by cooperation with the authorities rather than contestation (Ziegler: 2010). Uzbekistan represents the other extreme of the scale, as international organisations have routinely been denied accreditation, especially since the 2005 Andijan uprising (Human Rights Watch: 2020).

All in all, when it comes to both informal and institutional co-optation networks, Kyrgyzstan's authoritarian leaders have been less successful in establishing them than either Kazakhstan's or Uzbekistan's leadership. Kazakhstan is the quintessential rentier state with a neopatrimonial order, where business opportunities are exchanged for political support and oil revenues are used to sustain the process. While Uzbekistan's resources are not on par with those of Kazakhstan, both first president Karimov and his successor Mirziyoyev have managed to co-opt supporters through clans and other regional power bases. Both regimes also benefit from strong presidential political parties, which help to institutionalise support and distribute positions of power within the elites.

Successful co-optation networks have therefore played an important role in the relative authoritarian stability of both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, co-optation is not always enough, which is why we will shift our focus on coercion in the following section.

c) Stability through repression?

As has already been established in the earlier sections of this paper, Uzbekistan’s regime is the most repressive of the three under investigation in this paper. This is demonstrated in a quote from Spechler & Spechler (2010, p. 159), who list the three secrets behind Uzbek stability as “docile general population, corrupted elites, and the government’s willingness to use force when necessary”. The repressive nature of the regime is also showcased in the Freedom House scores for Uzbekistan, summarized in the table below:

Table 2.10. Freedom House Scores by Year, Uzbekistan

Years	Freedom House Score	Classification
2001 – 2005	6.5	not free
2006 – 2018	7	not free
2019	6.5	not free

Data: Freedom in the World Index 2001-2019, Uzbekistan

Since independence, the Uzbek government “has been able to retain its revenue base, which it uses for fairly high educational and health expenditures, investments in ‘strategic industries’, as well as unknown (but considerable) military and police budgets.” (Spechler & Spechler p.160). The regime has therefore strived to achieve stability through both co-optation and coercion. Considerable educational and health expenditures fall under co-optation, more specifically the provision of public goods, and contribute to the “docile population” that the authors list as a key contributor to regime stability. The high military and police budgets, on the other hand, ensure that resorting to coercion is always possible in case other methods fail.

The lengths to which the Uzbek government is ready to go to in order to ensure stability are demonstrated in the Andijan massacre of 2005, where security forces opened fire against demonstrators and killed hundreds of civilians (Williamson and Swerdlow: 2013).

In addition, the government performed a crackdown on civil society and independent media organisations in the aftermath of the event, leading to the decline of its FH civil liberties score from 6 to 7 (Freedom House, 2006). The score remained at 7 until 2019, when the limited reforms by president Karimov’s successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, led to the improvement of Uzbekistan’s civil liberties score to 6 and the overall score to 6.5 (Freedom House, 2019). Some of the changes in post-Karimov Uzbekistan have involved releasing political prisoners and slightly curbing the endemic amount of torture practised in Uzbek prisons through sentencing several security officers for their involvement in the torture and death of entrepreneur Ilhom Ibodov in custody in 2015. (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Nevertheless, thousands of people remain behind bars on politically motivated charges, and the regime is still among the most repressive both regionally and globally, as neither political opposition nor civil society groups can operate freely for fear of severe retribution.

Despite relying heavily on economic prosperity and foundational myths as legitimisation factors and co-optation as a control strategy, the Kazakh leadership has also had to resort to repression regularly in order to safeguard regime stability. While elements of oppression have been present throughout the regime’s existence, the intensity has increased in the past years. This is demonstrated in Freedom House’s Freedom in the World Index, which used to score Kazakhstan 5.5 out of 7 until 2017, since when the score has been adjusted to 6. According to the organisation, the weaker score is a result of further crackdowns on the remaining independent media (Freedom House, 2018). Oppression may not be as blatantly obvious as in Uzbekistan, but Kazakh leadership’s calculated use of violence has nonetheless been a key element in ensuring the regime’s stability over the past decades.

Table 2.11. Freedom House Scores by Year, Kazakhstan

Years	Freedom House Score	Classification
2001 – 2016	5.5	not free
2017 – 2019	6	not free

Data: Freedom in the World Index 2001-2019, Kazakhstan

As discussed in the theory section of this paper, outright repression of popular dissent is very costly, as it relies on a highly functional police and military apparatus, whose loyalty to the government must be ensured through either co-optation or intimidation. In addition

to this, violent suppression of peaceful protest can act as a focal point that further exacerbates popular discontent and drives people to the streets. This point has not been missed by the Kazakh authorities, who under Nazarbayev tended to focus their efforts on preventing rather than suppressing large scale demonstrations (Marat, 2019). In practice, this approach has meant targeting and pre-emptively arresting activists and critical journalists before they have had the chance to organise large-scale public protests (ibid.). This approach was largely successful under president Nazarbayev, as widespread demonstrations were rare. Even the most prominent examples of popular uprising, the 2011 protests in Zhanaozen and the 2016 demonstrations against land reform did little to erode the stability of Nazarbayev's regime, as the president still enjoyed widespread support among the urban population and could rely on the police's ability to effectively suppress and pre-empt popular uprising (ibid.).

The situation has changed slightly since the resignation of president Nazarbayev in March 2019, as the new government has faced more vocal opposition and has been forced to adopt a more repressive approach as a result. This can be observed, for example, in frequent arrests of protesters in a series of demonstrations since Nazarbayev's resignation (Radio Free Europe: 2019). The measures adopted by the Tokayev regime have, however, been reasonably mild compared to neighbouring Uzbekistan, as most demonstrators were only sent to jail for a maximum of 15 days.

The stricter approach of the new Kazakh leadership can also be observed in the declining internet freedom. As Freedom House reports in its *Freedom on the Net 2019* publication (p.4), more frequent expressions of public discontent prompted a reaction from the government, which "temporarily disrupted internet connectivity, blocked over a dozen local and international news websites, and restricted access to social media platforms in a bid to silence activists and curb digital mobilization." Combined with the government's efforts to develop a system of electronic surveillance, these censorious steps ensured that Kazakhstan experienced the greatest year-to-year drop in Freedom House's internet freedom index.

Even though Kyrgyzstan is the freest of the three by Freedom House standards, being an independent journalist or a human rights activist is not always safe: during the Akayev years, both journalists and activists risked having their family members beaten by unidentified assailants (Human Rights Watch: 2005). Similar attacks also continued

during Bakiyev's rule and beyond. While these incidents cannot always be easily traced back to the government, clear violations of Kyrgyz and international law were reported in the aftermath of the June 2010 eruption of violence in Osh and Jalal-Abad. A disproportionate number of ethnic Uzbeks were detained in connection to the violence, and credible evidence on mistreatment and torture was largely ignored by the government (Human Rights Watch: 2011).

While the Kyrgyz government, therefore, has regularly resorted to suppression of the media and civil society, as well as ill-treatment of prisoners, it has not effectively utilized force where it matters the most. This is exemplified in the 2002 Aksy crisis, where the arrest and attempted prosecution of a local parliamentarian, Azimbek Beknazarov, led to mass protests in the politician's home region. The protests escalated even further when five protestors were shot on the 17th of March 2002, only coming to an end once an agreement was reached between Beknazarov and the regime (Lewis: 2008, p.267). While the horrendous violence that the Uzbek regime inflicted on protestors in Andijan in 2005 effectively deterred local elites from organising similar uprisings, the actions of the Kyrgyz government in Aksy had a completely different outcome. According to Lewis (2008, p.268), Aksy helped local elites to realize how effective protests and roadblocks could be in causing disruption. The events also led to the alienation of the police force, members of which were charged for shooting protestors, thus making the police less likely to open fire on demonstrators again (ibid). This shows how important it is for the regime to maintain the loyalties of the security apparatus, a goal that has been achieved by the Kazakh and Uzbek regimes, but not the Kyrgyz one.

d) Effects of governance strategies on regime stability

Based on the preceding discussion, it seems clear that both co-optation and coercion play an important role in maintaining authoritarian regime stability in Central Asia. Co-optation occurs in all three countries through both informal patronage networks and more formalized government institutions. The strength of these institutions differs from one country to the next, however, as a result of both economic and organisational factors. The oil-rich economy of Kazakhstan, for example, provides the regime with an optimal setting for fostering neopatrimonial patronage networks, where business opportunities are

exchanged for a cut of proceeds and political loyalty (Lewis: 2010, p.116). Neopatrimonialism is similarly prominent in Uzbekistan, but the more limited availability of resource rents often necessitates “the state to use coercion instead of financial persuasion”, leading to a situation where “repressive security forces back patron-client relations (ibid., p.117).”

While patronage networks play an important role in co-opting the elites, the population is kept in check mostly through state propaganda and effective narrative building. Both Nazarbayev and Karimov were exceptionally talented at promoting the image of themselves as the “father of the nation”, the nearly singular force behind their country’s relative success. The extensive control that both regimes exert on the media has made it possible to convince significant parts of the population of this narrative. Some public spending, especially on basic needs such as health and education, is also a cornerstone of both Uzbek and Kazakh budgets, contributing to procedural legitimacy and making it less likely for the people to revolt against the regime.

In countries where the population has very limited experience with political participation and where deference to authority has been the norm (Akiner: 1998, p.19), it seems unlikely that the people would rise up spontaneously. Nevertheless, a disgruntled population can act as a fertile recruiting ground for competing elites. Thus, it is important to both keep the elites in check, for example through elaborate co-optation networks, as well as to provide the population with a convincing enough reason to support the regime instead of turning to alternative sources of authority. In Kazakhstan, both the population and the elites have been effectively convinced that they are better off supporting the regime, which provides shares of the oil wealth to elite supporters and a sense of security and economic progress to the population. In Uzbekistan, coercion has played a larger role in convincing both elites and the people to stay in line, as can be seen from the Andijan massacre and the subsequent crackdown on remaining civil society and media.

Unlike its neighbours, Kyrgyzstan lacks significant natural resources that could form the core of a neopatrimonial system, in addition to which the Kyrgyz regime has not managed to create effective pro-presidential political parties to facilitate credible power-sharing in a more institutionalised manner. Similarly, its security forces and other government institutions seem to lack the power and the will needed to enforce order in situations where co-optation fails. These shortcomings are further explored in the following section,

which provides a case-study of the 2005 and 2010 leadership changes in Kyrgyzstan, both of which can be considered major failures of authoritarian governance in Central Asia.

VI. Failures of authoritarianism: 2005 Tulip Revolution and 2010 leadership change in Kyrgyzstan

While the so called Tulip revolution of 2005 can be seen as a positive event from the standpoint of liberalism and democracy – it was, after all, the first relatively peaceful power transfer in post-Soviet Central Asia – it also demonstrates the failures of authoritarian governance in Kyrgyzstan. The democratic nature of the so-called revolution can also be questioned. Unlike the revolutions that took place in Ukraine and Georgia around the same time, the events in Kyrgyzstan were largely driven by disaffected members of the elite (Radnitz: 2006, p.133). Neither did the revolution lead to a functional multi-party democracy, as the presidency still retained extensive powers and the political playing field remained uneven. The limited extent of democratization is illustrated in the following summary of Freedom House scores for Kyrgyzstan between 2001 and 2019:

Table 2.8. Freedom House Scores by Year, Kyrgyzstan

Years	Freedom House Score	Classification
2001 – 2005	5.5	not free
2006 – 2009	4.5	partly free
2010	5.5	not free
2011 – 2018	5.0	partly free
2019	4.5	partly free

Data: Freedom in the World Index 2001-2019, Kyrgyzstan

The second Kyrgyz regime change that took place in April 2010 was arguably more democratic from the outset, as the ousting of president Bakiev occurred after seemingly spontaneous, large-scale popular uprisings. This second power transfer also resulted in the freest elections that Central Asia had ever seen before in the following year (Collins: 2011, p.150). Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan’s political system remained only partly free

according to Freedom House's classification. In 2017, power changed hands once more, as Sooronbai Jeenbekov took over the presidency after another multi-candidate election. While this election, much like the 2011 one, was comparatively free in the Central Asian context, it also failed to meet western standards for a free and fair election (Freedom House, 2019).

The following section will take an in-depth look at the development of events preceding the power transfers in 2005 and 2010, with the aim to uncover the reasons behind them. Preceding chapters will be used as a basis for the structure of the discussion, starting from underlying causes like economic stagnation and continuing with more immediate causes like the disintegration of patronage networks and failure of the government to control events through either co-optation or coercion. The following question will be central throughout the discussion: Why did the increasingly authoritarian presidents have to cede power in Kyrgyzstan, while their counterparts in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have not faced similarly serious threats to their hold on power.

a) Stagnant economy and corruption

When seeking to explain the events of 2005 and 2010, it seems intuitive to begin the exploration with structural variables, which provide the background to Kyrgyzstan's political situation prior to March 2005. As discussed in the above sections, Kyrgyzstan does not possess abundant natural resources comparable to those found in neighbouring Uzbekistan, let alone oil rich Kazakhstan. Neither has the Kyrgyz regime managed to restructure the economy in a way that would be conducive to economic development through private business or industry. Instead, remittances from migrant workers remain a significant part of the GDP. While the privatization of state resources has provided new opportunities to a relatively small business elite (often close associates of the president), it has not benefitted ordinary citizens, especially in Kyrgyzstan's stagnant economic environment. Life has arguably become even more difficult, as the Soviet regime provided universal education and access to healthcare, both of which became more uncertain after independence (Cummings: 2012, p.123).

Material grievances like poverty and lack of access to essential services clearly make Kyrgyzstan seem like an ideal setting for a popular uprising. It is doubtful, however, that

the unstable economy would have been enough to bring either Akaev or Bakiyev down on its own, as although the economy was performing poorly in the early 2000s, it was doing even worse the decade before (Kubiciek: 2011 p.118). It is instead more likely that popular dissatisfaction, resulting from the economic stagnation as well as corrupt leadership, was a necessary factor in creating the conditions for mass protests. The disaffected population could, after all, be more easily mobilized by elites that were left outside the presidents' support coalition.

The economy itself was only one of the factors contributing to popular disillusionment in Kyrgyzstan prior to the two power transfers, as the government's increasingly corrupt practises also contributed to crumbling legitimacy and growing disapproval. In 2005 the catalyst for the events was president Akaev's attempt to influence the February parliamentary elections, where multiple members of his family stood for election (International Crisis Group: 2005a). In 2010, on the other hand, dramatic increases in the price of utilities and suspected corrupt energy deals contributed to the population's disenchantment. This was not helped by the fact that president Bakiev's son Maxim was getting involved in both governance and the corrupt business deals (International Crisis Group: 2010).

The lack of natural resources or other significant sources of revenue led to a situation where the Kyrgyz government could not guarantee the basic needs of the population. Between 2007 and 2009, serious electricity shortages faced the nation and power cuts lasted up to 12 hours per day during the cold winters (International Crisis Group: 2010, p.3). It was no wonder, then, that people in the poor provinces were soon ready to support their local leaders over the leadership in Bishkek. The final straw in 2010 for the population was the governments decision to privatize a major electrical company as well as a phone company at extremely low prices, with rumours that Bakiyev's son Maxim had sold the companies to his close associates for personal financial gain. The privatization coincided with doubling of electricity and water tariffs, driving 1 500 demonstrators to the streets in late February (ibid. pp.8-9). This shows that there was certainly resentment towards the government among the population, but in order to effectively challenge the status quo, the population's anger needed to be wielded by local elites.

b) Crumbling support coalitions

According to Lewis (2012), there are two main issues facing the autocrat running neopatrimonial systems like that of Kyrgyzstan: firstly, an “increasing number of outsiders” – or elite groups squeezed out of the system, and secondly a large mass of disillusioned non-elites, lacking both economic opportunity and political rights. Out of these, excluded elites are especially dangerous, as they can mobilize large numbers of supporters locally (Lewis: 2012, p.119). In a poor country such as Kyrgyzstan, it is difficult to distribute the limited resources effectively, and thus to avoid the defection of elites or to diminish the risk of turning the population into a fruitful recruiting ground for competitors. As we saw in the previous section, the population was effectively alienated by both Akaev and Bakiyev, who failed to deliver on promises of liberalisation and economic sustainability. Similarly, elite networks were also affected by the corrupt leadership in Kyrgyzstan prior to the 2005 and 2010 power transfers, leading to a number of defections.

In addition to potentially angering the people, the Akaev family’s attempt to fix the February 2005 election pitted elites against each other, as the number of seats in the parliament was lowered from 105 to 75. This led to many elites being side-lined, leaving them few other options than to stand against the government to ensure their political survival (International Crisis Group: 2005a). A similar process occurred in the Bakiyev years, as he placed multiple family members in positions of power. By 2010, three of his brothers and two of his sons were responsible for overseeing important state organisations. In addition, the years 2008 - 2010 saw multiple disappearances, deaths and flights of opposition figures and independent journalists (Temirkulov, pp.594-6). This made it increasingly clear for many that they did not have a future in Bakiyev’s increasingly small circle of supporters.

As well as gradually concentrating around their own families, the support coalitions for both Akaev and Bakiyev were centred around clan-based and regional patronage networks – in Akaev’s case from the north and in Bakiyev’s from the south of the country. These networks excluded important actors from other clans and regions, which contributed to the erosion of both presidents’ hold on power (Kubiciek, p.118). This regional imbalance was one of the factors leading to dissatisfaction and eventually an outbreak of demonstrations in the neglected area. In 2005 the protests started in the

southern regions of Osh and Jalal-Abad, while in 2010 the chain of events begun in poor northern regions such as Talas and Naryn (Khamidov: 2010). Common to both instances was the failure of the incumbent to satisfy a sufficiently large and representative support coalition to stay in power.

c) Failure of repression

In 2005, the protests started in remote regions over disqualified candidates, who were prevented from taking part in the February 2005 elections – not because they were radical opponents of the regime, but because they were to face candidates closely allied to Akaev (Lewis: 2008, p.272). The remote towns and villages where the demonstrations originated were soon left with minimal government presence, which showcases the institutional weakness of the Akaev regime (ibid.). This can be contrasted with the 2005 uprising in Uzbekistan's Andijan province. Similarly to the eruption of demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan, the events in Andijan were centred around local elites, namely 23 businessmen, who were “accused of involvement in Islamic extremism and acts against the state”, despite the fact that no concrete evidence of extremist connections could be produced by the government (International Crisis Group: 2005b, p.1).

Organised by local elites and motivated largely by economic stagnation and energy shortages, the events in Andijan encompass many points of similarity to Kyrgyzstan's demonstrations in both 2005 and 2010. The response of the Uzbek regime was, however, decidedly different as compared to Kyrgyz government's inability to suppress demonstrations. The exact number of people who died in Andijan when the government open fire on demonstrators is uncertain but estimates range in the hundreds. While the violence perpetrated by the Uzbek regime was horrendous, it seems to have been effective. In their 2005 report, the International Crisis Group suspects that Uzbekistan may become a failed state unless it manages to alleviate the economic and social challenges the population faces. In hindsight, the Uzbek regime has remained remarkably stable without introducing significant reforms to this effect, suggesting that the use of force in Andijan was effective in discouraging further large-scale demonstrations. This illustrates a key difference between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan when it comes to the effectiveness of repression: while Kyrgyzstan had “become increasingly repressive since 1991, it did not possess the infrastructural power to implement this repression” in 2005 (Cummings and Ryabkov: 2008, p.243).

The factors that contributed to Kyrgyzstan's comparable instability can therefore be divided into three parts:

- a) failure to generate legitimacy among the population either through material or ideational factors,
- b) inability to satisfy a sufficiently broad base of elite supporters to prevent defections and the creation of alternative power bases, and
- c) failure to effectively suppress the elite-coordinated demonstrations that originated as a result of the first two factors.

Not having natural resource wealth to easily sustain their patronage networks or to keep the population satisfied through the provision of adequate public goods certainly made it more difficult for the Kyrgyz presidents to stay in power, but lack of resources alone does not explain their fall from grace. Critical mistakes were made by both Akaev and Bakiyev with regards to their increasing concentration of resources in the hands of their own family, and the corresponding negligence over other important elites and the security apparatus. Favouring one's own region at the expense of other localities also contributed to the collapse of authoritarian order on both occasions and the lack of coercive capabilities prevented the effective handling of a situation that was already out of hand.

VII. Conclusions:

The purpose of this paper was to outline the ways in which the autocratic leaders of Central Asia have either succeeded or failed in their quest to maintain power. Regime stability was established as the most important determinant of authoritarian success in the theory section, as economic prosperity and other similar indicators may not be directly proportional to the autocrat's ultimate goal of staying in power. With regime stability as the dependent variable, economic success and various governance strategies were then evaluated with regards to their instrumental value in contributing to the goal of maintaining power. It was discovered that the relatively dynamic Kazakh economy, largely based on the country's oil wealth, has contributed to regime stability, as it allows for a wider range of options when choosing different governance strategies. Former

president and current head of the security council, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has been successful in constructing effective neopatrimonial support networks, as well as a strong presidential party, through which the spoils of power have been distributed. At the same time, the population has remained largely docile due to a narrative of Nazarbayev as the guarantor of stability and prosperity, some of which has trickled down to an emergent middle class. An argument may even be made for authoritarian legitimacy having been present in Kazakhstan, as the regime seemed to be genuinely popular without a need to resort to excessive violence. The situation has slightly changed since the resignation of Nazarbayev from the presidency in March 2019, however, as the shift in power was met with historically large and frequent demonstrations.

The autocratic regime in neighbouring Uzbekistan also seems to have been remarkably stable throughout the country's independence, even though the economic realities are considerably different from those of oil-rich Kazakhstan. Nonetheless, the Uzbek regime has managed to provide some basic welfare to the people, for example in the fields of education and healthcare. As in neighbouring Kazakhstan, these provisions have arguably helped the government to maintain a level of performance-based legitimacy. Narrative-building has also been fairly successful in Uzbekistan, even though it has relied more on ethnic and nationalistic justifications. In addition to these legitimization factors, president Karimov managed to sustain loyal support networks both through neopatrimonial links and political institutions, including four pro-presidential parties. These networks have remained intact after Karimov's death in 2016, as his successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, emerged from within the old elite in a virtually seamless transition. While the extent of repression has reduced slightly as a result of Mirziyoyev's reforms, Uzbekistan still remains the most oppressive of the three countries. Possessing both the willingness and the ability to use force, the regime has been able to suppress challengers effectively, as exemplified by the events in Andijan in 2005.

Nearly all the factors that have contributed to stable authoritarianism in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have been absent in Kyrgyzstan. Lacking the economic resources necessary to attain performance-based legitimacy among the population, presidents Akaev and Bakiev have had to focus on co-opting small sectors of the elite instead. Both failed in this quest, however, as they increasingly concentrated power and resources on their own clan and family at the expense of regional elites. These neglected elites played a central

role in both the 2005 and 2010 power transfers, where they managed to mobilize large sections of the disaffected population and drive them to the streets. The presidents could not prevent or contain the uprisings with the use of force, as the Kyrgyz regime's coercive capabilities were not enough to achieve this.

Authoritarian success and failure in Central Asia are, therefore, explained in multiple different ways that do not fit a single theory on authoritarian stability. With regards to de Mesquita et al.'s selectorate theory, for example, the findings of this paper provide only partial support for the authors' argument. The so-called winning coalition seems, indeed, to be crucial to authoritarian survival, as exemplified by the role that local elites played in the Kyrgyz power transfers of 2005 and 2010. Nonetheless, the deliberate pursuit of economic stagnation as a survival strategy in authoritarian regimes is not supported by the findings, as Kazakhstan abundant oil revenues have undoubtedly provided the regime with enhanced opportunities in the realm of co-optation. Kyrgyzstan's stagnant economy, on the other hand, has contributed to popular disillusionment that has made the people easier targets for competing elites seeking to mobilize supporters against the government.

As every power transfer is different, the mechanisms behind Kyrgyzstan's authoritarian failure may differ from future power transfers in the region, however. It will be especially interesting to follow the developments in Kazakhstan over the next few years, as president Nazarbayev's resignation in April 2019 already seems to have weakened authoritarian legitimacy in the country. The increased frequency of demonstrations and the rallying cries of "old man out!", referring to Nazarbayev, who still continues to wield power as the head of Kazakhstan's security council, suggest that an increasing number of people are disillusioned with the regime and are prepared to stand up against it (Lillis: 2019). Similarly, there seems to be some disorganisation among the elites, as Nazarbayev's daughter Dariga was recently ousted from her post as the speaker of the senate (Pannier: 2020). While Nazarbayev's hold on power as the de-facto leader of Kazakhstan seems relatively stable in the spring of 2020, even after his resignation and the demonstrations that have followed it, the possibility of a future power transfer cannot be ruled out.

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