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Political Liberalization in Post-Communist Central Asia: a Comparative Study.

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POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN POST-COMMUNIST CENTRAL ASIA:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of Political Science

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December 1999
TO

My wife, Farhat S. Raja,
and daughters, Izza, Inaash, and Haneen,
whose presence, patience, cooperation,
and unconditional love made
this dissertation possible.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to explain variation in political liberalization among three post-communist Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. These countries share several common political outcomes such as the dominance of the executive and a high degree of statism. Yet they also witnessed significant variation in political liberalization within a short period of time after their independence in 1991. The fact that these countries share several common political, socioeconomic, cultural, and historical features makes the rise of this political variance more intriguing than the rise of the above, however, salient, common political outcomes among them within few years of their independence. An intriguing question arises here: Why these countries which share several common features experienced significant variation in political liberalization within few year of their independence? This study seeks to answer this question—a question which has been glaringly ignored in the recent scholarly political literature on Central Asia.

In order to explain variation in political liberalization among these countries, this study emphasizes three variables: a) Russian minority; b) elite structure; and c) political orientation and strategic behavior of political leadership. It argues that these countries show systematic variation in these three variables which account for variation in political liberalization among them. Each of these explanatory variables is important in its own right and produces a significant separate effect on political liberalization. This study also makes a bold claim that this theoretical scheme helps explain not only variation in political liberalization among them but also aberrations in the political liberalization processes.
within them. It further argues that influences other than these three variables produce, if at
all, only short-lived relaxation of political restrictions in the republics.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to understand and explain variation in political liberalization among the three Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Of course, these Central Asian republics share several common political features such as the dominance of the executive, secularism, and a high degree of statism. Yet they also witnessed many important different political outcomes within a short period of time after their independence in 1991. Although they share many authoritarian features, the fact that they have been variously described with epithets such as "an oasis of democracy in an authoritarian desert," "enlightened authoritarianism," and "the rule of old prince" clearly suggests the rise of important political differences among them in the post-independence period.

The fact that these countries share several common cultural, socioeconomic, political, and historical features makes the rise of important different political outcomes among them more intriguing than the rise of the above, however salient, common political outcomes within few years of their independence. An intriguing and important question that arises here and needs to be answered is why these countries which share several common features experienced important different political outcomes within a few years of their independence.

This study seeks to answer this question. However, this study is not intended to examine all the political dimensions along which these republics vary. This study has
rather a modest objective in sight. It seeks to account for variation in the most important political dimension—political liberalization. We believe that the most pronounced different political outcome among these countries has thus far appeared in the area of political liberalization and that this political variance is significant enough to warrant an explanation.

A number of reasons account for our choice of political liberalization in the study of emergent dissimilar patterns of post-communist politics in Central Asia. First, political liberalization is a worth studying subject in its own right. The importance of political liberalization as a precursor to the democratization process with its attendant consequences for nondemocratic societies is well-documented in the recent literature on regime change. It not only provides a very useful and convenient means of capturing some of the very real differences that exist in the organization and conduct of politics in developing countries, but also serves a base point from which progress of these countries toward an enduring political alternative such as democratic rule could be charted, let alone its importance for groups and individuals caught in the middle of coercive rule and democratic regime.\(^3\)

Second, the study of political liberalization will enhance the comparability of our cases with other developing countries in general and the Muslim countries in particular. Let alone certain monarchical and other authoritarian societies in the Middle East which are trying to introduce political reforms and are increasingly being studied from the political liberalization perspective (Mufti 1999; Robinson 1998), some Islamic scholars who reject the concept of liberal democracy as incompatible with the Islamic political
system accept that under an Islamic regime individuals and groups enjoy certain political and civil rights which can be lumped together under the rubric of political liberalization (Maududi 1992, 22nd edition; 1993 16th edition).

Third, an adequate understanding of political processes in the Central Asian countries cannot be gained without studying the question of political liberalization because it constitutes the core of the post-communist transition politics in these countries. The importance of political liberalization for sociopolitical forces further increases because of its close connection with the post-communist economic transition underway in these countries and the consequent question of the access of these forces to economic resources being distributed under this transition.

Fourth, political liberalization is also worth studying for its future relevance to the politics of these countries. Because these countries are far from becoming consolidated democracies, the question of political inclusion and exclusion with its attendant enormous consequences for political forces in these countries will continue to be at the core of their politics for the foreseeable future. In addition, because these countries have powerful ethnic minorities, this question will continue to affect their relations with external powers affiliated with such minorities. Thus, we can safely expect political liberalization to stay with us in one way or another until these Central Asian countries decisively move either toward genuine democracy or toward some other enduring political alternative. If the political liberalization process is bound to critically affect the future of Central Asian societies, an investigation of this process today can provide a solid background for the study of these societies tomorrow.
IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study has both theoretical and empirical importance. Theoretically, this study will contribute to the scholarly efforts aimed at building theory about the post-communist polities where little democratization has occurred. Our information about post-communist politics in societies where outright authoritarian and semi-democratic regimes are emerging is extremely deficient. And it is difficult to formulate a reliable set of propositions about post-communist political processes in such societies. This study is intended to generate theoretical propositions about post-communist politics, redressing the lack of theory-grounded explanations of the emerging patterns of post-communist politics in these societies. In addition, the focus on the Central Asian countries will help broaden the empirical scope of the recent theoretical research efforts which paid more attention to post-communist polities in Eastern Europe and European parts of the former Soviet Union than to those in Central Asia. Without incorporating those post-communist regions which have not been focus of these research efforts, we can not be sure whether political processes unfolding in such regions such as Central Asia support or undermine theoretical insights of the several bodies of post-communist literature developed mostly from the study of the East European countries, the Baltic republics, and Russia.

This study will also contribute to the efforts aimed at understanding where and why certain countries, which begin their independence at the same point in time and share several common socioeconomic, cultural and political characteristics, experience important different political outcomes within a short span of time (Collier 1982). In addition, in the absence of mutually exclusive typologies of political regime types and
subtypes and in the absence of prior theory and a well-developed typology of political regimes in the post-communist world, this study is expected to contribute, though indirectly, to the refinement of typologies of political regime types and subtypes.⁶

The lack of an adequate theoretical and comparative analysis in the existing literature on Central Asia further underscores the importance of this study. Before Central Asia became independent in 1991, most studies of the region were historical, descriptive and configurative in nature.⁷ Only few studies were of comparative nature.⁸ This situation continued in the post-independence period. After independence more emphasis has been given to geopolitical questions than to sociocultural and political processes within the Central Asian republics.⁹ Most studies which deal with sociopolitical processes in Central Asia are configurative and descriptive, offering little theoretical explanation of such processes. The few comparative studies done so far focus mostly on similarities among the regional countries (Hunter 1996; Lipvosky 1996; Clement 1994). Some of them even recognize the development of these republics along different political paths (Motyle 1997:53; Hunter 1996:xviii, 40; Kangas 1994; Chavin 1994:161; Halbach 1992). However, sufficient systematic attention has not been paid to studying and explaining these differences. This assertion is supported by a recent comparative study which lamented the lack of an adequate theoretical explanation of significant variation in political openness among these republics (CSCE, March 1998:39-42). We hope that this study will help remove this theoretical confusion among students of the Central Asian region.
The empirical importance of this study is evident from the vantage point that we have very little hard evidence about Central Asia. Despite scholarly attempts to study Central Asia in the post-communist era, it is still not among the widely studied areas, and there is no extensive range of hard evidence about it. Writers are trying to fill the gap in our information and knowledge about Central Asia. However, specialists are still deeply divided on how to characterize the Central Asian societies. It is fair to say that the Central Asian societies are still poorly understood and serious research is greatly hampered by the lack of reliable objective information. The existing studies of Central Asia provide only small amount of hard evidence on that region. This situation seems to have led many scholars to make rash and wrong judgments and predictions about the region. This study is hoped to generate not only hypotheses and propositions about post-communist politics but also empirical evidence about one of the most neglected but increasingly important areas in the post-communist world.

This study is also hoped to benefit a variety of people and groups, governmental and nongovernmental, interested in Central Asia in one way or another. More specifically, this study will serve a double purpose: 1) For a general student and a specialist of Central Asia, this study will offer sound information and source material for further study of a relatively obscure but increasingly important area in the post-communist world; and 2) for individuals and groups with economic, sociopolitical, and cultural stakes in Central Asia, this study will provide diversity of information to draw on in their dealing with Central Asia and help them avoid rash and wrong judgements and policies about that region.
PREVIEW OF THE THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL ARGUMENT

A full description of our theoretical argument is offered in Chapter 1. In this section we will briefly summarize the main findings of this study. We hope that this exercise will help prepare and guide the reader through our theoretical and empirical arguments. It is one of the arguments of this study that our countries began to experience differential rates of political openness in the wake of the Gorbachev reform program in the pre-independence period and that this variance became more pronounced in the post-independence period. We further argue that the same set of factors can adequately account for differential rates of political openness among these republics in the pre- and post-independence periods.

In order to explain variation in political liberalization among our countries, we emphasize three factors: the Russian minority, elite structure, and political leadership. We argue in this study that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan show systematic variation in these three variables which produce variation in political liberalization among them. Each of our explanatory variables is important in its own right and produces a significant separate effect on political liberalization. We further argue that till now influences other than these three variables are found to produce, if at all, only short-lived relaxation of political restrictions in these republics.

Our first explanatory variable is a compound variable which involves focus on the proportional size, the level of politicization, and resourcefulness of the ethnic Russian minority in each republic. We find a positive impact of the large ethnic Russian minority in proportion to the titular nationality on political liberalization. The relatively large
Russian minority is more likely to be politicized, defend its own causes rather than to leave them to the governments of these countries and command considerable resources, including the support of their coethnics, both the people and authorities, in Russia. The relatively large size of politicized Russian minority means a reduced support base for the ruling elites (whose chief political opponents come from their own titular nationality), wider opposition to them, and higher costs of its repression, including inter-ethnic instability and the potential Russian intervention with serious consequences for their rule. All such considerations considerably constrain authoritarian impulses and contribute to relaxation of political control in republics with a relatively large size of the ethnic Russian minority.

The second variable that we emphasize is elite structure. The character of elite structure in these republics is defined by the internal unity and cohesiveness of the old-regime elites who include leaders of the (former) republican communist party, members of the parliament, important members of momenklatura, state functionaries, and heads of public enterprises in the pre- and post-independence period. The two basic elite structure types, consolidated and fragmented (or dispersed), emerged in these countries in the pre- and post-independence periods. We find that the consolidated elite structure has a negative impact on political liberalization in these countries. Such elite structure means that the support base of the old-regime elites is intact and that they have more freedom of action with their full access to power resources which they can readily use to crush opposition forces without paying enormous costs.
On the contrary, the dispersed elite structure has a positive impact on political liberalization in these countries. It is so because the fragmented elite structure is indicative of the dispersion of political resources, the rise of multiple power centers, a narrow support base for the ruling elites, their isolation from important sources of support, a reduction in the clientelist networks available to them, their need for societal allies, and a reduction in their capacity to thoroughly control and repress society with impunity. In addition, because certain disgruntled elites with their intact access to traditional sources of support may be tempted to take up arms to defend their causes and protect themselves against excessive government repression, the fragmented elite structure increases the risk of civil war along tribal, ethnic, and regional lines and therefore the risk of Russian intervention---a prospect which the governing elites very much like to avoid because of its potential serious consequences for their own power position, let alone for their societies. Thus, the dispersed elite structure considerably complicates the use of indiscriminate repression of independent political forces and contributes to the expansion of independent political space in these republics.

The logic of our theoretical argument has thus far been structural. We recognize that it has certain limitations. The large Russian minority and fragmented elite structure act as powerful constraints on the authoritarian impulses in the Central Asian republics, but they can not be shown to clearly determine a full range of variations in political liberalization among these countries. They account for the broad variance in the general direction of the political liberalization process in our countries, but they can not adequately answer a number of specific questions. For instance, why does the political
liberalization process experience aberrations in a republic when the above two causal factors remain constant? Why do ruling elites in these republics relax some activities but not others? And why do they some times tolerate the same independent political activity which they otherwise repress? These and other similar questions remained unanswered if we confine our theoretical argument to the above two structural explanatory variables. Therefore, we expand our theoretical argument and incorporate in it another explanatory variable, political leadership, in order to provide an adequate explanation of variation in political liberalization among the Central Asian countries. In this way, our theoretical argument is both structural and voluntaristic in nature.

The incorporation of the political leadership variable is based on the assumption that political leaders are not simply forced by broad structural conditions into a predetermined direction, but rather they generally possess certain amount of autonomy, retain initiative, and mediate the gross impact of such conditions on the political process. In other words, even under powerful constraints produced by structural conditions they generally have a significant range of options in making political choices and decisions. Their actions tend to have cumulative effect which can increase or decrease the level of political liberalization in a republic. In addition, political leaders exhibit certain central political tendencies which are assumed to influence political liberalization. If these assertions are correct, then variations in political orientations of the political leadership of the Central Asian republics and their concrete actions will help explain variation in political liberalization among them.
In this study, political leadership refers to the presidents in charge of the post-communist transition process in these republics. In this study, we focus on two aspects of political leadership, its views about political liberalization and concrete actions related to it. We find that the political leaders of these countries differ in their views about political liberalization. More specifically, they differ about whether, how and when political liberalization can be introduced in their societies. Some Central Asian political leaders doubt the readiness of their societies for political liberalization, its compatibility with their political culture, and refer to its adverse consequences for their societies. While others have a more favorable view of political liberalization and its consequences for their societies. Political leaders with benign view of political liberalization are more likely to relax political control and to be responsive to the constraints of structural conditions—the Russian minority and fragmented elite structure—than the political leaders with ambivalent and negative views of political liberalization and its consequences for their rule and societies.

In addition to the political leaders’ view of political liberalization, we focus on their concrete political actions and find them relevant to the study of variation in political liberalization among our countries. Because there is no necessary connection between one class of actions and political liberalization and because actions of political leaders are of fluid nature, it becomes more or less an empirical question to investigate whether a concrete action of political leadership produces a positive or negative impact on political liberalization in a republic.
We observe systematic variation across our countries in three variables, the Russian minority, elite structure, and political leadership. Kazakhstan has the largest ethnic Russian minority, followed by Kyrgyzstan; Uzbekistan has relatively small Russian minority (see Tables 1 and 2). Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan both passed into the post-communist transition phase with fragmented elite structures. Uzbekistan emerged out of the transition phase with a consolidated elite structure which by and large remained intact in the post-independence period. Kyrgyz leadership exhibits very favorable views about political liberalization. Kazakh leadership exhibits moderately negative views about political liberalization. And Uzbek leadership has very negative views about political liberalization and its consequences for Uzbek society.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan show considerable variation in political liberalization (see Table 7). The systematic variation across our countries in the three explanatory variables yields the following ranking. Kyrgyzstan scores higher in political liberalization than Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Barring few minor aberrations since mid-1994, the political liberalization process in Kyrgyzstan recorded sustained progress in almost all the areas of political liberalization in the post-independence period.

Although Kazakhstan’s record on political liberalization is modest in comparison to Kyrgyzstan, it is far better than that of Uzbekistan. In other words, Kazakhstan has a mixed record of political liberalization. After independence, it witnessed an overall improvement in the pre-independence level of political liberalization and sizable independent political space became available to Kazakh society. Yet repression of
independent political forces remained a serious problem in Kazakh society in the post-independence period.

Both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have a relatively large ethnic Russian minority and fragmented elite structure but differ in the level of political liberalization. Kazakhstan ranks lower than Kyrgyzstan on the political liberalization scale. The moderately negative views of Kazakh leadership about political liberalization and the presence and demands of secessionist elements of the Russian minority (which provides Kazakh authorities an easy excuse to repress certain unwanted opposition forces in the name of inter-ethnic harmony and security and territorial integrity of the republic) explain the overall mixed record of political liberalization and its lower rank than that of Kyrgyzstan on the political liberalization scale in the post-independence period.

Uzbekistan which scores low on all the three factors conducive to political liberalization has by all accounts made little or no movement toward political liberalization in the post-independence period. Tactics aside, no tolerated independent political activity existed in the republic in the post-communist era. In fact, in the absence of effective constraints, Uzbek authorities unhesitatingly unleashed indiscriminate repression and have been able to drive individual and organized opposition forces into exile or into underground and semi-underground positions in the post-independence period.

THE CASE FOR SELECTION OF CASES

The decision to study variation in political liberalization among three out of five Central Asian republics is not arbitrary. Quite the contrary. In fact, the three republics,
Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan are selected, and the two republics, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are dropped, for important reasons.

As already mentioned, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan are distinctly located at three different points on the political liberalization scale (see Table 7). Kyrgyzstan represents the best case of political liberalization in Central Asia. Because of its relatively low ranking on socioeconomic factors commonly associated with political democracy, the fact that Kyrgyzstan, a small republic, surpasses the two most important republics in the region, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, in almost all areas of political liberalization makes it an interesting and intriguing case study. Uzbekistan, the most populous republic in the region, is one of the worst cases of political liberalization in the region. And, Kazakhstan, the second most populous but the largest republic in terms of area in Central Asia, represents a middle case of political liberalization, falling between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Hence, the study of the political liberalization process in these three countries can capture the maximum range of variation the Central Asian region has thus far experienced in political openness in the post-communist era. In other words, we can correctly identify and adequately explain the highest and the lowest points on the political liberalization scale of Central Asia through our study of the political liberalization process in three rather than five Central Asian republics.

The reason for dropping Tajikistan from this study is that it is an abnormal case for the study of a subject like political liberalization. More precisely, it is a highly volatile country torn apart by a bloody civil war since 1992 between regional factions of different political orientations and ideological colors. These factions, especially the
communist forces, readily seek help from hardened criminals in order to eliminate their opponents (Khazanov 1995:127). The massive involvement of external forces, including the Russian and Uzbek troops, in this war has further compounded the political scene in the republic. This war has thus far claimed more than 50,000 lives and produced large refugee waves, creating an abnormal situation for the study of political liberalization. In other words, such situation makes it very hard to document empirical evidence on political liberalization and affix the blame for violations of civil and political rights of people.

The decision to drop Turkmenistan is based on the fact that there is no meaningful variation in political liberalization between Uzbekistan and the former. Both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are located at the same point on the authoritarian scale. Both have experienced the rise of the most repressive regimes in Central Asia.¹¹ We can save space and avoid duplication by dropping Turkmenistan—a country far less important than Uzbekistan—without affecting our conclusions.

This study will cover the period from the independence of the Central Asian states in 1991 to 1997. This cut-off date is not chosen on the basis of hard and fast rules. As is the case with running themes, we primarily chose this cut-off line for research purposes. In other words, we need to terminate our research on some point in order to make it manageable. However, the fact that discernible political patterns have emerged in Central Asia by 1997 also influenced our decision to choose it as the cut-off date for our research.
ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into six chapters, including this chapter. Chapter 2 clarifies definitional issues, provides a literature review of approaches to political liberalization, discusses inadequacy of these approaches to the study of variation in political liberalization among Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, and builds a theoretical framework to explain this political variance. The next three detailed chapters are devoted to the three countries. In these chapters we will apply the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 to three republics. The location of each republic on the political liberalization scale is discussed in a single chapter. In other words, we shall examine the impact of our three independent variables on political liberalization in each country chapter. Each country chapter serves as an important frame of reference for chapter 6. The sixth chapter makes an overall comparison of our cases and matches our empirical findings to our theoretical expectations. Also, this chapter provides the summary conclusions of this study, and looks at prospects for the future evolution of these countries along the dimension of political liberalization.

NOTES

1. Lipvosky views secularism as a sine qua non for the preservation of the Central Asian ruling elites’ power in the post-communist era (Lipvosky 1996:212).

2. Kyrgyzstan has been variously characterized "as an oasis of democracy in an authoritarian desert" (CSCE, March 1998:17), as "enlightened proto-authoritarianism" (Rumer 1996:74), and the Switzerland of Central Asia (Kubicek 1997:643-4). Karimov has been described as "old prince" (Carlisle 1995:197).

3. These points are borrowed from Conteh-Morgan (Conteh-Morgan 1997:6-7).

4. All the Central Asian ruling elites claim that the current nondemocratic regimes are temporary arrangements and that they intend to move toward genuine democracy as the conditions are ripe for such a move.
5. In the recent post-communist transition literature the democratizing polities in the former communist world received far greater scholarly attention than those in which outright authoritarian and pseudo-democratic regimes emerged (McFaul 1993; Rozman 1993; Ekiert 1991; Korosenyi 1991).

6. For partial efforts to develop typologies of political regime types and subtypes see Lijphart 1968; Linz 1975; Park 1977; and Gasiorowski 1990.


8. These studies include Fierman (1991).


10. Brzezinski predicted ethnic and border conflicts in the region. He also considered inter-ethnic conflicts as inevitable part of the process of exodus of several millions Russians who live in the Central Asian countries (Rumer 1996:13). Rumer rightly observes that none of such dire predictions has thus far come to pass (Rumer 1996:13). Wimbush and Broxup predicted Islamic revolution (Rezun 1992:130).

11. For an excellent synopsis of the characteristics of despotic states of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, see Olcott (1995:218).
CHAPTER 2
POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN CENTRAL ASIA
A THEORETICAL EXPLANATION

INTRODUCTION

After their independence in 1991, the Central Asian republics experienced several similar and dissimilar important political outcomes. The notable common political outcomes include the rise of presidentialism, dominance of the chief executive, secularism, and a high degree of statism. The most pronounced different political outcome has so far appeared in the area of political liberalization. The fact that these republics witnessed significant variation in political liberalization within a few years of their independence is more intriguing than the emergence of the above, however salient, common political outcomes because they share several common socioeconomic, political, cultural, and historical features. This variance has been ignored in both bodies of literature, the recent theoretical literature on the post-communist transition and the comparative empirical literature on Central Asia. Although there are several bodies of theoretical literature that for almost half a century have informed studies of the various aspects of political liberalization, without a detailed and systematic study of the political liberalization process in the Central Asian countries we can not be sure whether any and which body of the existing theoretical literature can best explain variation these countries experienced in political liberalization within few years of their independence.

This study is an attempt to redress this academic lacuna in a systematic manner. And the purpose of this chapter is to prepare a theoretical base for such an effort and to immerse the reader in its theoretical argument. This chapter intends to accomplish five
things. First, it seeks to define and discuss our dependent variable, political liberalization, in order to provide focus to this study. Second, it will review major theoretical approaches, which have informed numerous studies of the political liberalization process in many parts of the world over the past several decades, to show the richness of theoretical literature one can draw on to study the question of political liberalization. Third, we will briefly critique these approaches to demonstrate that although most theoretical approaches help us understand the overall low level of political openness and democratization in the Central Asian countries, no single approach on its own can adequately explain the significant variance they experienced after independence in the area of political liberalization. However, we will also show that some theoretical approaches are more relevant than others to our concern and that we can increase their explanatory power for our inquiry if we modify their original arguments. Fourth, we will build our own theoretical model which draws on certain existing theoretical approaches but modifies their original arguments in order to adequately account for variation in political liberalization among the three Central Asian countries. The selection of such theoretical approaches and modification of their original argument were dictated by the detailed case studies. In other words, our theoretical model derives from the detailed study of our countries. Finally, we will briefly present our empirical argument, showing how our independent variables vary across our countries and whether they produce expected results.
DEFINITION OF POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION

The comparative politics literature has not been consistent in the use of political liberalization. It has been defined in different ways. The purpose here is not to expose inadequacies of various existing definitions of this term in order to develop an exhaustive definition of political liberalization, but rather to develop a working definition which could provide focus to this study.

One can find three broad conceptualizations of political liberalization in the existing literature on political regime change. One group of regime analysts uses political liberalization and democratization interchangeably (Conteh-Morgan 1997). According to another perspective, political liberalization is more broad and inclusive than democratization. Arguing that democratization may accommodate nonliberal beliefs and practices within a constitutional order which more or less satisfies the procedural requirements of political democracy, advocates of this perspective conceptualize political liberalization as encompassing not only a democratic constitutional order but also a change in political culture of society leading to the adoption of liberal and civic beliefs and practices (Cotton 1991:312). Still another group of scholars conjoins political liberalization and democratization as two related but not synonymous phenomena. According to this perspective, political liberalization can exist without democratization. However, advocates of this viewpoint differ over the specific components of political liberalization (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986:7; Kaufman 1986:92-99; Przeworski 1991:51-99).
Building on the conceptualization in which political liberalization can exist without democratization,\textsuperscript{5} this study views political liberalization as a process of loosening political restrictions, and restoration of political rights and those civil rights (such as freedom of speech) which have political bearings under an authoritarian regime.\textsuperscript{6} At the more concrete level, political liberalization involves a decrease in repression, the corresponding decline of fear of repression in society, and the extent of freedom available to political forces for voicing individual and/or collective dissent, for interest articulation and representation, and for waging a political struggle through individual or/and collective efforts to modify the rules of the political game. In short, political liberalization refers to opening and loosening of the prevailing coercive political regime.

VARIOUS THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION

The study of political liberalization received a great deal of scholarly attention over the past two decades.\textsuperscript{7} In several communist and noncommunist countries around the world, the breakdown of various communist and authoritarian regimes during this period began with the process of political liberalization. Thus, it was logical for regime analysts to focus on political liberalization in order to fully understand and explain the unraveling of old regimes and the rise of new ones. In addition to provoking scholarly debates on various aspects of political regime change, this sustained scholarly endeavor produced an insightful body of literature on political liberalization.\textsuperscript{8}

STRUCTURALIST APPROACHES

One can find in the existing literature several different theoretical approaches to the study of political liberalization. Modernization theory is one of the leading
theoretical approaches to the question of why an authoritarian regime liberalizes its restrictive practices and/or is ultimately replaced by a democratic one. In most of the early modernization theoretical literature, the question of political liberalization was addressed as part of a general process of political development, and democracy was viewed as the final stage of such process. A host of socioeconomic factors associated with capitalist economic development were believed to facilitate this evolutionary process. These socioeconomic factors include higher levels of per capita income, urbanization, literacy, education, and mass media exposure. As modernization theory postulates, because a wealthy, industrialized economy is associated with higher levels of these factors, an evolutionary, inexorable process of transition toward democracy is set in motion in nondemocratic countries as their economies develop (Lerner 1958; Lipset 1959, 1994; Deutsch 1961).9

A number of reasons have been offered for the positive correlation between capitalist economic development and the regime transition toward democracy in nondemocratic polities.10 However, the most common line of argument is that as countries develop, their economic and social structures become complex, the politically relevant strata of the population expand, the demands for governmental services and political participation multiply, new autonomous social and political groups arise, organize, and begin to resist dictatorial forms of control. As a result, the system can no longer be effectively and efficiently run by an authoritarian regime. In addition, capitalist economic development produces a class structure which is conducive to democratization. It produces a middle class (Lipset 1959 and 1994), bourgeoisie (Moore 1966),11 and
working class (Therborn 1977; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992; Stephens 1993:438) that stand up against the coercive state, provide resources for autonomous societal groups, and seek access to national political process. In short, industrial capitalism increases economic benefits for the masses; it spreads authority and democratic aspirations among various societal groups, intensifying demands for the political benefits of democracy (Dahl 1989; Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994:903); and its promotes civic cultural attitudes conducive to democratization (Huntington 1991:69). Thus, the above development-related socioeconomic factors generate growing social pressures and conditions which facilitate the relaxation of political restrictions under an authoritarian regime and its ultimate replacement with a democratic regime.

In spite of a continued scholarly effort to reconfirm it (Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994), the basic notion that capitalist economic development is a requisite to democratic development continued to remain suspect in certain academic quarters (Przeworski and Limongi 1997). However, after having gone out of fashion as a dominant grand theory due to a variety of reasons, modernization theory has made a strong comeback and has been used to explain the breakdown of authoritarian regimes in the communist and noncommunist world over the past two decades (Pye 1990).

In 1990, Lucian Pye used modernization theory to account for the political liberalization and democratization processes underway in the communist and noncommunist countries around the world. He claimed that the key factors responsible for what he called "the crisis of authoritarianism" and "great transformation" over the past decade were all those critical variables the early modernization and political
development theorists had identified as conducive to political liberalization and democratization. More specifically, he emphasized the vulnerability of the authoritarian regimes to the pressures created "by the increasingly significant flows of international trade, finance, and communication; by the effects of contemporary science and technology; and by all the other development-related socioeconomic factors lumped under the rubric of modernization." Because the authoritarian regimes are the most vulnerable to these pressures, they are therefore being seriously undermined and, as a result, are liberalizing their practices (Pye 1990). It is, however, important to note that he does not view political liberalization as a necessary outcome, but rather as one of the policy measures an authoritarian regime may adopt in response to these pressures.14

Another body of literature that explains political regime variation in economic terms is produced by the Marxist authors. According to these authors, throughout human history each mode of production produced an appropriate political form that furthered the interests of economically dominant class. The capitalist mode of production produced, as the argument runs, political democracy as an instrument of exploitation and repression of labor by the dominant class, the bourgeoisie. According to the Marxist perspective, the bourgeoisie uses democratic mechanisms to capture the state from the traditional power elites (Arat: 1988:21), to arbitrate disputes among its members, and to decide periodically which of its members are to repress and crush the working classes (Femia 1993:47-51). Hence, the modernization and Marxist perspectives both assign causal significance to socioeconomic factors, though they differ on how these factors operate.
Another set of socioeconomic factors that is thought to facilitate the political liberalization and democratization processes relates to social structural conditions of society. These conditions include a relative equality (in terms of social and economic status) among individuals and social groups, a dispersion of the means of violent coercion in society, cultural homogeneity, an array of relatively autonomous social classes (such as feudal, aristocracy, in addition to ones discussed above) and groups (such as regional groups, occupational groups, and ethnic and religious groups), cohesiveness of elites, and other cross-cutting cleavages (Dahl 1971, 1982; Lijphart 1977; Muller 1988; Huntington 1984).

The most common argument offered to establish a connection between social structure and the political liberalization and democratization process refers to the widespread dispersion of power and other political resources in a society in such way that no single, unified group could monopolize them. According to this argument, a relatively even distribution of power in society increases the cost of repression and violence, which in turn increases the likelihood that the government will tolerate an opposition, creating the most favorable conditions for competitive politics (Dahl 1971:48-51).

The above social structural conditions informed the theoretical and analytical frameworks of a number of scholars who sought to explain the wave of liberalizations and democratizations which swept through the communist and noncommunist countries over the past two decades. However, most of these frameworks emphasized the role of autonomous social groups lumped under the rubric of civil society (Schmitter 1986:6-8; Kaufman 1986:92; Lewin 1988; Huntington 1991:72-85; Lipset 1994:12-14). The rise
(or a change in the orientation)\textsuperscript{17} of such autonomous social formations is said to be supportive of a strong civil society capable of creating favorable conditions for political liberalization and eventual democratization of public and political life (Schmitter 1986:6-8; Kaufman 1986:91-93; Huntington 1984:203). More specifically, a strong civil society is capable of escaping subordination to state authority, resisting and countervailing the state, articulating its demands (including ethical concerns) long repressed or ignored by the authoritarian rulers or accommodated to their needs, publicly acting in the defense of its legitimate interests, and becoming a support base for the institutionalized political parties which are viewed as a necessary condition for a modern political democracy (Lipset 1994:12-14; Arato 1991:198, 203-204; Gellner 1991:50; Schmitter 1986:6-8; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986:49).\textsuperscript{18} In addition, state power is constrained; and the cost of repression exceeds the cost of toleration, providing the basis for political liberalization, for increased societal control of the state, and for eventual democratization of public and political life (Schmitter 1986:6-7; Kaufman 1986:92; Huntington 1984:203).

Another group of scholars who focus on social structural conditions used the cohesiveness of elite structure as a variable to study the recent regime change. Many scholars find that the erosion of internal unity and cohesiveness of ruling elites was critical to the recent wave of regime change and related phenomena around the world (Stepan 1986, 1988; Huntington, 1991, 1991-92; Easter 1997). According to some scholars, the erosion of the elite unity which could occur for many reasons, including policy differences, leads one faction of elites to activate and enlist societal support in
order to strengthen its own position vis-a-vis the rival faction, precipitating a situation conducive to political liberalization (Stepan 1986, 1988).

Another body of literature focuses on political culture of both the elite and the masses to account for the rise of political regime. According to the political cultural theory, every political system is embedded in a particular political culture (Almond 1956:396). The political cultural values found to be compatible with and conducive to political democracy include tolerance, interpersonal trust, egalitarianism, national-political identity, empathy, and a willingness to compromise, accommodate, cooperate, and associate (Almond and Verba 1963, 1980; Huntington 1984:209; Huntington and Dominguez 1975:32; Dahl 1971, 1989; Diamond 1993). Political cultural theorists weave dense and complex relationships between these values and democracy. However, according to the most common line of argument, the above cultural traits produce flexible and negotiable political objectives, mediate and attenuate political conflict, balance cleavage and conflict with the need of consensus, and promote participatory atmosphere—all favorable conditions for democratic development (Diamond 1993:10). Some political cultural theorists emphasize the importance of a democratic culture of the political elites and activists (Dahl 1989:260-1), while others emphasize the importance of a democratic culture of the masses, too (Diamond 1993).

More often than not, political culture is viewed as an intervening variable which influences and guides rather than predetermines political structures and political behavior (Eckstein 1988; Laitin 1988:589-591; Almond 1988; Brown 1989; Dahl 1971; Ellis and Colye 1994:2-3; Inglehart 1997). In other words, most scholars view political culture
both as cause and effect, although they differ on the sources of political cultural change. Because the erosion or the breakdown in congruence between political culture and political regime will trigger political change (Huntington and Dominguez 1975:17), one can safely extrapolate that an authoritarian regime is likely to open up and relax its practices when the political cultural values supportive of democracy will begin to take root in society. According to many scholars, the explanation of the recent political liberalization and democratization process which swept through the communist and noncommunist countries over the past two decades partly lies in their political cultures which, for several reasons, experienced many important changes both at the elite level and the mass level. The most prominent political cultural changes include the loss of faith in the efficacy of authoritarian rule, the loss of faith in the many long-sustaining myths about an all-seeing leadership and planning, the widespread aversion to social and political violence perpetrated in the name of both reactionary and socialist/communist ideologies, and the rise and transformation of most political, social, and cultural forces who publicly recognize the virtue of ideological tolerance, appreciate the higher ideological prestige of democracy, and attribute high intrinsic value to its establishment and consolidation (Silva 1998:85-87; O’Donnell 1986:15-17; Diamond 1993; Brown 1989; Reinsinger et al. 1994:185; Lapidus 1989; Bahry 1993).

In addition to the above socioeconomic and cultural factors, some scholars assign causal significance to political institutions in their explanation of political outcomes, including political regime variation (Huntington 1965, 1968; Thelen and Steinmo 1992). Huntington is credited for innovating the institutional approach to study regime change.
According to him, the most critical explanatory variable in the study of regime change is the level of political institutionalization of a national society. Although his variant of the institutional perspective is a critique of the modernization approach for its assumption of a more or less linear relationship between economic modernization and democracy, Huntington concedes that economic development and social mobilization are responsible for expanded political participation. However, he argues that the degree of political institutionalization, not economic modernization, of a society will determine whether this situation will evolve into stable democratic regime or degenerate into praetorian regime. According to his argument, political institutions with a high level of institutionalization socialize and induct the newly mobilized political actors into the prevailing political channels, procedures, and norms. The smooth socialization and induction into the national political process is conducive to the rise of stable democracy. On the other hand, political institutions with a low level of institutionalization are unable to handle the increased political participation and other societal demands and pressures. As a result, demonstrations, strikes, riots, and violence engulf polities, giving rise to praetorianism of which military rule is the usual form (Huntington 1965, 1968; Huntington and Dominguez 1975).

The implication of the above argument for political liberalization is that it occurs under both high and low levels of political institutionalization. Although certain features of political liberalization such as interest articulation, rallies, demonstrations, and sometimes even group formation do appear in societies with a low level of political institutionalization, political liberalization of this sort is of temporary nature with
virtually little possibility of evolving into a stable democratic regime as it quickly gives way to praetorian and repressive regime. The gradual political liberalization process introduced in societies with a high level of political institutionalization is more likely to prolong and mature into stable democracy.

Another variant of the institutional perspective recognizes the causal importance of political institutionalization for political liberalization but argues that its impact on political liberalization is mediated by the type of political regime in power. Some scholars argue that because of the temporary nature of military-led authoritarian regimes whose declared goal has almost always been to prepare the way for a return to a civilian rule are less likely to institutionalize themselves than the civilian-led authoritarian regimes (Rouquie 1986:108-109; Linz 1973:234-5). As a result of their temporary nature and a consequent void in their political institutionalization, military-led authoritarian regimes are more likely to permit the promised political liberalization than the civilian-led authoritarian regimes (Gasiorowski 1995) which often seek to institutionalize themselves as enduring political alternatives.

In addition to the above structural factors which reside within national societies, some scholars focus on international influences to explain why an authoritarian regime liberalizes its practices and moves in a democratic direction (Huntington 1984, 1991; Whitehead 1986; Pye 1990; Case 1993; Abrahamsen 1997; Bratton and Walle 1994:453). The international factors that are thought to be conducive to democratic development include colonial rule, foreign occupation and direct imposition of democratic rule by the occupation power, efforts and influence of powerful democratic states, the decline
or withdrawal of the influence of an authoritarian hegemon, demonstration effect of successful democratization on other countries, the end of the cold war, and international financial institutions. Some scholars attribute authoritarian regimes in the Third World countries to their economic dependence and their peripheral position in the world economic system (Chirot 1977; O'Donnell 1979; Jackson et al. 1978; Cardoso and Faletto 1979; Portes 1976; Frank 1969; Bollen 1983; Wallerstein 1974), implying that political repression will end when these countries will throw off shackles of economic dependence and peripheral position in the capitalist world system through socialist or and nationalist revolution. However, some scholars argue that in certain conditions political democracy is possible to arise in economically dependent countries. According to O'Donnell, in the easy phase of ISI, a native bourgeoisie and working class come together to challenge the political and economic hegemony of the export-oriented oligarchy and provide a base of support for populist democratic regime (O'Donnell 1973).

Although advocates of many structural approaches present a large body of empirical evidence in support of their claims (Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994; Inglehart 1990; Bollen 1983), some scholars argue that the structural explanations that focus only on the above enduring structural factors are inherently inadequate and problematic because they ignore two important sets of causal factors, concrete historical situations and political actors, and therefore cannot fully explain political regime variation (Gasiorowski 1995).
HISTORICAL SITUATION-ORIENTED APPROACHES

The first set of causal factors ignored by the structural theories of regime change involves immediate concrete historical situations that consist of quite momentous contemporary events such as economic crisis, war, and other political crises (Huntington 1991; Gasiorowski 1995; Remmer 1990). Some scholars argue that such immediate concrete historical situations set off the political liberalization and democratization process in authoritarian societies. A number of studies have argued that international debt crisis, inflation, recession and defeat in war produce legitimacy crisis for authoritarian regimes, cause splits within the ruling bloc (prompting its reform-oriented members to court civil and political society in order to strengthen their position vis-a-vis the conservative members), and trigger the breakdown of such regimes (Huntington 1991:59; Epstein 1984; Richards 1986; Markoff and Bretta 1990; Remmer 1990; Gasiorowski 1995). According to Huntington, both rapid economic growth and economic recession produce various crises that weaken authoritarian regime and provide the context for political regime changes (Huntington 1991:59).

In spite of their emphasis on immediate concrete historical situations, some of these authors concede that the political liberalization and democratization process is more likely to be set off "when triggering events occur in conjunction with certain structural factors that act as background conditions that magnify the effect of these events on regime change" (Gasiorowski 1995). According to the recent scholarship on regime change over the past two decades, the background conditions which magnified the effects of immediate concrete historical situations on the political liberalization and
democratization process around the world include the active international efforts to promote democratic development, the decline of the influence of authoritarian states such as the former Soviet Union, widespread changes in political culture of authoritarian societies, new positive attitudes toward democracy among influential societal groups such as business, military elite, certain sections of the ruling alliance, and intellectuals, and the end of the cold war (Remmer 1990; Huntington 1984, 1991; Abrahamsen 1997).

**PROCESS-ORIENTED APPROACHES**

The second set of causal factors ignored in the structural explanation of political regime variation relates to the strategic behavior of important political actors and the consequent sequences of events (Rustow 1970; Przeworski 1991; Gasiorowski 1995; Kitschelt 1992). In fact, some scholars even reject the claim of structural approaches that the structural conditions determine regime change. At most the structural factors, in the opinion of these scholars, constrain what "is possible under a concrete historical situation" (Przeworski 1986:48). These scholars offer alternative, process-oriented explanations which focus on the contingent factors such as the sequence of events, the internal power struggles among the ruling elites, and the strategic behavior of the important political actors (Rustow 1970; O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986; Przeworski 1986, 1991; Di Palma 1990; Young 1992; Stepan 1988; Casper and Taylor 1996).

Assumptions of rational choice approach and game theory provide foundations for most process-oriented models of political regime variation (Collier and Norden 1992; Casper and Taylor 1996). The common claim of these models is that the explanation of
political regime variation lies not in the structural factors but in political choices and decisions that political actors make, and the preferences and strategies they adopt in their political struggles. In contrast to the structural approaches which hold political actors’ preferences constant, focus on changing structural factors claiming that these factors determine regime change, and assume that political actors face extremely narrow choices, process approaches emphasize the contingency of actions, preferences, strategies of political actors, and political outcomes. As process-oriented authors argue, political actors can shape the context in which other actors make choices, can manipulate “their own and their adversaries’ cognitive and normative frames” and that choices of political actors depend on “a continuous redefinition” of their “perceptions of preferences and constraints” (Kitschelt 1992). By “deliberate and lasting compromises of core disputes among” themselves, national elites can achieve “consensual unity” or “elite settlement” which produces political stability and increasingly leads to political openness and to stable democratic regimes (Higley and Burton, 1989, 1998).

In short, the process-oriented authors emphasize the contingency of individual choices, strategies, and political outcomes and suggest that such contingent factors may bring about regime change which no political actor anticipated or desired at the outset (Kitschelt 1992; Collier and Norden 1992; Casper and Taylor 1996). Thus, according to process-driven explanations, human actions and consequent sequences of events, not the structural conditions, bring about political regime changes.

A number of process-oriented scholars argue that some sequences of events are more likely than others to facilitate the shift from an authoritarian regime to a more open
and competitive regime (Rustow 1970; Dahl 1971:33). These scholars have tried to identify certain specific historical-political processes, sequences of events and phases, and crises which facilitate this shift. According to Rustow, "the dynamic process of democratization itself is set off by a prolonged and inconclusive political struggle" that "is likely to begin as the result of the emergence of a new elite that arouses a depressed and previously leaderless social group into concerted action." He argues that what concludes this protracted political struggle is a deliberate decision of important political actors to accept diversity in unity, and to institutionalize democratic procedures (Rustow 1970:352-358). Dahl identifies three paths from authoritarianism to democracy, although he admits that almost an infinite number of paths can be invented. He prefers the sequence in which political liberalization precedes mass participation. He argues that under political pressures of oligarchical elites a closed hegemonic regime liberalizes its practices and allows for contestation between these elites, and then competitive oligarchies will evolve into inclusive political regimes (Dahl 1971:7-8,33-47).

Although process-oriented scholars assign causal significance to human actions, some of them appreciate that "the strategic behavior of political actors (is) embedded in concrete historical situations" (Przeworski 1986:47) and that certain background conditions such as national unity (Rustow 1970) and the existence of nation-state (Linz and Stepan 1996; Huntington 1991) are important for human actions to set off the democratization process.
ELECTIVE AND INTEGRATIVE APPROACHES

Instead of offering exclusively structural explanation or process explanation of regime change, a number of scholars draw insights from both types of explanations (Dahl 1971; Huntington 1991). In fact, some scholars argue that structural and process-oriented approaches are not mutually exclusive (Collier and Norden 1992; Kitschelt 1992). Kitschelt believes that structuralist and process-driven analyses do not directly compete with each other but focus on different objects of explanations with different research methods and comparative designs. He thinks that structuralist approaches are good at explaining the general causes of regime breakdown and the consolidation of new ones. Process approaches best explain, in his opinion, "the timing of breakdown and transition as well as specific trial-and-error process of searching for a new viable regime." In his view, these two types of approaches "represent only strands within the structuralist camp" (Kitschelt 1992:1028-1029). Yashar also makes more or less similar arguments. He regrets the fact that in pursuit of methodological purity and analytical clarity, scholars have neglected the simple point that structuralist and process-oriented approaches address different questions. He rather suggests an integrative approach to study questions of political liberalization and democratization. The integrative approach he suggests emphasizes to focus on "historically constructed conditions that have undergirded authoritarianism and the actors that have set out to overcome them." He argues that structures "provide constraints within which and against which actors maneuver." However, at times, actors challenge the very structures in place, facilitating political
outcomes, including political liberalization and democratization, which even they had not hoped for (Yashar 1997:2-3).

A CRITIQUE OF THE EXISTING THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The above theoretical approaches broaden our overall understanding of a host of factors related to political liberalization. The results of the past research on political liberalization and democratization are in many ways impressive. Some theoretical approaches still inform much of the academic discussion on political liberalization. However, the fact that a large body of empirical evidence is available to support the plausibility of these approaches confronts us with the problem of overdetermination. In other words, we have multiple plausible theoretical approaches to study political liberalization. The multiplicity of plausible approaches also implies that each approach is applicable to, at least, a few cases, but no single approach can necessarily explain every case of political liberalization.

Because these approaches seem plausible and their assumptions sound partly true, each of them seems potentially useful in thinking about political liberalization. Although these approaches are worth keeping in mind when explaining the overall tenuous democratization process in our countries, none of them seems by itself to adequately account for the significant variation they experienced in political liberalization in the post-independence periods. A number of scholars have used some of the above approaches to study the post-communist politics in Central Asia. However, few studies have tried to examine and explain variation in political liberalization among the regional countries in the post-independence era. Such studies relate a large number of explanatory
variables to this variation without a careful and systematic analysis. The explanatory variables used in such studies to explain variation in political liberalization among these countries include the historical and cultural legacies such as nomadic versus sedentary and strong versus weak Islamic traditions, Asian mentality, the continuity of Soviet institutions (including the change of ruling elites), the strength of opposition and the level of threat to ruling elites, numerical strength of minorities (especially the Russian minority), and the fear of inter-ethnic conflict, various external pressures, the impact of the Tajik conflict, and the varied policy responses of ruling elites which reflect their priorities and capacities in meeting the challenges in the post-communist era (Matveeva 1999; CSCE 1998:40-2). Some of these variables seem to vary across our countries and can potentially explain the political variance, but their true explanatory power has not been explored in a systematic fashion. However, most of the above variables seem to have little or no explanatory power and have already been correctly and systematically dismissed in serious analyses (CSCE 1998:40-2; DeWeese: 1994; Shahrani:1991).

In fact, it is unwise for us to assume that this variation is overdetermined. In other words, we cannot employ all the existing theoretical approaches to explain this variation. Therefore, we need to exercise great care in selecting approach(es) in order to offer an adequate theoretical explanation of variation in political liberalization among our countries. Because there are multiple plausible theoretical approaches to explain this political variance in Central Asia, our choice of the relevant explanatory variables must be dictated by the empirical evidence. In other words, the post-communist political scene
in our countries must dictate the selection of relevant approaches to explain the variance these countries experienced in the area of political liberalization in the post-independence period.

A careful examination of the post-communist political scene in Central Asia sufficiently illustrates that some approaches are of little or no help in explaining the variance in political liberalization among our countries. It is so because the variables these approaches use to study political liberalization in other cases either do not exist\(^{37}\) in our countries or do not produce expected results or produce more or less similar effects in each of them and therefore do not explain the political variance that exists among them. More precisely, approaches which use socioeconomic factors associated with capitalist economic development, dependency situation, foreign domination, political culture, inherited political institutionalization, class structure, tribal social structure, and other historical legacies explain little or no variance in political openness among our three Central Asian countries.

This critique is by no means intended to refute these approaches. Rather, we wish to emphasize their limitations in explaining the significant variation in political liberalization among our countries. Of course, the robust finding of many cross-national studies—a positive correlation between capitalist development and democracy—is hard to dismiss. The overall low level of capitalist development of our countries (see Tables 4 and 6) can account for the lack of democratic rule among them. However, it can not explain the significant variation in political liberalization among them because the way they rank on socioeconomic factors associated with capitalist development does not

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produce expected results. On some factors our countries show quite similar trends. On others they differ, but their differences in most cases are quite small. For instance, all the three countries have more than 90% literacy rate; Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan show quite similar trends on urban population, labor force by occupation, and GDP by sector (agriculture, industry, and services). Kazakhstan outscores both on these factors (see Tables 4 and 6). However, the results are not in the expected directions. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan remarkable differ in the level of political liberalization. Kazakhstan scores lower than Kyrgyzstan on the political liberalization scale, although it scores higher than Uzbekistan on this scale. Likewise, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan show similar trends on the GNP per capita but outscores Kyrgyzstan in this regard (see Table 6). However, both scores lower than Kyrgyzstan on the political liberalization scale—a result contrary to the modernization theoretical expectations. In short, the limitations of these approaches become more obvious when asked to explain why Kyrgyzstan, a country with the least propitious socioeconomic conditions and which many students of the region viewed as the most ill-prepared republic of all the former Soviet republics for a democratic transition due to its historical legacies (Huskey 1997:243), consistently surpassed both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in all areas of political liberalization in the pre- and post-independence periods.

Likewise, besides socioeconomic variables associated with economic development and considered to set in motion the democratic process (with political liberalization being part of it), other variables listed above do not vary across our countries in a way as to cause the significant political variance that exists among them. In other words, the
Central Asian countries share, broadly speaking, social and historical experiences, including their tribal, Muslim, Czarist, and communists pasts (Khazanov 1995:115), their dependent position in the world capitalist system, including their relationship with the Soviet center in the Soviet period (Khazanov 1995:115; Gleason 1991), class structure and tribal social structure. Because our countries have very more or less similar trends on these variables, we can not use them to explain the significant variation among them. Hence, approaches which incorporate these factors can be safely ignored.

This assertion is also true of the political cultural approach. The Central Asian countries share the main sources of political culture, including historical tradition and experience (Brown 1989:19; Laitin 1988; O'Donnell 1986:15-18; Huntington and Dominguez 1975:15), indoctrination (Eckstein 1988; Taylor 1989:135; Gibson 1996:955) and modernization experiences (Lipset 1994; Inglehart 1988, 1990). We have no persuasive reason to expect significant variation in their political cultural values. Preliminary evidence collected through a survey of political cultural habits and attitudes of the people in two of the three countries, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, shows remarkable similarities in their political cultures. If fact, differences in their attitudes toward different political systems are quite small (see Tables 10 and 11; Lubin 1995a; Pilon 1998). Consequently, we can not expect that such small differences would causes the significant political variance that exists among our countries. Although some scholars did refer to some small and insignificant differences in the political cultural values among and within these countries, they did not use them to explain the rise of significant differences in political liberalization among them (Huskey 1997). And that is precisely
the point we wish to emphasize in this critique. In fact, political cultural approach can not even explain aberrations in the political liberalization process within our countries, let alone among them.

In addition, in the light of the recent information on the popular attitudes, it is becoming increasingly difficult to explain not only significant variation in political liberalization among these countries, but also the rise of despotic regimes in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Contrary to the common view (promoted by the Central Asian ruling elites and their supporters and some Western observers) that the Central Asian political cultures are not suitable for political democracy, the recent evidence shows that the Central Asian populations "are supportive of democratic rights, while generally dissatisfied with their own governments' performance in defending these rights, and are hopeful for progress without recourse to violence." This evidence which was gathered through surveys conducted in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in late 1996 further makes it clear that the Central Asians "today exhibit a fairly widespread desire to participate in the political life of their nations" (Pilon: 1998:90).

The preceding discussion suggests that we need to look elsewhere to find relevant variables to adequately address the question of variation in political liberalization among our countries in the post-independence period.

Approaches which appear to be more relevant to the focus of our inquiry are those which emphasize ethnic pluralism (and concomitant consequence of dispersion of political resources in a society), varied elite structure, and political leadership. As already mentioned, a body of comparative politics literature postulates that ethnic pluralism can
push a society in a democratic direction under certain conditions. The most emphasized conditions under which ethnic heterogeneity can set off the political liberalization and democratization process include a multiple balance of power achieved through the existence of more than two resourceful ethnic groups and the desire of the ethnic leaders (supported by a sufficient number of their followers) to cooperate with each other for a variety of reasons, including national unity, independence, peace, stability, and formation of a coalition government. In other words, ethnic pluralism characterized by a multiple balance of power prevents any single unified ethnic group from even approaching a monopoly of political resources and forces ethnic leaders and their followers to master the art of conciliation and coalition formation in order to achieve their objectives. And this, in turn, helps promote political liberalization in multi-ethnic societies (Dahl 1971:113-123, 1996:178; Lijphart 1977; Huntington 1984:205; Kothari 1971).

In its existing form, this approach pays little or no attention to the support which ethnic minorities in an authoritarian state receive from external sources and its impact on political liberalization. This situation exists in other areas of the world, too, but is more acute in the Central Asian context. A number of scholars emphasize the relevance of ethnic pluralism, especially the Russian minority, to the building of the post-Soviet polity in Central Asia. Beissinger is one of such scholars. In fact, in 1991, he predicted that ethnic pluralism in Central Asia would greatly influence the post-Soviet politics in Central Asia (Beissinger 1991:31). Khazanov later elaborated on the theme and referred to the Russian minority’s identification with Russia as an important factor contributing to its political activism and consequently fanning inter-ethnic competition in Kazakhstan.
(Khazanov 1995:115-73). However, he also does not clearly show the relevance of this identification and inter-ethnic competition to the democratization process in the Central Asian region. The Central Asian cases amply show that if an outside powerful ethnic patron identifies with and extends support to its coethnics living in an authoritarian society, it is likely to contribute to their strength and politicization, protect them from excessive repression of their authoritarian rulers, and help promote political liberalization in such society.

In many countries around the world, there are powerful ethnic minorities which adopt a democratic posture in order to enlist international support for their causes. One obvious response the authoritarian rulers of the multi-ethnic countries with such powerful minorities may adopt in response to persistent international pressure is to relax political restrictions and accommodate certain concerns of such minorities. In most instances, the international support for the democratic concerns of such minorities comes from democratic states. However, in the Central Asian republics, the Russian minority that once enjoyed the status of a dominant group under the communist rule now finds it advantageous to defend its privileges in democratic terms and draws support for its civil and political rights and other causes from Russia, a country with little or no manifest interest in democratic promotion around the world. In other words, authoritarian rulers are likely to liberalize their practices when their powerful minorities enlist the external support of a powerful (especially a contiguous country with ethnic ties with such minorities) for their democratic causes, even if this powerful country has little or no demonstrated commitment to democratic promotion. Authorities of such powerful country
more often than not use democratic rhetoric as the least expensive but effective strategy
to preserve the privileges of their co-ethnics in an authoritarian country. Thus, the
explanatory power of a model based on ethnic pluralism greatly increases if we
incorporate such external support as a factor contributing to the politicization and
resourcefulness of an ethnic minority.

Another theoretical scheme that appears to be relevant to our inquiry is the one
which incorporates elite structure as an explanatory variable in the study of political
liberalization. More specifically, promising for our inquiry is the extent to which the elite
structure in an authoritarian society is cohesive or fragmented. In many studies of the
recent regime change around the world, a number of scholars have found a fragmented
elite structure to be a favorable condition for political liberalization. As already
mentioned, some factions of ruling elites may promote autonomous societal forces and
enlist their support in an effort to enhance their own position vis-a-vis their political
rivals within the ruling circles. This situation helps expand independent political space
in an authoritarian society.

This theoretical scheme needs modification and further development in order to
be applicable to the Central Asian context. In its existing form, it focuses on national
elites and their modern support bases, including political parties and various social
classes. However, it pays inadequate attention to the national elites’ traditional support
bases, such as family, tribe, and clan, etc. If elite structure is a relevant category to
study political liberalization in Central Asia, then the focus on these support bases is
important because the Central Asian elites heavily rely on them in their political struggle.
In addition, those who used elite structure as an analytic category to study the post-communist political life in the former Soviet republics, including our countries, saw no variance, contrary to the fact, in elite structure in our countries and, hence were led to emphasize common political outcomes among them (Easter 1997). We believe that this is a mistaken view of elite structure in Central Asia. We find that our countries considerably vary in elite structure and we expect that varied elite structure in them can help explain variation in political liberalization among them.

The third approach which we find relevant to our inquiry focuses on political leaders. As already noted, process-oriented approaches assume that political actors are not merely forced by structural conditions to make pre-determined choices; but rather they prove innovative in overcoming such conditions and/or maneuver their way out of their constraints, producing intended and unintended consequences. A number of factors related to political leaders, including their interests, preferences, political ideas, political and economic strategies, actions, and sequence of actions, etc., are believed to influence political outcomes.

We intend to draw on this approach in our effort to build a model to explain variation in political liberalization among our countries. However, unlike many process-oriented explanations which assume that political outcomes are influenced by rationally self-interested political leaders who seek total control of the state (Malloy 1987:237), we do not intend to impute any interests to them. Not only it is hard to conclusively show which interests political leaders are pursuing at a particular point in time and which interests are prompting them to take certain actions but the focus on interests also creates
other problems. If we assume that all the Central Asian leaders, as rationally self-interested political actors, seek total control of the state and/or seek to perpetuate their rule, then the focus on their interests can not help explain why their countries vary in political liberalization. In other words, in order to explain variation that exists among these countries, we need to focus on dimensions along which these political leaders vary and which produce different political outcomes in spite of their common interests. Thus, instead of focusing on their interests, we will focus on two aspects, political orientations and strategic behavior (including concrete actions) of political leaders.

This scheme raises a conceptual problem which needs clarification. The danger in this scheme is that it is vulnerable to criticism on account of involving a cause-effect relationship between political orientations and actions of leaders. More precisely, critics can argue that how political leaders act is influenced by their ideas about political and socioeconomic matters, and the relative merit of different available options. In our case, this criticism means that acts of the Central Asian leaders which we are treating as an independent variable in our scheme may, in effect, be an aspect of political liberalization, our dependent variable. This is a legitimate concern which must be addressed before we proceed further in our inquiry.

We know that a number of scholars refuse to reduce political beliefs and ideas to mere epiphenomena; they rather treat them as relatively independent, though not as uncaused primary, variables in the explanation of democratic outcomes (Dahl 1989:260-61). Can actions of political leaders be put in the same category? In the comparative politics literature, political actions and strategic behavior of political leaders are treated,
just like political beliefs, ideas, and ideologies of leaders, as relatively independent, though not uncaused primary, variables in the explanation of political outcomes, including the rise and demise of democratic regimes (Stepan 1988; Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1990). Political actions and strategic behavior of political leaders may not always be determined by their ideas and views. A number of other factors, including the force of events and emotion, can also cause the leaders to take actions and make strategic choices which may assume their own momentum and autonomy and produce consequences which no one intends and anticipates. In addition, a political leader may take an action which is not in accordance with his central political tendencies, ideas, and beliefs. In other words, at times political actions of political leaders can not be reasonably and consistently linked to their political orientations.

Conscious of this conceptual confusion surrounding our scheme, we will focus on such political actions which are either inconsistent with central political tendencies of the Central Asian leaders but produced consequences consistent with their political orientations or are of such nature that they can not be characterized as pro- and anti-democratic actions. Two examples will illustrate this point. The ban on the republican communist party in the immediate post-independence period by the president of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akayev, a reformist leader who later legalized it, falls in the former category of actions. The decisions of Sultan Nazarbayev, the Kazakh president, to quit the republican communist party and not to join any political party in the wake of the August 1991 abortive coup fall in the second category of actions.
A more detailed discussion of these examples and their impact on political liberalization in both the countries is presented below. Here, it will suffice to point out that the Central Asian political leaders differ in their views about political liberalization, and they also took certain concrete actions which influenced political liberalization in one way or another. We assume that variation in their political orientations will help explain the variation in political liberalization among their countries. And different concrete actions which these political leaders took at different times will not only help explain variation in political liberalization among our countries but also aberrations in the political liberalization process within them.

Building on the preceding promising theoretical schemes, an effort is made in the next section to lay out a theoretical framework to adequately explain variation that exists among the three Central Asian republics.

POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN CENTRAL ASIA: A THEORETICAL MODEL

The dependent variable in this study is political liberalization. The theoretical framework we developed to study political liberalization in post-communist Central Asia contains three independent variables. These independent variables are: a) the size of the Russian minority in proportion to the titular nationality; b) elite structure; and c) political leadership (see Figure 1).

The dependent variable is shown at the top and independent variables on the left side of Figure 1. Each row on the table depicts the impact of a particular independent variable on our dependent variable. We have decomposed our dependent variable into high/moderate/low trichotomy and two independent variables, Russian minority and elite.
structure, into large/small and high/low dichotomies, and third independent variable, political leadership, into reformist/cautious reformist/anti-reformist trichotomy, showing causal relationship between dependent and independent variables in an oversimplified manner for the convenience of the reader. In fact, this format enables us to show to the reader in a very simple way whether an independent variable has any effect on the dependent variable and whether this effect is positive or negative.

Our first independent variable is the size of the Russian minority in proportion to the titular ethnic group in each of the three Central Asia republics, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Although all the three republics house the Russian minority, they vary in its size relative to the size of the titular nationality (see Tables 1 and 2). One of the assumptions of our theoretical model is that a large Russian minority constitutes a favorable condition for political liberalization in the Central Asian republics. This study hypothesizes a positive impact of a large Russian minority on political liberalization in post-communist Central Asia, for the following reasons.

First, elites and governments in power in each of the Central Asian republics under study are identified with the titular ethnic group. Most transition policies these elites pursue are tailored to address the concerns of the titular ethnic group. As a result, the Russian minority, like other nontitular ethnic minorities, is alienated from these elites and their ethnonationalist policies. Since both the ruling elites and the main opposition forces trying to displace them come from the same titular ethnic group, the sheer large size of the alienated Russian minority means that the elites and governments in power have a reduced social base to draw support from in their political struggle and, hence,
there are less aggressive in the use of repression in such struggle. In addition, if the Russian minority strives to advance its own agenda, it means wider opposition to the ruling elites and higher cost involved in its repression. And, if it champions causes with democratic trappings without challenging the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a republic, it makes it harder for the rulers of these republics to find reasonable excuses to unleash widespread repression and justify it, especially to the Russian authorities who have publicly avowed to use force, if necessary, to protect the Russian-speaking population living in the 'near abroad'.

Second, what makes the Russian minority a favorable condition for political liberalization in Central Asian societies is its resourcefulness. The Russian minority’s resourcefulness stems from both endogenous and exogenous factors. The former include the numerical strength, higher and specialized education, technical skills, professional status, and economic conditions of the Russian minority. The latter include the Russian government’s political, material, and moral support.

As compared to its proportion, the Russian-speaking population outnumbers the titular nationality in higher and specialized education and consequently in the makeup of the technological elite and skilled industrial workforce. This fact helps the Russian minority become a very resourceful social group. In addition to the above factors, the Russian government’s support to the Russian minority also contributes to its resourcefulness and hence effectively protects it from outright repression in societies with a relatively large Russian minority.
We expect that a large Russian minority is likely to attract more Russian government’s support than a small Russian minority. The reasons for this expectation include: a) the active and much-publicized involvement of large Russian minorities in politics to preserve their privileges; b) the potential loss of the credibility of Russia’s pronounced commitment to protect the rights of the Russian minorities in the former Soviet republics if they are subjected to an outright repression; and c) greater chances of winning concessions for them from the governments of the former Soviet republics with relatively large Russian minorities.

On the one hand, the Russian minority’s resourcefulness resulting from both internal and external factors helps it in its survival as an effective social group and in its struggle against both the titular nationality and the government. And, on the other hand, it discourages the Central Asian authorities from subjecting it to outright and indiscriminate repression, which could potentially set off massive Russian outmigration, depriving the republic of skilled manpower, with an adverse impact on the already fragile transition economy.

In addition, in view of the explicit Russian commitment to use all available means, including force, to protect the Russian minorities in the former Soviet republics, the high level of Russian support to these Russian minorities serves as a clear signal to the Central Asian ruling elites that Russia is serious in its commitment. In view of the dependence of the Central Asian republics on Russia, the presence of Russian troops on their soil, and the potential Russian capability and willingness to make and break the governments in the region (as the Tajik case illustrates), the Russian government’s
support to the Russian minority weighs heavily in the calculations of the ruling elites and generates lot of pressure on them, prompting them to accommodate the sociopolitical and cultural concerns of this group. In other words, this pressure prompts them to provide independent political space to the Russian minority and, hence, to other autonomous opposition forces.

If the ruling elites spare the resourceful (and politicized) Russian minority but use excessive force against the opposition forces of the titular nationality, they risk undermining their nationalist credentials with potentially adverse consequences for their rule—a prospect they would like to avoid. As a consequence, the ruling elites in republics with a relatively large size of the politicized and resourceful Russian minority are constrained in the excessive use of force against both the titular opposition groups and nontitular groups and are likely to relax political restrictions and provide political space to independent opposition forces.

Third, the large size and resourcefulness of the Russian minority induce its members to organize, put up an active defense of their interests, and make demands on the state. The titular opposition forces and the Russian minority are allies in the post-communist era in the sense that both are opposed to the ruling elites for their respective, although often mutually conflicting, concerns. This situation is conducive to political liberalization because the government has a large size of opposition to deal with and finds it increasingly difficult to silence it through outright repressive methods.

A large, resourceful, and politicized Russian minority contributes to political liberalization yet in another way. More often than not the Russian minority and titular
nationality operate and interact with each other in the political arena in a competitive manner. The politicized Russian minority and the titular ethnic group are involved in an interactive relationship. They often make mutually exclusive demands on the state. The ruling elites often find it difficult to reconcile these conflicting demands. The action taken by one group to achieve its objectives activates the other, and so on and so forth. This interactive relationship sets in motion a chain of pressures, counterpressures, mobilization, and countermobilization, galvanizing the political arena in the republics with large Russian minorities. In other words, the volume of autonomous political activity greatly increases. As a result, the ruling elites often find it advantageous to offer limited political liberalization rather than paying the enormous cost required to suppress all this autonomous political activity and risk other political eventualities, including civil war and the reaction of the Russian government.

Conversely, if the Russian minority is small in proportion to the titular ethnic group, it is less likely to engage in an independent political struggle to promote its interests for fear of antagonizing the incumbent authority, let alone the titular majority, with little or no chance of substantive achievement. It is more likely to depend on and cooperate with the government in power to ensure its security and welfare. In such a case, the incumbent authority rather than the ethnic Russian minority is more likely to receive the Russian government's encouragement and support for the protection of the interests of this minority. We assume this situation to be prejudicial to political liberalization as it strengthens the ruling elites against the opposition forces and builds no pressure on them to tolerate independent political activity and liberalize their
authoritarian practices. The above discussion leads us to expect that the republics with relatively large Russian minorities will score higher on political liberalization than those with smaller Russian minorities.

Can we expect the same results in Estonia and Latvia which each houses a large Russian minority in proportion to the titular nationality (see Table 1)? In other words, does the large Russian minority constitute a conducive factor for political liberalization in these republics the way it does in the Central Asian republics? Is Russia as effective in pressurizing these republics on the question of the Russian diaspora as it is in the case of the Central Asian republics housing large Russian minorities? According to a common impression which seems to have developed due to the situation in the early phase of their independence, the presence of large Russian minorities undermines rather than advances the political liberalization process because the nationalizing Baltic republics exclude them from the political processes. This is a mistaken view.

According to the Freedom House rating, both Estonia and Latvia have increasingly become free countries since their independence (see Table 8). Also, the Russian diaspora in these republics can engage in most independent political activities which can be lumped together under the rubric of political liberalization. In fact, the Russian population of these republics is found resisting their nationalizing policies through periodic strikes and demonstrations (Smith and Wilson 1997). In addition, the Russian population (especially citizens) of these republics can form organized political parties to pursue its interests (Laitin 1998). In fact, what is at stake in these republics is not the question of political liberalization (as is clear from the fact that the Russian
population can engage in such political activities without being subjected to repression), but rather the question of citizenship (Laitin 1998) which, according to O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), falls under the rubric of democratization. In Central Asia, it is not the question of citizenship because the Russian population there has been granted citizenship; it is rather the question of their freedom to exercise this and other civil and political rights lumped under the rubric of political liberalization.

Russia is less effective in winning concessions from the Baltic republics than the Central Asian republics on the question of citizenship for their Russian population. In fact, Russia can exercise more effective pressure on the Central Asian republics than the Baltic republics to protect their Russian population from repressive measures for two important reasons. First, Russia has withdrawn troops from the Baltic republics but not from the Central Asian republics. Russian troops still guard the latter's borders and have the capability to depose and install governments in these republics. Tajikistan is a case in point. The presence of Russian troops effectively protects the Russian minority from excessive repression in Central Asia. Second, the cost of Russian military action in behalf of the Russian minority in the Baltic republics is potentially far greater than in the Central Asian republics. It is so because the Western industrialized countries are likely to react more sharply in the case of the former than the latter. This is clear to the Central Asian republics with a large, politically active Russian minority, discouraging them from unleashing indiscriminate repression in society.

The second independent variable in our model is elite structure. In this study, elite structure refers to a patterned set of relationships that developed among elites of the
old regime. The leaders of the republican communist party, important members of nomenklatura, members of the parliament, state functionaries, heads of public enterprises, and other important figures (such as tribal and clan leaders) under the tutelage of the republican communist leadership comprise this elite. In this study, we will focus on the structure of old-regime elites as they passed from the breakdown phase into the post-communist transition phase. The character of the structure of old-regime elites is defined by their internal unity and cohesiveness and the extent to which they retain access to their public and nonpublic power resources. On the basis of this definition, we can identify two basic elite structure types—consolidated and fragmented (or dispersed)—that emerged in Central Asia in the post-Soviet era.

A consolidated elite structure means that old regime elites pass into the post-communist transition phase structurally intact. The consolidated old regime elites maintain their internal unity and cohesiveness and retain access to power resources. They do not suffer major defections. Above all, they are unified in keeping new political actors out of the national political process and exhibit a remarkable consensus on the pace and direction of the post-communist transition. All of this means that unified elites have more freedom of action in controlling independent political activity.

In contrast, a fragmented elite structure means that the old-regime elites experience serious internal fragmentation during the regime breakdown and transition phases. The fragmented old-regime elites join different groups and alliances and often adopt conflicting political agendas. Although some old-regime elites may remain in power, many suffer the loss of power positions and public (and in certain cases...
nonpublic) power resources. When they are fragmented, most old-regime elites face real political competitors in their struggle for power resources in the post-communist era—a beneficial situation for political liberalization.

Drawing on the prevailing scholarly argument that elite structure influences regime change,43 this study hypothesizes that variation in the structure of the old-regime elites helps explain variation in political liberalization among the Central Asian republics in the post-Soviet era. This study expects a positive effect of the fragmented elite structure on political liberalization. It is so because this type of elite structure is indicative of a narrow support base of the ruling regime. It undermines a government’s capacity to control and repress society because of the defection of its important allies, its isolation from important sources of support, a reduction in the clientelist networks available to the ruling elites, and the rise of broad movements and challenges from above and from below. If the elite structure is fragmented, opposition forces become stronger and are able to resist restrictions on their political activities. The above conditions produced by a fragmented elite structure facilitate the decisions of the ruling elites to provide political space for autonomous opposition activities.

The fragmented elite structure facilitates political liberalization in our countries yet in another way. That is, fragmented elites of the old regime tend to draw support from their old connections, including those located in Russia, which contributes to their strength and prove an effective shield against indiscriminate and outright repression. If such old connections include the Russian government’s support, it effectively discourages the elites in power to eliminate their former comrades (and present political opponents)
from the national political process through indiscriminate repressive measures. In other words, the ruling elites can impose certain restrictions on their political opponents, but can not unleash widespread repression to completely eliminate them without the risk of prohibitive costs.

In addition to the above conditions, another factor that figures most prominently in the decision of the ruling elites to tolerate independent political activity is the specter of civil war. If the ruling elites unleash excessive and indiscriminate repression against their opponents, civil war becomes a real possibility under a fragmented elite structure because fragmented elites with traditional sources of support (such as tribal, clan, ethnic, and regional) at their disposal can be tempted to use them to defend themselves against the government repression. The Tajik civil war is a case in point. The civil war increases the risk of Russian intervention and the removal of the ruling elites from their power positions. Again, the Tajik case illustrates the point, and serves as a lesson to the ruling elites in other republics. The above discussion leads us to expect greater political liberalization in the Central Asian republics where a fragmented elite structure has emerged.

Our theoretical argument has thus far been structural. We are confident that the above two structural independent variables can adequately account for the broad variance in the general direction of the political liberalization process in the post-communist Central Asian republics. However, they have their own limitations. Although the large Russian minority and a fragmented elite structure considerably constrain authoritarian impulses in our countries, but they can not be shown to clearly determine a full range
of variations among and aberrations in the political liberalization process within them. If we confine our focus to these two variables, we can not adequately answer certain specific questions related to the political liberalization process in Central Asia. For instance, why does the political liberalization process shift back and forth in a republic when the above two explanatory variables remain constant? In other words, what explains aberrations in the political liberalization process within a country? Why do ruling elites relax restrictions in some areas of political liberalization but not in others? And why do they sometimes tolerate the same independent political activity which they otherwise repress? In view of the fact that the above two variables experience no change, what explains the timing of certain political liberalization-related developments? And why are some societal groups included in political liberalization and others excluded from it?

The above two structural independent variables cannot adequately address these questions. In order to provide satisfactory answers to these and other similar questions, we expand our theoretical argument and introduce the third independent variable, political leadership, in our model. In this study, political leadership refers to the incumbent presidential leaderships in charge of the post-communist transition process in our countries. Of course, these incumbent presidents put together teams of their own choosing. These teams often share their political approach and assist them in directing this transition. We will focus on two aspects of political leadership, its views about political liberalization and its concrete actions and strategic behavior. In this respect, the logic of our theoretical argument is both structural and voluntaristic.
The assumption of this study is that political leaders are not simply forced by broad structural conditions into a predetermined direction; but rather they have central political orientations which influence political outcomes; they generally retain initiative; they mediate the gross impact of structural conditions on the political process; and their actions may produce outcomes which no one intended or anticipated.

The central political tendencies of political leaders are likely to magnify or weaken situational stimuli for a particular course of action. In other words, if political leadership is reformist, it will react favorably even to weak situational press for a reformist course of action, and vice versa. If political leadership is anti-reformist, it will forcefully resist pressures conducive to political liberalization. Even under powerful constraints of structural conditions a significant range of options is available to political leaders to make political choices and take actions. The choices they make and the actions they take tend to have cumulative effect which can increase or decrease the level of political liberalization in a republic. One set of decisions and actions taken at one point in time, practically and effectively, if not theoretically, rule out another set of decisions and actions down the road. Hence, if a decision conducive to political liberalization is taken at one point in time, it is likely to facilitate other decisions and actions which may further deepen the political liberalization process. If these assertions are correct, then variations in political orientations of the political leadership of the Central Asian republics and their concrete actions will help explain variation in political liberalization among them.
Our focus on the central tendencies of the Central Asian leaders is very much in line with the serious analyses of the region. After the abortive coup against Gorbachev, serious scholars like Beissinger could foresee that "the varied ideological colors of the elites who were left in power at the time of the Union's collapse will have an enormous impact on subsequent politics in the area, including the complication of efforts to construct a post-Soviet community." He also referred to the significant variation in ideological colors of the Central Asian leaders (Beissinger 1991:31, 35). However, his recommendation to focus on the political orientations of the incumbent political leaderships was largely ignored in the subsequent analyses of the post-communist politics in the region.

We concur with Beissinger that the Central Asian political leaders differ in their views about political liberalization. More specifically, they differ about whether, how and when political liberalization can be introduced in their societies. Some Central Asian political leaders outrightly reject political democracy as unsuitable for their societies. In fact, they believe that political democracy is not compatible with the political culture of their societies. Others, especially moderate reformist leaders, doubt the readiness of their societies for political reforms. In addition, they enumerate a number of adverse consequences of for the their societies during the transition period. However, they manipulate and moderate rather than forcefully resist pro-reform pressures. Still others have a more favorable view of political liberalization and its consequences for their societies. Political leaders with benign view of political liberalization are more likely to relax political control and to be more responsive to even weak constraints of structural
conditions than the political leaders with negative views about political liberalization and its consequences for their rule and societies.

The choices the political leaders make and the actions they take may or may not be in accordance with their central political orientations. We assume that political leaders are innovative and at times take actions which are contrary to their central political tendencies. However, these actions do influence the political liberalization process in one way or another. Because actions of political leaders are of fluid nature, it becomes more or less an empirical question to investigate whether a concrete action of political leadership produces a positive or negative impact on political liberalization in a republic. Because leaders take different (and at times inconsistent) actions, we assume that variations in their concrete actions will help us explain not only variation in political liberalization among our countries but also aberrations in the political liberalization process within them.

THE EMPIRICAL ARGUMENT

As Figure 1 shows, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan score higher than Uzbekistan on political liberalization—a conclusion supported by the Freedom House rating of these countries on political and civil rights index (see Table 7). Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan both have large Russian minorities in proportion to their titular nationalities. Preliminary evidence also shows that these minorities receive the Russian government’s help in their struggles to defend their political, civil, and cultural rights.

In addition, the elite structure in both countries is fragmented. In Kyrgyzstan, the communist party suffered serious splits even before independence. A reformist group
of communist party members was formed within the Kyrgyz parliament in 1990. This group entered into an alliance with a group of independent members of the parliament and proved critical in the victory of reform-oriented Askar Akayev in the October 1990 parliamentary election for president. This situation continued in the post-independence period.

In Kazakhstan, the republican communist party lost its monopoly over access to power resources. It also suffered splits. A number of its members left the party to join other political formations and/or operate independently. One section of the republican communist party not only opposed the Kazakh president but it also had to face other political competitors in the post-Soviet period. In fact, Nazarbayev helped transform not only a section of the communist party into a new political formation but also helped create two more political parties which now rival the communist party. Thus, the large, resourceful, and politicized Russian minority, and a fragmented elite structure help explain why Kazakhstan scores higher on political liberalization than Uzbekistan. However, these factors can not explain why Kazakhstan scores lower on political liberalization than Kyrgyzstan which also have a relatively large Russian minority and a fragmented elite structure. In order to explain the mixed record of Kazakhstan on political liberalization, we need to turn to the political orientations of the Kazakh leadership and its certain concrete actions which increased and/or decreased the level of political liberalization in the republic.

In contrast to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan scores quite low on political liberalization. The small Russian minority, little or no Russian government's
support to it, and a consolidated elite structure are responsible for the low level of political liberalization in Uzbekistan. In Uzbekistan, the consolidated elite structure was put in place before independence. The Uzbek elites closed their ranks partly in reaction to the center-sponsored purges of nomenklatura involved in alleged widespread corruption. After independence, the communist party suffered few defections and was successfully transformed into a new ruling party headed by the Uzbek President, Islam Karimov. These factors produced a low level of political liberalization in Uzbekistan.

The leadership of Akayev played an important role in promoting political liberalization in his republic. Even before independence, he, unlike other Central Asian leaders, was enthusiastic supporter of the Gorbachev reform. His pro-reform political orientations persisted in the post-independence period. In addition, he relied on more than one political party and group for his support. Hence, by entering into alliance with old as well as new political actors, Akayev expanded political space available to society.

Like Akayev, Nazarbayev collaborates with more than one political group, producing almost similar consequences for political liberalization. Certain actions of the political leaders are responsible for greater political liberalization in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. However, due to his ambivalent views about political liberalization and its consequences for his society and the presence and demands of secessionist elements among the Russian minority (which provide him a more or less safe pretext to repress certain unwanted opposition elements) explain why Kazakhstan lags behind Kyrgyzstan in political liberalization.
The political leadership in Uzbekistan is anything but reformist. Before independence, it showed rhetorical solidarity with the central leadership on political reform, but systematically subverted its implementation when it belatedly made its way to Uzbekistan in the late 1980s. After independence, the Uzbek leaders made no secret of their quite negative views of the center-sponsored political reform program and their determination to roll it back. Immediately after independence, they doubted the readiness of their society for political reforms—a position which remained unchanged thereafter. In the absence of structural constraints, the Uzbek leaders had more freedom of action to conduct the post-communist transition in accordance with their central political tendencies and designs. As a result, tactics aside which produce(d) short-lived moments of political openness, there exists no tolerated independent political activity in the post-communist Uzbekistan.

NOTES

1. The state-sponsored ethno-nation building is another important area in which the three Central Asian republics significantly differ.

2. Conteh-Morgan conceptualize democratization as a transitional stage on a continuum starting with authoritarian rule to democratic governance. He argues that it can be seen unfolding in countries instituting multiparty systems, national conferences on political reforms, holding free and fair competitive elections, establishing mechanisms to ensure participation at all levels of politics, and creating responsible leadership and civil liberties (Conteh-Morgan 1995:6). This conceptualization implies that political liberalization will ultimately mature into political democracy. Lee views political liberalization as a necessary condition for democratization; however, he is opposed to reducing democratization to political liberalization (Lee 1993:351-356).

3. Cotton argues that political cultural approach suggests the possibility of accommodating illiberal beliefs and practices rooted in political culture of societies within constitutional arrangements (Cotton 1991).
4. For a representative work, see O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986). O'Donnell and Schmitter conceptualize political liberalization as a process of redefining, extending and making certain rights effective that protect both individuals and social groups from arbitrary or illegal acts committed by the state or third parties. The list of individual and group rights which they identify elevate their conceptualization of political liberalization to an ideal-type which they concede has probably never been totally and unconditionally observed in any country and that its content has changed over time (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986:7). Kaufman (1986) and Martin (1986) offer rather a conservative conceptualization of political liberalization. Their conceptualization of political liberalization under an authoritarian regime includes features which according to O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), and Przeworski (1991) are the features of democratization. These features refer to the authoritarian regime's experimentation with guided and controlled democracy. In other words, during the political liberalization process the authoritarian regime may adopt formal democratic institutions but these institutions are often without democratic content.

5. This study views democratization as process of transforming a non-democratic state into a democratic state. As Huntington proposes, democratization involves three things: a) the end of a non-democratic regime; b) the establishment of a democratic regime; and c) the consolidation of the democratic regime (Huntington 1991:35). Huntington believes that "Modern democracy is not simply democracy of village, the tribe, or the city-state; it is democracy of nation-state and its emergence is associated with the development of the nation-state" (Huntington 1991:13). Linz and Stepan (1996) share this view. However, unlike Huntington and Linz and Stepan, Ambrose believes that groups and communities, in addition to states, can also be transformed into democratic entities (Ambrose 1995:19).

6. The troublesome aspects of the conceptualization of political liberalization offered by O'Donnell and Schmitter are that it puts equal emphasis on civil as well as political society and includes conditions (such as the protection of individuals and groups from arbitrary acts of parties other than the state) which perhaps no state will ever be able to satisfy. Moreover, it establishes a link between political liberalization, law and order situation in a country and the state capability to deal with it. However, theoretically as well as practically, it is possible that a country has a democratic regime, but is suffering from internal social and political strife. India is just one example. According to our conceptualization, political liberalization is primarily related to the extent of political space an authoritarian regime makes available to society.

7. Before the breakdown of authoritarian regimes over the past two decades, political liberalization was seldom studied as a separate subject of political inquiry. While it has always been a presumption of the evolutionary model of political development outlined by modernization theorists that political liberalization would occur (and ultimately mature into consolidated political democracy) in nondemocratic countries when they would begin to attain a higher level of socioeconomic development, it was only after the recent regime
change that regime analysts systematically studied political liberalization (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986).

8. As already mentioned, the question of political liberalization has been around for quite some time. One of the interesting debates the recent regime change has provoked is focused on the question of how to compare various aspects of recent political regime change, including the question of political liberalization, in the communist and noncommunist world. Some scholars find it appropriate to examine the post-communist transitions with the analytical categories developed from the study of regime change in the noncommunist world (Karl and Schmitter 1991; Schmitter and Karl 1994; Hasegawa 1992). Others argue that the post-communist transition is a unique phenomenon which is fundamentally different from the post-authoritarian transition. They insist on developing new analytical categories in order to properly study the post-communist transition (Ekiert 1997). Both groups use a number of theoretical schemes to explain the beginning of political liberalization under authoritarian and communist regimes. In this chapter, we shall discuss various approaches both groups use to study political liberalization.


10. In addition to these effects, a wealthy, industrial economy, as the argument runs, lessens the tensions of political conflict and facilitates accommodation and compromise in the political arena by offering alternative opportunities and abundant economic resources to unsuccessful political leaders (Huntington 1984:199). For an excellent synopsis of the reasons for the positive correlation between democracy and economic development, see Huntington (1984), and Przeworski and Limongi (1997).

11. Marx is believed to be among the first scholars to identify the bourgeoisie as the major force responsible for the rise of democracy. According to him, the capitalist class uses democratic mechanisms to capture the state from the traditional power elites (Arat 1988:21).

12. Therborn argues that although the rise of market economy and the middle class have eroded state power and enlarged human rights, it was the working class, especially in the capitalist world, that championed the rights of political parties and the expansion of suffrage (Therborn 1977). John Stephens observes that capitalist development causes democratization "because it is associated with a transformation of the class structure strengthening the working class" (Stephens 1993:438).
13. He uses the two terms, "the authoritarian crisis" and "great transformation," with reference to the transition process underway in the nondemocratic countries in the communist and noncommunist world. The term "the crisis of authoritarian" is used to refer to the grand failure of dictatorial rule "to deliver on its promises of purposeful efficiency," the state-initiated "liberalization practices," and the democratization process underway in the nondemocratic communist and noncommunist countries. The "great transformation", a term he borrows from Karl Polanyi (1944), refers to the process in which "transnational forces involving a dynamic world economy and revolutions in technology and information are compelling authoritarian governments to open up their economies" as well as political system (Pye 1990).

14. In addition to political liberalization, other common possibilities include: a) democratization—"decisive transitions from autocratic rule toward democracy" (Pye 1990:5; Huntington 1991:59); b) an abrupt overthrow of a dictatorial regime; and c) increased repression (Pye 1990:5; Huntington 1991:59). Other scholars also refer to some of these possibilities in their analyses of regime transition (Linz 1978:35; Huntington 1984:212-14, 1991:110-63; Share and Mainwaring 1986:177-79).

15. Huntington is of the view that under certain conditions, ethnic, racial and religious diversity may facilitate the development of at least limited forms of democracy. However, he asserts that "In most cases of communal pluralism, democracy can operate only on a consociational rather than a majoritarian basis." And he believes that such democracy "often break(s) down as a result of social mobilization that undermines the power of elites or as a result of the intrusion of external political and military forces." (Huntington 1984:205). Dahl also believes that a heterogeneous country can experience competitive politics if "it is not segmented into strong and distinctive subcultures; or if it so segmented, its leaders have succeeded in creating a consociational arrangement for managing subcultural conflicts" (Dahl 1996:178).

16. A number of social groups ranging from religious associations such as the Catholic Church (Huntington 1991:72-85) to middle-sector groups such as salaried class and small local producers (Kaufman 1986:90-93) to environmental and cultural groups (Butterfield and Weigle 1991) to a host of other voluntary associations (Schmitter 1986:6-8) are thought to have played a critical role in the democratization process in the world over the past two decades. Schmitter believes that in addition to autonomous social formations, "independent territorial communities, especially town and cities" greatly facilitated the recent democratization process around the world (Schmitter 1986:6). Moshe Lewin is believed to be first to introduce and emphasize the importance of the concept of civil society to the study of politics in the Soviet Union. He is of the view that modernization slowly expanded civil society which in turn is responsible for perestroika and glasnost (Lewin 1974, 1988). Arato differs with Lewin's notion of a slowly and expanding civil society in the Soviet Union. He rather argues that independent social movements and initiatives did not arise in the pre-Gorbachev period. He also rejects the notion that modernization is responsible for the rise of civil society which facilitated perestroika and glasnost. He rather refers to "the self-constitution of civil society in independent
movements and initiatives" and the role of the state (the reform-oriented Gorbachev team) in providing opportunity structure for the beginning of self-organization. He also suggests the possibility of the republic level administrative structures contributing to the rise and politicization of independent social movements and initiatives (Arato 1991:202, 212).

17. A change in the orientation of the already existing social groups can facilitate the initiation of the political liberalization and democratization process in a country. Huntington believes that the pro-democracy change which occurred in the Catholic Church played a significant role in undermining authoritarianism (Huntington 1991:72-85). In a similar fashion, Kaufman finds that the defection of the middle-sector groups from an authoritarian coalition and their support to anti-regime coalition forces greatly facilitated the political liberalization process in many South American countries (Kaufman 1986:91-93).

18. O'Donnell and Schmitter are of the view that the resurrection of civil society begins after some political liberalization has been introduced in a country (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986:48). In other words, civil society can help expand and deepen political liberalization, but cannot be the cause of it. The assumption underlying this position is that authoritarian rule destroys autonomous political spaces and is able to orient most of its subjects toward the pursuit of exclusively private goals (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986:48). In other words, no autonomous grass-root organizations exist before political liberalization. In spite of its merits, this view does not capture the reality in many countries including Pakistan where autonomous social organizations such as religious formations existed before different authoritarian regimes liberalized their practices. And such formations pursued goals with explicit political implications. One of such goals was the demand for the introduction of an Islamic system in the country.

19. Political culture has been defined in different ways. According to Huntington and Dominguez (1975:15), political culture "consists of empirical beliefs about expressive political symbols and values and other orientations of the members of the society toward political objects" (Huntington and Dominguez 1975:15). Larry Diamond defines political culture as "a people's predominant beliefs, attitudes, values, ideals, sentiments, and evaluations about the political system of its country, and the role of the self in that system" (Diamond 1993:7-8). Sidney Verba defines political culture as a "system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which define the situation in which political action takes place" (Verba 1965:513). Some scholars went beyond this subjective and psychological definition of political culture to include behavior (Tucker 1987:3-6; White 1984:62). According to Archie Brown, despite some important differences between ideology and political culture, "the substance of one can impinge upon and intertwine with the other" (Brown 1989:2).
20. Huntington and Dominguez believe that "The most crucial political belief for political modernization is...the extent to which individuals consider themselves unambiguous members of a given nation" (Huntington and Dominguez 1975:32).

21. For Daniel Lerner, empathy is the capacity of a person to see himself in his other fellows' situation (Lerner 1958:49-50).

22. The crude version of the political cultural theory sees in political culture a causal determinism. According to the crude political culture theory, political culture of a society is relatively impervious to change, and it more or less predetermines both political structures and political behavior. Howard Wiarda (1974) is often criticized for such a rude political cultural theory. Pye is also criticized for his explanation of Asian political development through a political cultural perspective which "approaches the deterministic model in several basic assumption" (Diamond 1993:9). For a critical review of the crude version of the political cultural theory, see Diamond (1993). Although the assumptions Diamond (1993) found in Pye's work approach the deterministic model, Pye at other places recognizes the malleability of political culture: "A political culture is the product of both the collective history of a political system and the life histories of the individuals who currently make up the system; and thus it is rooted equally in public events and private experiences" (Pye 1965:8).

23. There are three broad sources of political culture: a) historical tradition and experience (Brown 1989:19; Laitin 1988; O'Donnell 1986:15-18; Huntington and Dominguez 1975:15); b) indoctrination (or artifice) (Eckstein 1988; Taylor 1989:135; Gibson 1996:955); and c) modernization (Lipset 1994).

24. The much-cited sources of these political cultural changes include the painful experience of social conflict (i.e., strikes, protest rallies, street violence, and shortage of food and consumer goods) prior to the rise of authoritarian regime, the painful experience of bloody military coups, the "unusually repressive and socially regressive" authoritarian regimes, the failed economic policies of such regimes, the destruction of the myth about the inevitability and irreversibility of the socialist process, generational gap, intellectual debates (especially in the USSR), and modernization (O'Donnell 1986; Silva 1998; Diamond 1993).

25. Huntington defines institutionalization as a "process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability" (Huntington 1965:394).

26. This is more true of the British and American colonial rule than of other colonial powers. As Huntington reported, as of 1983, no former colony of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands was a democracy (Huntington 1984:206). However, some former British colonies, as Myron Weiner observes, existed with a continuous democratic experience (Weiner 1987). The two prominent examples are Sri Lanka and India.
27. Kitschelt considers the focus on international efforts to promote democracy as a process approach to the study of political regime (Kitschelt 1992).

28. Huntington argues that demonstration effects are increasingly possible because of the almost instantaneous transmission of information about significant political events around the world. The successful democratization demonstrates to other societies that leaders and groups have an ability to end an authoritarian regime; that it could be done; that how it can be done; and that how and what dangers could be avoided (Huntington 1991:33, 100).

29. During the cold war, the Soviet Union and the United States supported all kinds of countries to secure allies. Once it was over, it caused a substantive reduction in resources available to authoritarian regimes. In addition, aid donors announced that aid would be available to those who undertake political reforms (Abrahamsen 1997:130-131).

30. In fact, dependency and world system theorists concede that independent economic development is conducive to a humane political regime. However, they argue that economic development and peripheral position in the world economic system distort most of the usual consequences of socioeconomic development associated with the rise of political democracy. The common argument offered to establish a connection between economic dependence and lack of democracy focuses on the relationship between the elites in the periphery and the elite in the core. The former are said to maintain authoritarian regime with the support of the latter. This support is thought to hinder the processes associated with socioeconomic development that contribute to democratic development. Contrary to the assumption of modernization theorists that industrial class will challenge authoritarian regimes, in the dependent countries this class becomes a vital part of the system of domination. Thus, the core and noncore elites resist the pressure of the working class for more political and economic rights. An end to this situation will bring about an end to political repression in the Third World countries (Cardoso and Faletto 1979; Frank 1969; Portes 1976; Chirot 1977; O'Donnell 1979; Bollen 1983; Evans 1979).

31. Cardoso, on the other hand, believes that although there is a certain "elective affinity" between the structures produced by associated-dependent development and the centralization of power, but because the political form (the regime) is distinct from the pact of domination (an alliance of hegemonic classes) which gives the State its social base, the same style of associated-dependent development is "consistent with democratic regime" (Cardoso 1989 :301, 310-311).

32. In his cross-national study of relationship between world system position, dependency and democracy, Bollen finds "support for the belief that different positions in the world system are associated with different levels of political democracy even after controlling economic development" (Bollen 1983:477). However, Muller's cross-national study does not support Bollen's position (Muller 1985).
33. Some scholars argue that the structural and process-driven approaches are not mutually exclusive (Collier and Norden 1992). Kitschelt believes that "structuralist and process-oriented analyses do not directly compete with each other but focus on different objects of explanations with different research methods and comparative designs." He thinks that structuralist approaches are good at explaining "the general causes of regime breakdown and the consolidation of new regimes. Process approaches may explain the timing of breakdown and transition as well as specific trial-and-error process of searching for a new viable regime." In his view, the "two currents represent only strands within the structuralist camp" (Kitschelt 1992:1028-1029).

34. The approaches used toward these ends include modernization theory (Bohr in Rezun 1992, p.129), cultural theory (Huskey 1997), social structural approaches focusing on various cleavages along ethnic, regional, tribal, and religious lines (Huskey 1997), and dependency approach (Huskey 1997).

35. Lately, Anna Matveeva tried to explain the emergent political differences in Central Asia. According to her, "political diversification" in the Central Asian region is the result of the different "policy responses adopted by the leaderships" to constraints produced by fundamental structural elements related to the demise of the communist order. These different policy responses reflect the leaderships' "varying priorities and capacities in meeting the challenges of the new era." The challenges and concerns (or "fundamental structural elements" she referred to here as the true factors shaping the post-communist political order in Central Asia are the challenges and concerns of both the elites and the masses in the post-communist era. These include the need to construct new power relations, nation-building, the presence of minorities and the possibility of inter-ethnic conflict, division of society along regional, tribal, or clan lines, and economic transition (Matveeva 1999:24-6).

36. In this category, we can include the historical and cultural legacies, the continuity of Soviet institutions, the Tajik civil war, the powerful opposition and the gravity of threat to the incumbent ruling elites, and Asian mentality.

37. For example, feudal and industrial classes do not exist in these republics.

38. Huskey referred to differences in political culture that exist in different parts of Kyrgyzstan, but he did not explain aberrations in the political liberalization process within Kyrgyzstan as well as variation among the regional countries in political liberalization (Huskey 1997).

39. The Kosovo crisis is the best example of an ethnic minority can enlist international support, including military intervention, for its democratic rights.

40. This point is taken from Whitehead (Whitehead 1986:8-9).
41. According to one estimate, approximately three times more Russian-speakers are employed in industry than members of the titular nationality. The same is true of the makeup of the technological elite (Current Digest Press, no. 17, 1993:12). The importance of this workforce can be partly judged from the fact that students of the region have described the outmigration of the Russian-speakers as "brain drain" (Olcott, 1997:213).

42. This definition is borrowed from Gerald Easter (Easter 1997:187-88). However, I believe that his position that a consolidated structure of old-regime elites prevailed in all the post-communist Central Asian republics is incorrect. In fact, even if we use his criteria to characterize elite structures in these republics, a cursory look would sufficiently expose structural variations of old-regime elites in these republics. It is interesting that he characterizes elite structure in Russia as reformed, but that in Kyrgyzstan as consolidated. A careful examination will fully reveal that elite structures in both the countries are similar in many respects. Both countries have reform-oriented presidents, reform-oriented administrative teams under the leadership of the chief executives, reformed former communist elites in power position, the hardcore communist elites out of high public offices, power struggle between the chief executives and the legislatures, alliances between reformed former communist elites and new political actors, etc.,

43. Many scholars used elite structure to explain political outcomes, including political regime changes (Huntington 1991-92; Higley and Burton 1989; Stepan 1986, 1988) and variation in institutional choices in the post-communist world (Easter 1997).
CHAPTER 3

UZBEKISTAN
THE RISE OF A POST-COMMUNIST AUTHORITARIAN
POLITICAL ORDER

INTRODUCTION

On August 31, 1991, the Republic of Uzbekistan, one of the 15 Soviet republics, declared independence. After independence, Uzbek ruling elites publicly expressed their resolve to continue the transition process the central authorities had initiated under the rubrics of perestroika and glasnost in the pre-independence period. However, as of 1997, the post-communist transition process in Uzbekistan made little meaningful progress toward the expressed goals of democracy and a free market economy. In fact, as Uzbek ruling elites set out to handle without central dictates the unprecedented and monumental task of the post-communist transition, gradual reformism became the most authoritative slogan for them. According to their approach, gradual economic transition was to precede gradual political transition.

The Uzbek government has so far handled the economic transition in an erratic way. Presidential decrees have been regularly issued as quick fixes to complex economic problems such as liberalization of prices, inflation, unemployment, and privatization. Still, the overall economic transition has proceeded at a slow pace. Although the state still controls most of the economic activity in the country, it does allow Uzbek society to engage in some sort of autonomous economic activity. The same, however, cannot be said of the political transition.
As compared to economic space, political space available to Uzbek society is much more restricted. In fact, the political transition witnessed fewer aberrations and erratic shifts than the economic transition. In other words, after independence, the Uzbek leadership has consistently refused to introduce even gradual but genuine political reforms. It has rather established political structures and procedures which are democratic in appearance but not in content. Since independence, barring few tactical and short-lived pro-reform moves and periods of limited political openness, genuine political liberalization has never been tried in Uzbekistan. In fact, Uzbek authorities have relentlessly and successfully sought to repress all forms of political dissent, muzzle the independent print media, and establish compliant political structures, including sociopolitical groups, in the post-independence period. It is no exaggeration that if we keep in view its record on political liberalization in the pre-independence and immediate post-independence periods, Uzbekistan experienced deliberalization rather than liberalization in many respects in the post-1991 presidential election period.

This chapter is devoted to the in-depth study of the level of political liberalization which Uzbekistan achieved in the post-independence period. The in-depth study of the post-independence political liberalization process in the republic will involve a systematic examination of the empirical evidence and its correspondence with the expectations of our theoretical model. In other words, we will study the extent to which our independent variables produced the expected outcomes in Uzbekistan. Before we examine the empirical data on political
liberalization, we will first discuss the extent to which our independent variables hold in the republic. A concise discussion in this regard will be useful for interpreting the empirical evidence and for assessing its correspondence with our theoretical expectations. The next section of the chapter is devoted to the study of the late introduction of glasnost in Uzbekistan and its restricted impact on Uzbek politics. The ongoing political transition in Uzbekistan is rooted in the center-sponsored political reform initiatives in the pre-independence period. The study of the pre-independence reform measures will provide us a proper background to comparatively understand the current post-communist political transition in that country. We will then focus on the first phase of limited political openness in the immediate post-independence period and examine its relationship with the short-lived intra-elite power struggle. This phase lasts until the December 1991 presidential election. The remaining chapter will focus on the long spell of thorough repression of independent political activity and independent mass media outlets. In addition, we will also examine the second brief period of limited political openness during 1995-96, followed by a new wave of repression. In the last part, we shall discuss the sham competitive electoral process and its exclusive openness to the pro-government individuals and political formations. Main findings of the chapter will be summarized in the conclusion.

A SMALL AND POLITICALLY INACTIVE RUSSIAN MINORITY

At the time of independence, Uzbekistan was home to almost two million ethnic Russians,1 who made up 8.3% of its total population and 34% of the population of the capital city, Tashkent (see Table 1 and 3). The size of ethnic
Russians in proportion to the titular Uzbeks, who make up 71% of the total population (Table 2), is not only small, it is also in constant decline, primarily due to Russian out-migration. According to the 1996 estimates, Russians dropped to 5.6% and Uzbeks increased their share of the total population to 76.6% (see Table 2). Although Russian out-migration began in 1990, it did not gain an alarming momentum until after the breakup of the Soviet Union. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, ethnic Russians in Uzbekistan lost once and for all their previous status as the dominant sociopolitical group and consequently their out-migration gained an unprecedented momentum. According to one source, the number of Russians desiring to leave Uzbekistan increased from 25% in 1991 to 75% in 1996 (Olcott 1996:543; Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press No. 28, 1996:19).

In addition to suffering a constant decline in their relative size, ethnic Russians are among the least politically active ethnic groups in Uzbekistan. Ethnic Russians do not have any vocal and effective sociopolitical association of their own to promote their interests in Uzbekistan in the post-independence period.² In fact, most Russians in Uzbekistan do not pursue a political course of action to redress their grievances. Also, they keep away from the intra-Uzbek political struggle for fear of reprisals from both the government and opposition forces. Those Russians who are active in Uzbek politics are small in number. The political survival and well-being of such activists are tied to their membership in the ruling party and an open alliance with Uzbek ruling elites.
Instead of entering into an open alliance with Uzbek ruling elites, most ethnic Russians extend their passive support to them. They extend such support in the belief that, as compared to other viable alternatives such as nationalist and Islamic governments, the incumbent Uzbek government is the best available guarantee for the protection of their interests in the post-Soviet period. There is a common impression among the Russian population of Uzbekistan that "were it not for Karimov, the Russians would be fleeing" the republic (BBC, June 12, 1993). As a consequence, this population is supporting rather than opposing his government and authoritarian policies.

Given their enormous economic, educational, and professional resources, and the reservoir of support from their co-ethnics in Russia, ethnic Russians in Uzbekistan could have generated effective pressure on the Uzbek government for greater political liberalization had they directed these resources toward that end. Their survival strategies in the post-Soviet period, namely migration and passive support for the incumbent Uzbek government, work to the advantage of the latter, which would have paid a greater price to suppress the largest and most resourceful ethnic minority in the country if the Russian minority had been politically active to promote its interests in Uzbekistan. Also, the current role of the Russian minority serves Uzbek ruling elites from another vantage point. On the one hand, they use its protection and maintenance of inter-ethnic harmony as pretexts to restrict political space for Uzbek society, including its Russian element. On the other hand, they use the current passive role of
their Russian minority as proof of the absence of an ethnic, especially Russian, problem and as proof of the effectiveness of their repressive measures.

Thus, the migration trends among ethnic Russians, the absence of effective and vocal Russian sociopolitical associations committed to the advancement of their interests, and their active and passive support for Uzbek ruling elites hardly build any pressure for political liberalization in the republic in the post-independence period; rather, these factors facilitate the Uzbek rulers' efforts to curb autonomous political activity in their society. The above factors also undermine another factor with enormous potential for promoting political liberalization in Uzbekistan: Russia's support for ethnic Russian minority.

In the post-Soviet period, Russia was expected for several reasons to support the Russian minority in Uzbekistan. These reasons include the explicit commitment of the Russian authorities to protect the rights of ethnic Russians living in the 'Near Abroad' with all possible means, including the use of force if necessary, the unique position that Russia occupies in Central Asia, the overall repressive political situation in Uzbekistan, the enormous magnitude of and potential for Russian exodus from there, and the serious socioeconomic and political consequences this exodus would have for Russia. Although Russia sought to persuade and pressure Uzbekistan on behalf of the Russian minority, its efforts have thus far produced nothing more than empty declarations. The failure of its initial modest efforts did not prompt Russia to pursue a more aggressive approach toward Uzbekistan. It appears instead to have accepted the failure of its policies. In fact, the absence of Russian activism in
Uzbekistan and the consequent Uzbek denial of the existence of a Russian problem led the Russian authorities to concede that the problem of the Russian population in that republic "is past its peak" (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press No. 31, 1995:20-1). In addition, the Russian perception of its geopolitical interests and sources of threats to these interests in Central Asia obliged Russia to avoid an aggressive approach toward Uzbekistan.

The breakup of the Soviet Union has unleashed new political forces in the former Soviet space. The potential rise of nationalist-democratic and Islamic forces into power in Central Asia is viewed in Moscow as an ominous development for several reasons, including the welfare of ethnic Russians in that region. The importance of close cooperation and willingness of the incumbent Uzbek government to combat these forces increased its value for the Russian authorities. The Uzbek government and its policies appeared to the Russian authorities as the best available guarantee, as compared to other viable nationalist-democratic and Islamic political alternatives, for the protection of the Russian population of Uzbekistan. As a consequence, they downplayed the cause of ethnic Russians in the republic and ended up supporting the Uzbek government against Uzbek opposition forces. That the Uzbek dissidents living in Russia have been harassed and arrested by both the Uzbek and Russian secret services and police is an unmistakable show of Russian support to the Uzbek government in its efforts to suppress opposition forces (Khazanov 1995:151; Russian Press Digest, November 11, 1993). This situation strengthened the Uzbek
government but undermined the prospects for greater political liberalization in Uzbek society.

REMARKABLE UNITY OF UZBEK RULING ELITES

Uzbekistan is one the two countries (Turkmenistan being the other) in Central Asia in which ruling elites of the Soviet era showed remarkable unity in the post-Soviet period. Barring a few cases of individual splits, the elite structure in Uzbekistan has so far remained intact. The remarkable unity among Uzbek ruling elites developed and solidified during the Soviet period, for several reasons. These reasons include the development of a multifaceted network of relationships as part of the survival strategy of the indigenous population under Soviet rule, the rise of Uzbek nationalism vis-à-vis the center much earlier than in other Central Asian republics (Critchlow 1991), and various policies such as emphatic pursuit of nativization of cadres and affirmative action sanctioning preferential treatment to the indigenous nomenklatura.

Before independence, Uzbek elites demonstrated their unity and cohesiveness on several occasions. The most vivid display of this unity occurred during the 1983 infamous cotton affair, a scandal of widespread political corruption in Uzbekistan cotton procurement agencies. In addition to eliminating corruption, the central authorities used the cotton affair to rid echelons of power in Uzbekistan of the long-secure elites. The central authorities carried out massive arrests and purges following the exposure of the cotton affair. Some local kingpins even received death sentences.
However, the central anti-corruption campaign backfired. Uzbek elites progressively hardened and united to resist the center’s anti-corruption campaign and scheme to replace them with non-Uzbek cadres in the party and government apparatus. For all practical purposes, the center called off its anti-corruption campaign in early 1989 in large part due to the determined and united resistance of Uzbek elites. After the center called off its anti-corruption drive, Uzbek elites under the leadership of Islam Karimov rejected the central version of the cotton scandal, protested against injustices done to innocent people during the investigation, and sanctioned a quiet rehabilitation of those cadres who had lost their positions in the massive purges. This rehabilitation policy gained momentum as the center progressively lost control over developments in the republics. The overall protective conduct of Uzbek elites, which enabled thousands of compromised cadres to smoothly weather the cotton affair, could not have failed to promote and solidify among the Uzbek cadres feelings of gratitude and bonds of loyalty toward each other in general and the leadership in particular.

The renewed unity enabled Uzbek ruling elites to develop concerted responses to other developments before independence. These developments included the question of sovereignty, the August 1991 abortive coup in Moscow, the termination of the Uzbek communist party’s organizational and ideological ties with the CPSU following the coup, and the independence of Uzbekistan.

In the post-independence period, the cohesiveness of Uzbek ruling elites did not suffer any major blow. In the immediate post-independence era, there were only
odd cases of dissent within the ruling party and government apparatus which could not shake consolidated elite structure to its foundation. Although Uzbek elites closed ranks for national causes and for preservation of their power position in Uzbek politics, this unity did not mean an unchallenged position for Karimov. In fact, after independence there were still prominent former communist figures who had considerable clout in Uzbek politics. In September 1991, almost two hundred members of the Uzbek parliament signed a letter of protest against the increasingly dictatorial position of Karimov. Vice President Shukrulla Mirsadov reportedly masterminded this protest letter after he gathered support from certain forces in Moscow during his visit in early September 1991 (Olcott 1993a: 57; Fierman 1997:378, 404; Russian Press Digest October 29, 1991).

Karimov responded to his critics in parliament and avoided a showdown with them at the time. This episode showed the vulnerability of the Uzbek elite structure to fragmentation and the controversial position of Karimov within the ruling party. In case the elite structure suffered fragmentation, there was enormous potential for a grand alliance among opposition forces, disgruntled members of the revamped Uzbek communist party, and their supporters in Moscow against Karimov's rule. It would have been very difficult for him to move against such an alliance.

This challenge, however, did not develop into an enduring position, and his challengers did not form a solid and resourceful bloc of prominent political figures within the ruling party and government apparatus. Thus, the Uzbek elite structure survived the most serious threat of disintegration in the immediate post-independence
period. As it became clear that the Uzbek elites structure was solid enough to sustain such threats, Karimov unhesitatingly moved after the 1991 presidential election to deal his critics and rivals within the party and government apparatus with a heavy hand. In the post-1991 presidential election period, he was able to purge his potential challengers, including Mirsadov, without seriously damaging the internal integrity of the elite structure. The ouster of Mirsadov and other dissenting voices within the party, parliament, and the executive branch of government without any uproar and serious crack within the Uzbek elite structure demonstrated two things. First, unity among Uzbek ruling elites is solid and not easily eroded. Second, this unity has involved the recognition and acceptance of Karimov as the unchallenged primary actor in Uzbek politics.

Since the ouster of Mirsadov and other dissenters, the party and parliament members have faithfully avoided criticism of Karimov and his transition policies, allowing him to single-handedly direct the course of the post-communist transition. The Uzbek parliament has quietly accepted the advisory role, approving presidential decrees by a unanimous vote. Of course, these decrees include measures which are aimed at eliminating the potential political rivals of Karimov and his ruling party, the People’s Democratic Party.

This above discussion makes it clear that the former communist cadres have so far remained united under the leadership of Karimov, with their full access to the state resources and control over distribution of benefits in Uzbek society. And this situation offers little optimism for a relaxation of political controls in Uzbekistan.
ANTI-REFORMIST UZBEK POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Before independence, the successive Uzbek communist political leaders, including Karimov, who came to power during the center-sponsored reform program were anything but reformist. While they endorsed the cultural, social, and ecological issues which the rising informal sociopolitical groups championed in the pre-independence period, they continued to condemn the techniques of such groups, the character of their leaders, and the chaos they were allegedly creating in the republic. The Uzbek communist leaders also took practical measures, including the use of force, to restrict their activities and to prevent them from becoming a legitimate force in Uzbek politics (Fierman 1997:368-377).

As compared to his two predecessors, Usmankhoadjaev and Nishanov, Karimov increasingly became candid in expressing his anti-reformist views. After the center lost power vis-a-vis the republics in 1991, he made no secret of his hostile attitude toward independent political activity and his readiness to use force to curb it. He urged the central leadership "to make the party truly democratic and democratize in parallel the entire power structure in the country" (Tass, April 16, 1991), because this decentralization process was bound to give him more latitude in governing Uzbek society. However, the Uzbek leader opposed the idea of uniformly incorporating non-communist sociopolitical forces in the democratization process for several reasons, including the deterioration of order and the immaturity of the Soviet people in many parts of the country (BBC, June 3, 1991).
Assessing the center-sponsored political reform program in June 1991, the Uzbek leader regretted that the democratization process was getting out of control. He accused the rising autonomous sociopolitical groups, especially in Uzbekistan, of doing politics of rallies, creating inter-ethnic tension, and committing pogroms and arson, and advocated to give up the interests of a small number activists of such groups in order to protect the interests of the majority which, in his view, was not interested in the negative politics of the former. He lamented that such groups were acting as a negative opposition which was busy in defending the interests of individuals striving for power. He advised them to become a constructive opposition which should cooperate constructively with the ruling forces and at the same time should defend convictions, policies, and decisions which correspond to the group rather personal interests (BBC, June 3, 1991).

The Uzbek leader advocated a quite conservative approach to introduce the democratization process in the country. According to his opinion, before taking practical measures to introduce "comprehensive democracy" in society, "one should think about whether this democracy is governable or not, whether you control the processes, or the processes will control you." He insisted that the establishment and maintenance of order and discipline should take precedence over the inclusion of non-communist sociopolitical forces in the democratization process because "There is no democracy without order." In addition, he emphasized the evolutionary nature of democracy and its close relationship with the political awareness and political culture of the masses. Because democracy has certain stages which must correspond to the
political awareness and political culture of the masses and because the Soviet republics considerably varied in these dimensions, the Uzbek leader viewed it unwise to implement an identical form of political reform program in various parts of the country. The most unsuitable republics for the introduction of the center-sponsored political reform program were, in the eyes of Karimov, the Central Asian republics whose masses respect authority rather than democratic spirit (BBC, June 3, 1991).

His anti-reformist views of the pre-independence period left no doubt that Uzbek society would witness little genuine political reform, at least for the foreseeable future, if Karimov had a free hand to decide the fate of the democratization process underway in his republic. The fate of political reforms in Uzbekistan in the post-independence period remarkably corresponded to his anti-reformist views of the pre-independence period. In other words, Uzbek society witnessed little genuine political liberalization in the post-independence period.

After Uzbekistan declared independence in August 1991, Karimov was free to rule without Moscow’s dictates. However, he appeared to have no clear blueprints of his own to deal with the post-communist transition because soon after independence he expressed apparently quite contradictory views about the political future of Uzbek society. For instance, the Uzbek leader made it clear in an interview in September 1991 that his republic was not yet ready for democracy and a market economy. However, in the same interview, he alluded to the possibility of holding presidential and parliamentary elections. He also promised a law that "will provide for a multi-

Of course, there were signs in the immediate post-independence period that the Uzbek leader was in the process of refining his ideas, views, and strategies about the future of Uzbek society. However, a close examination of his views and the occasions on which they were expressed makes it clear that Karimov was consistent in terms of expressing different views for different purposes and audiences. The purpose of his pro-democracy statements was to address international concerns (The Associated Press, February 16, 1992; BBC March 11, 1992). He continued to express his customary rhetorical commitment to democracy mostly on diplomatic occasions but made no political concessions to Uzbek society. For instance, with James Baker, the US Secretary of State, on his side in Uzbekistan in January 1992, Karimov told reporters that "Uzbekistan is prepared to build an open society where there will be no dictates of a single party" (The Associated Press, February 16, 1992).6 However, such statements have no correspondence, whatsoever, with his actions in the post-independence period.

As compared to his sporadic pro-democracy statements mostly issued for diplomatic consumption, Karimov has been more consistent in expressing his anti-reformist views. His anti-reformist statements have been primarily aimed at the domestic audience and have so far remarkably corresponded to his actions in the post-independence era.
As views of the Uzbek leader crystallized over time and he began to express them in a consistent manner in the post-independence period, it became clear that independence brought no notable change in his pre-independence anti-reformist views; rather, he became more vocal in expressing them in the post-independence period. In other words, his views about the priority of stability and economic issues over political reform, the need for constructive rather than negative opposition forces, the destructive consequences of the indiscriminate inclusion of non-communist forces in the democratization process, the evolutionary nature of democracy, and the authoritarian political culture of Uzbek society remained unchanged (BBC, June 12, 1993).7

In addition, after independence, Karimov openly began to say that Western democracy was unsuitable for Uzbekistan. He plainly told foreign reporters: "It is not necessary for us to adopt Western democracy spiritually alien to us. We shall have our own, national democracy which will help Uzbekistan become one of the leading countries of the world" (Khazanov 1995:143). After independence, the Uzbek leader was attracted toward the Turkish, the Chinese, and the South Korean models all of which contained a strong authoritarian element (The Associated Press, September 17, 1991; The Independent, December 21, 1991:8).8 He soon gave up the pretense of following other models in favor of his own model of development which was no less authoritarian. His model was inspired by "the Code of the medieval despot Timur" (Khazanov 1995:144).
In fact, the Uzbek leader was of firm belief that the transition period needed an iron hand in order "to prevent bloodshed and confrontation and to preserve ethnic and civil concord, peace and stability in our region. It is necessary for democracy's progress" (BBC, February 18, 1993; Russian Press Digest, February 12, 1993). He admitted that his activities were somewhat authoritarian, but justified them by citing the need of a strong executive and central authority during the transition (BBC, February 18, 1993). In addition, he also de-emphasized the role of parliament in the transitional period. In one of his interviews, Karimov plainly stated: "I am for a strong executive, not something amorphous called here and there a parliamentary democracy. This is in a transitional period, I believe, an impermissible luxury" (BBC, June 12, 1993). He envisioned a gradual and slow change in Uzbek society.

Affirming that he would bring about political change in his republic "from the top down amid order and discipline" (The Washington Post, September 16, 1991:A18), the Uzbek leader perceived the Uzbek opposition forces as a negative phenomenon which constituted the most serious threat to order and discipline, and thus to political reform, because they engage in the protest politics to advance personal interests of individual political leaders. In addition, he was critical of Uzbek opposition forces because they offered no constructive alternative and because of their efforts to oppose "the man in power" rather than to fight for the cause and ideas they profess (BBC, June 12, 1993). In his address to the parliament in August 1996, he complained that so far he has not seen a constructive and genuinely democratic opposition in Uzbekistan (CSCE, March 1997:4), implying that the existing Uzbek opposition
forces are unfit to have an access to the political process. Thus his views about how and when authoritarian polities should democratize and his assessment of the prevailing circumstances in Uzbekistan rendered the inclusion of the whole Uzbek society in the political liberalization process a remote possibility in the post-independence period.

The above discussion of the extent to which our three explanatory variables hold in Uzbekistan offers little optimism for political liberalization in that country. In other words, the small Russian minority in proportion to the titular ethnic group, remarkable unity of Uzbek elites, and anti-reformism of the Uzbek political leadership lead us to expect low level of political liberalization in Uzbekistan. Because these variables saw little change in the extent to which they held in Uzbekistan in the pre-and post-independence periods, we expect low level of political liberalization in both the periods. However, the main difference between the two periods is the role the central authorities played in influencing the reform process in the republic. This role is present in the pre-independence period but absent in the post-independence period. Whatever political openness was available to Uzbek society in the pre-independence can be attributed to this role. However, at the same time, a small and politically inactive Russian minority, cohesive elite structure, and anti-reformist orientation of the Uzbek leadership militated against the deepening of glasnost in Uzbekistan.

LATE AND RESTRICTED GLASNOST IN UZBEKISTAN

Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Soviet president, began to introduce economic and political reforms after he assumed power in March 1985. His political reforms under
the rubric of glasnost made their way to some Soviet republics much earlier than to others. Uzbekistan witnessed the late arrival of the center-sponsored political reforms. In fact, the Gorbachev reform initiatives were not only delayed in Uzbekistan but they also had little meaningful impact on Uzbek politics, for several reasons.

Gorbachev shared with his predecessors the view of Islam as a troublesome and reactionary force. He feared that Islam would undermine his reform initiatives. He also attributed the alleged widespread corruption in the Central Asian republics in general and Uzbekistan in particular to Islamic culture (Olcott, 1990a:375). Thus, despite his professed commitment to widespread openness, including religious tolerance, Gorbachev endorsed an all-out attack on religion in Central Asia. In a secret resolution in 1986, the CPSU also declared Islam as an obstacle to socioeconomic development in the country (Khazanov 1995:131). The central and local press carried articles condemning Islam and Islamic practices as obstacles to the development of society (BBC, July 13, 1985). The Uzbek communist party affirmed and decided upon a plan of action in 1986 to combat religious influences in Uzbek society. As of 1988, when political openness had made significant progress in other areas, the Uzbek communist party under the leadership of Rafiq Nishanov was still engaged in Islam-bashing in Uzbekistan (Olcott, 1990a:375; Haghayeghi 1995:47-55). Such an attack attested to the selective practice of glasnost and made the Central Asian peoples skeptical of glasnost and of the intentions of the central authorities, discouraging them from all sorts of active participation in the political process in the republic.
The continued anti-corruption campaign and massive purges, which followed the exposure of the infamous 'cotton affair' after the death of Brezhnev further added to this skepticism, which in turn checked the rise of informal groups and a reform-oriented alliance of the communist elites in Uzbekistan. The anti-corruption campaign and massive purges created a national anger and united the Uzbek communist elites in their resistance against the center. Under this atmosphere, the reform-oriented group was difficult to form within the Uzbek communist party. Once united in common cause against the center, the members of the Uzbek ruling elites who had democratic tendencies were unlikely to break ranks with their national comrades, identify themselves with and support the Moscow-sponsored reform initiatives.

The proliferation of informal groups was not a welcome prospect for the central authorities during the anti-corruption campaign. In fact, they had a very negative view of the Uzbek informal groups. One Soviet official observed that there was "a far-reaching shadow headquarter of opponents of perestroika" which was exploiting informal groups for its sinister purposes (Critchlow 1991:146). The Soviet authorities suspected that the local informal groups were associates of the corrupt Uzbek officials. The central authorities also blamed the Uzbek informal groups for exploiting extremely sensitive national issues and pushing Uzbek society in an anti-Soviet direction (Critchlow 1991:146-7).

The above Soviet perception of the local informal groups suited the Uzbek leaders who were least interested in, and rather resisted, the full scale implementation
of political reforms in their republic. The Uzbek communist leadership was, in fact, skeptical about the merits of glasnost. It was not viewed as a panacea for the problems of Uzbek society. In addition, the Uzbek communist elites were unlikely to fully identify themselves with the center-sponsored reform initiatives after their humiliation in the anti-corruption campaign.

The Uzbek leadership resisted the full scale implementation of glasnost for the obvious reason of the potential arrival of new rivals on the Uzbek political scene and the fear of losing power to them. This partly explains why the Uzbek ruling elites graciously tolerated informal groups with local agendas and limited following, but were not ready to tolerate the growth of those groups with national agendas which could potentially challenge and discredit the incumbent Uzbek communist leadership. Thus, the interests of the central and Uzbek authorities coincided on the question of formation and operation of independent social and political groups in Uzbekistan. This situation partly explains why the central authorities took little or no notice of the lack of progress in the implementation of their much trumpeted policy of political openness in that republic.

Uzbek society itself is partly responsible for the late arrival of glasnost. If the central authorities were not pushing political reforms in Uzbekistan as they were doing elsewhere, and if the local authorities were skeptical about its merits, the people of that republic were also not willing (and politically not conscious of the need) to precipitously engage themselves in bold political adventures. In fact, with the decades of absolute repression under Soviet rule in the background, it was natural for
Uzbek society to be slow and cautious in its response to the policy of glasnost. This fact was not lost on those Uzbek democratically-oriented individuals who tried to awaken Uzbek society from the deep social and political slumber and encourage its "active participation in social and political life" (Guardian, October 25, 1990:9) in order to end the communist rule in the republic.10

However, as glasnost began to bring about sea changes in the political arenas of other communist societies, Uzbek society could not remain unaffected. In fact, once these sea changes appeared and were tolerated in other communist societies, it became difficult for the central and local authorities to isolate Uzbek society from their effect. Over time, the Uzbek intelligentsia began to trust Gorbachev's intentions, appreciate the scope of glasnost and respond to it in a number of ways. The Uzbek people began to organize themselves into informal groups, associations and movements. These formations began to make demands on the authorities and undertake actions, including protests and demonstrations, to accomplish them.

Despite the fact that the Uzbek leadership was averse to independent social and political formations, they tolerated these groups without considering them capable of making any positive contribution to the welfare of the Uzbek society. Most informal associations and movements pursued local agendas with limited followings. However, some associations and movements championed a wide variety of causes, including causes of national and political importance. For instance, much of the program of the Birlik movement, which was organized in November 1988, focused on social, economic and ecological issues but it also included more sensitive issues such as

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human rights, status of the Uzbek language, and sovereignty and ultimately independence of the republic (Haghayeghi 1995:66-67; Fierman, 1997:367; The Independent (London), May 28, 1990:6). Another organization, Islam and Democracy, pursued the goal of cleansing Islam in the Soviet Union. The pursuit of this stated goal, however, soon brought it into an open conflict with the official clerical establishment in Uzbekistan (Haghayeghi 1995:85).

Associations such as Birlik and Islam and Democracy with national agendas posed a real challenge to the monopoly of the Uzbek ruling elites over politics in general and national interest articulation in particular. As compared to the Uzbek communist leadership's negative view of glasnost, such informal groups fully supported the reform initiatives and viewed the petitions, demonstrations and rallies as appropriate forms of participation (Fierman, 1997:367). True to their word, but to the chagrin of the Uzbek authorities, these associations staged protest rallies to voice their concerns and demands. These protest rallies were first organized in Tashkent in December 1988 and later in other cities of Uzbekistan in support of Uzbek language and culture. Birlik’s leaders addressed these rallies with and without official permission.

The Uzbek communist party under Rafiq Nishanov adopted diverse, manifold and shifting responses to these informal groups and their challenges. The initial attitude of the Uzbek authorities toward important informal groups was that of denial and dismissal. Their formation was tolerated and even certain concessions were made to them. However, the Uzbek authorities denied them official recognition, considering
them incapable of playing a positive role in the conduct of Uzbek politics. Birlik and certain other opposition groups were the favorite targets of condemnation in internal party reviews, party conference reports, and the republic's press. In addition to internal party reports, the party news media also attacked the techniques and the character of the Birlik leadership. In fact, the Uzbek communist party leadership was averse to the politics of demonstrations, and Birlik was quite good in that.

The Uzbek authorities during the Nishanov era created various hurdles for informal groups like Birlik, but refrained from using frequent and excessive brutal force to curb the formation and activities of these groups. Even the unauthorized meetings, demonstrations and rallies Birlik and other informal groups organized in support of their demands were often tolerated. The leadership of Birlik and other informal groups were also permitted access, though limited, to the republic’s press. For instance, a favorable review of the poetry of Muhammad Solih, a Birlik leader, was published by a literary magazine at a time when he was under venomous attack in the main news media. He was also permitted to publish his defense in the republic’s press (Fierman, 1997:368, 402). At about the same time, Nihsanov’s policy toward the informal groups further changed for the better. His administration put on a friendly outward face toward the opposition groups. It publicly admitted that the informal groups can play a constructive role in solving the social and political problems of Uzbek society. Lending credence to its claim, the Uzbek communist leadership sent Birlik and religious leaders to the Fergana Valley to control riots there in early June 1989.
Building on the shift that occurred toward the end of the Nishanov era, the Uzbek communist party further softened its attitude toward the informal groups and their agenda after Islam Karimov came into power in June 1989. The main purpose behind this shift was to dissuade the emerging opposition forces from politics of protest rallies and to disarm them of such issues which they could use to potentially arouse the masses. Making a distinction between those who pursued their agendas in a peaceful manner and those who preferred protest politics and brought the masses into the streets, the Uzbek authorities granted the so-called the law-abiding leaders positive recognition and permitted them greater freedom to promote their ideas (Fierman, 1997:369). However, they adopted a shifting policy toward those who often brought the masses into the streets in support of their demands.

Initially, the Uzbek communist party under the new leadership of Karimov pursued a flexible approach, encompassing almost all the important informal groups and trying to dissuade them from street politics, essentially through negotiations and concessions. However, it later sought to control, undermine, and repress those individual leaders and informal organizations who continued to hold protest rallies and refused to operate within prescribed parameters. This second approach will be discussed in detail later in the chapter. Here, we focus on the first approach which granted the informal groups more breathing space than they had during the Nishanov era.

One of the most salient features of this approach was that the Karimov administration appropriated most of the popular issues on the agenda of most of the
important informal organizations. This appropriation was to serve the important purpose of controlling protest politics. In fact, this move could potentially end the monopoly of individual leaders and informal organizations over certain popular issues and disarm them of the issues they exploited to organize protest rallies. In short, this move sent a clear message that the informal groups and masses need not resort to protest politics and confront the Uzbek authorities because the latter also supported their causes; rather, they should become a constructive opposition and cooperate with the Uzbek authorities in pursuit of these causes.

Over time the Karimov government moved beyond the sheer adoption of the opposition groups' agenda. It further changed its policy toward them. It permitted the state-controlled mass media to debate very sensitive issues such as Uzbekistan's relations with the center, sovereignty, pre-communist history, and ecological and other social problems of the republic. Also, a dialogue began between the Uzbek authorities and the informal groups (CSCE, March 1997:1). This change was, in fact, concomitant with the increasingly positive attitude of the central authorities toward informal groups and with the Uzbek authorities' public recognition that informal groups were capable of playing a positive role in Uzbek politics. Karimov publicly spoke of the informal groups as "a natural and objective" development in the democratic evolution and an "indicator of the politicization" of Uzbek society.

Recognizing past mistakes, including the attitude of denial, which the Uzbek communist party committed in its approach toward the informal groups and movements, Karimov emphasized the change in the party policy from "total
non-recognition to constructive dialogue" with these forces. The republic press published favorable accounts of the initial contacts between the Uzbek authorities and leaders of the informal organizations with the "hope for fruitful cooperation in the very near future" (Fierman, 1997:369).

Of course, there were still many serious restrictions in place: yet, after the opposition-government dialogue, independent political space expanded for the opposition groups. They were relatively free to function, hold meetings, recruit supporters and occasionally issue publications to articulate and communicate their views to the Uzbek people (CSCE, March 1997:1-3). In addition, the Uzbek authorities opened up new opportunities for the participation of certain informal groups in the electoral process. In the Fall of 1989, they announced multi-candidate elections for the Uzbek Supreme Soviet, to be held in February 1990. Despite numerous restrictions, this campaign afforded the informal groups an opportunity to expand their base and articulate and promote their agendas. Ignoring the calls of some groups for a boycott, most informal groups participated in the elections and a number of nonparty candidates defeated the party nominees (OSCE Digest, April 1990:3). Developments of this sort had been hard to conceive of in the past. In this sense, they signified the growing tolerance of the republican communist party of the emerging political competitors. This fact held the promise for more political openness for Uzbek society in the future.
RETRENCHMENT OF GLASNOST UNDER KARIMOV BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

As events unfolded, the promise of more political openness turned out to be a false promise. Over time, it became clear that the Uzbek authorities would accept the expansion of political space at the pace and for groups of their own choosing. In February 1990, the Uzbek authorities introduced a restrictive legal measure which dealt with associations in Uzbekistan. This measure focused on many things relating to associations, including rules concerning the creation of associations, their efforts to gather support, their funding, their access to mass media institutions, and their right to establish such institutions. The law also specified penalties for a wide variety of violations of these rules by associations and their leaders. This measure was very vague and amenable to varying official interpretations. The Uzbek authorities effectively used these loose measures and their varying interpretations to arrest the growth of the so-called extremist political formations like Birlik and Islamic Republican Party (IRP).

As the 1990 election campaign proceeded, it became clear to the authorities that certain groups would campaign and contest elections in a manner contrary to their preferences. This was an unpalatable and potentially dangerous situation for the Uzbek ruling elites. In reaction, they began to shrink the political space available, especially to the so-called noncooperative and extremist individual leaders and organized groups. In its October 1989 resolution "On Measures for the Stabilization of Social-Political Situation in the Republic," the Uzbek Supreme Soviet lashed out at those who championed human rights and the politics of unsanctioned rallies and other
acts of extremism. The Supreme Soviet authorized the security forces to use clubs, handcuffs, and other special devices to keep civil peace. The opposition forces were reminded that the offer of cooperation did not extend to those who resorted to the politics of protest rallies (Fierman, 1997:370).

Uzbek rulers began to carry out their threats prior to the parliamentary elections. Although they created obstacles for almost all the informal groups in the electoral process and manipulated electoral procedures to preserve the power position of the Uzbek communist party, opportunities for the so-called extremist groups were particularly restricted, and some even faced outright exclusion from the electoral process. Uzbek rulers created numerous obstacles against their participation in the nomination process. Their nomination meetings were often blocked and their organizers discredited. Their several requests to hold election rallies were turned down.

Of course, the 1990 parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan were, as some observers noted, "more democratic than the Soviet variety", but they "left very little room for opposition forces to organize and promote their candidates" (Fierman, 1997:371). It was reflected in the foregone election results. One-third of the seats won by the Uzbek communist party members were uncontested (OSCE Digest, April 1990:3). Most nonparty members who won their seats reportedly had the blessings of the Uzbek authorities. Nonparty winners who were suspected to have enjoyed the official blessings included Muhammad Solih, a Birlik leader.14
The Uzbek authorities used both cooptive and coercive methods to emaciate the opposition. In addition to encouraging splits among the opposition ranks and creating associations sympathetic to them, the Uzbek authorities tried to coopt individual opposition activists (Guardian, October 25, 1990:9). The most common method the Uzbek authorities readily used to take care of the inconvenient individual opposition leaders and groups was coercion and intimidation.

In order to sound law-abiding, the Uzbek authorities, once they decided to pursue an aggressive approach toward inconvenient opposition groups and independent media outlets, began to lay down the legal foundations for restrictive and repressive conditions for them. Soon after the 1990 parliamentary elections, the Presidium of the new Uzbek Supreme Soviet decided to ban public rallies until the social-political situation was stabilized. On paper, the opposition could hold sanctioned public meetings in closed locations. However, in practice, most groups which the Uzbek authorities viewed as non-cooperative and extremist were unable to hold such meetings. The leaders of these groups became targets of official criticism and their attempts to organize public rallies were thwarted by all means necessary, including the use of force.

In February 1991, the Uzbek Supreme Soviet passed a law which made it a criminal offense to insult the honor and dignity of the president and other top officials of the republic. This law specified the heavy penalty of six years of imprisonment for repeat offenders and those who use the mass media. The law also authorized the
closure of a mass media institution that was found to be guilty of repeated infractions in this regard.

As the Uzbek authorities increasingly became aggressive toward the opposition forces in the wake of the 1990 elections, opposition groups like Birlik began to use foreign media, especially the Russian media, to criticize the authoritarian tendencies of Karimov. After the Russian press and electronic media began to publish and broadcast Uzbek opposition's criticism of the Uzbek leadership in general and after the IRP tried to hold its founding congress in particular, the Uzbek authorities took practical measures to restrict the access of informal groups and the access of the masses to independent foreign media outlets (Russian Press Digest, May 7, 1991; BBC, August 3, 1991).17

After the center-sponsored reform program increasingly deepened in response to the profound the economic crisis in the country and many republics, including Uzbekistan, declared sovereignty with the due consent of the center,18 the Uzbek authorities became less and less sensitive to the political reform program of the central authorities----who were increasingly becoming preoccupied with the future of the union than with the political reform program. A small and cooperative Russian minority and cohesive elite structure rendered it less expensive for Uzbek ruling elites to deal with the opposition forces in an aggressive way and to shape Uzbek society according to their own political vision.

The opposition forces recognized this fact. In response to this reality and the growing repression of the Uzbek authorities, Birlik, which was once accused of being
a radical nationalist movement, began to enter into alliances with national level
democratic and republican level Russian-oriented movements in order to protect itself
from repression (Russian Press Digest, May 7, 1991; BBC, August 28, 1991).19
However, to the dismay of opposition forces, such alliances proved less than effective
in protecting them from repression, for several reasons.

First, because such alliances were involved with so many issues in many
republics, they could not remain focused on Uzbekistan only and, hence did not
consistently generate enormous pressure effective enough to discourage the Uzbek
authorities from unleashing repression against the opposition in the republic.

Second, such alliances were formed at the time when the Uzbek leadership
backed by a cohesive republican communist party was increasingly becoming
autonomous and therefore could weather the occasional uproar and criticism of the
autonomous forces working at the national level. In fact, the Uzbek communist party,
unlike the Kazakh and Kyrgyz communist parties, did not experience any split due to
the center-sponsored reform program and/or inter-ethnic violence. As a result,
throughout the glasnost period, it remained united and was able to resist pro-reform
pressure.

Third, the Russian-oriented group, Intersoyuz, in Uzbekistan was too
insignificant and weak to matter. Because most Russian residents in Uzbekistan were
not politicized and thousands were migrating from Uzbekistan during the period 1990-
91, the Intersoyuz leadership was unlikely to be able to deter repression through
mobilizing large segment of the Russian minority in Uzbekistan and/or through
persuading the central and Russian authorities to exert enormous pressure on Uzbek authorities. Perhaps this partly explains why Intersoyuz could not play a significant oppositional role in the republic. As a result, the opposition's maneuvers to escape the increased repression through such alliances before independence came to naught.

**POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN INDEPENDENT UZBEKISTAN**

The basic authoritarian orientation and character of the Uzbek regime remained unaltered in the post-independence period. As before independence, the Uzbek rulers' approach toward political liberalization in the post-independence period witnessed shifts between short-lived, modest relaxations of political control and extreme repression.

In retrospect, the political openness during the glasnost and immediate post-independence periods appears particularly striking considering the high level of repression in the post-1991 presidential election period. The highest point in the relaxation of the post-communist authoritarian system in Uzbekistan occurred during the period between independence and the 1991 presidential election. However limited and short-lived, political openness of this period has so far gone unsurpassed. In fact, in the period that followed the 1991 presidential election, the Uzbek authorities extensively rolled back whatever limited political openness had previously been available to Uzbek society. Barring a few encouraging tactical moves made in 1995-96, the Uzbek authorities took no substantive initiatives which could inspire a reasonably positive assessment about the relaxation of the Uzbek post-communist authoritarian regime after the 1991 presidential election.
The remaining portion of the chapter is devoted to a detailed discussion of the two short-lived periods of relaxation as well the long spell of extreme repression in the post-independence period in Uzbekistan.

SELECTIVE POLITICAL OPENNESS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

As already pointed out, in the immediate pre-independence period, Uzbek authorities had begun to shrink even the modest independent political space which they had made available to Uzbek society under glasnost. Interestingly, instead of further shrinking it, Uzbek rulers expanded it in important respects in the immediate post-independence period. Although several political restrictions were still in place, the overall approach the Uzbek authorities adopted toward political liberalization during this period was much more flexible than the one they adopted during the preceding months in the pre-independence period. Also, during the immediate post-independence period, political liberalization reached a level which it never reached again in the later post-independence period.

Although this short-lived relaxation of political control came about at an intriguing juncture, we can make sense of it if we relate it to the temporary jockeying among the ruling party elites for power position in the post-communist state structures. More specifically, the decision to expand rather than further shrink independent political space in the immediate post-independence period was a tactical response the Uzbek leadership adopted to neutralize certain potential competitors within the ruling party and state structure.
Because the republican communist party was reincarnated intact into a new party, the People’s Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, with its unhindered access to the party and state resources, many prominent ex-communist leaders, besides Karimov, wielded considerable power and influence in the ruling party circles and state institutions. In other words, the Uzbek President’s position was not unchallenged, but rather he could still face a challenge to his authority from many influential ex-communist leaders of his party.

Such a challenge appeared, albeit temporarily, on the Uzbek political scene about one month after the proclamation of independence. At a session of the parliament, almost 200 deputies signed and circulated a letter critical of the dictatorial position of the president (Russian Press Digest, October 29, 1991). The president’s press service admitted that the parliament expressed dissatisfaction with Karimov. However, it claimed that this was nothing “unusual” and that the President made no attempt to suppress criticism. At the same time, it accused the Russian press for reporting a distorted version of the episode before it occurred. The scant evidence available on this episode suggests that perhaps the Russian press leaked the information about the attempts Mirsaidov may have made during his visit to Moscow in early September to enlist support of powerful forces in his bid to oppose the increasingly dictatorial style of Karimov (Fierman 1997:378, 404).

In his response to the rising challenge from within his own party, Karimov eschewed an outright confrontation with his challengers. Instead, he successfully tried a subtle method to neutralize their challenge. He tried to enlist support of independent
nationalist opposition forces such as Erk and Birlik and certain local religious-oriented
groups in the republic. He himself suggested in September 1991 the possibility of
1991:16). He was reportedly pleased with the anti-communist and anti-parliament
rhetoric of the nationalist opposition groups like Birlik and certain local religious
groups in the republic. In addition, he tolerated (and perhaps encouraged) a number
of rallies of certain Muslim groups who pressed the President to meet their demands,
including the removal of the communists from the political scene, ban on the
republican communist party, nationalization of its property, dismissal of the
parliament and new parliamentary elections on a multi-party basis (Russian Press
Digest, October 21, 1991). Above all, Karimov decided to renew his popular
mandate, while the legitimacy of the parliament was still open to question. The main
purpose of all these maneuvers and relaxation was to augment his political options and
send a clear message to his challengers both in Tashkent and Moscow: If the power
struggle continued and he was challenged, he was ready to promote and make
alliances with his open critics in the nationalist and religious groups who were eager
to cooperate with him in order to drive ex-communists out of power and undermine
interests of their Russian supporters in Moscow.

As a result of the short-lived power struggle among the ruling party elites, the
immediate post-independence period experienced a substantive relaxation of political
controls in Uzbekistan. However, it was meant to be a controlled relaxation. The
Uzbek leadership was careful enough not to let an opposition group become a
formidable force in Uzbek politics. As was the case with the glasnost period, the Uzbek authorities were more tolerant toward the groups they believed were willing to operate within the permissible zone of activities than toward those who stepped out of this zone and engaged in impermissible activities such as unauthorized and unwanted public demonstrations. This approach was quite evident in the differential treatment Birlik and Erk received from the Karimov government in the immediate post-independence period.

Erk was reportedly created out of Birlik with the blessings of the Uzbek authorities. It adopted a cooperative rather than confrontational stance toward Uzbek rulers. Such an attitude earned Erk preferential official treatment in the immediate post-independence era. Within less than a week after the declaration of independence, the Uzbek authorities permitted Erk to register itself as a political party. In addition to bringing other advantages such as permission to publish its own newspaper, this official recognition enabled Erk to field its candidate in the December 1991 presidential elections.

Some other opposition groups, besides Erk, were also granted concessions, though not at the same scale. In October 1991, Uzbek authorities released six Birlik activists who were arrested on felony charges in Kokand. In addition, despite their aversion to Birlik's use of protest rallies as part of its political struggle, the Uzbek authorities approved its application for registration as a popular movement in November 1991. However, Birlik was not permitted to participate in the 1991 presidential elections.
In addition to registered groups like Erk and Birlik, some other unregistered informal groups were also allowed to form and operate---of course, within limits. These groups include the Free Peasant Party, the Committee to Save the Aral, and Homeland National Independence Front.

The rise of two Islamic organizations, Islamic Lashkari (Islamic Army) and Adolat (Justice) in the Fergana Valley in Fall 1991 represents one of the most interesting and paradoxical aspects of the Uzbek government’s official approach toward emerging informal groups. The Uzbek authorities not only tolerated the formation and operations of these organizations but also cooperated with the latter to combat the rising crime rate in the region. In order to placate demonstrators of these organizations who were protesting against Karimov’s failure to keep his promise of meeting their representatives during his visit to the Fergana Valley in November 1991, he flew back to the Fergana Valley the very next day to listen to their ideas and demands, including the establishment of an Islamic state and legalization of the IRP. Of all their demands, the only demand that Karimov accepted was the demand of converting the ruling party building into a mosque. The whole episode of these organizations appears particularly striking considering the harsh treatment the Uzbek authorities meted out to the IRP. However striking, it is another piece of evidence attesting to the limited and selective liberalizing approach the Uzbek authorities followed in the immediate post-independence era, before imposing an extremely repressive regime.
As part of its selective and limited liberalizing approach toward opposition groups, the Uzbek leadership made modest concessions to some of them on the question of their direct participation in the electoral process and their access to the mass media. After independence, Karimov decided to renew his mandate through direct presidential election in December 1991. The election was ostensibly open to all the qualified candidates. In principle, all registered political parties could nominate their candidates and other public associations could do so through gathering the required signature of 60,000 voters. In practice, only the ruling party and Erk were able to field candidates, Karimov and Solih, respectively. Despite his pro-government leanings, the fact that Solih challenged Karimov in the presidential election, held election rallies, presented his agenda to the masses, and appealed openly for public support against his rival is particularly striking in comparison with the conduct of Soviet elections.

In fact, the 1991 presidential election marked the apex of the liberalizing approach of the Uzbek leadership in the post-independence era. The Uzbek authorities spared opposition groups, including the IRP and Birlik, from persecution during the election period. The election fervor generated a lot of political activity by the opposition forces, most of which the Uzbek rulers grudgingly tolerated. The election period offered opposition forces a rare opportunity to establish contact with the masses and promote their views. Birlik, for one, approached thousand of voters to gather the required signatures for nomination of its candidate in the presidential
elections. In this process, it was able to expand its base and communicate its message beyond party circles to the Uzbek people.

The republic’s press also became relatively open and accessible to the opposition forces during the election campaign. For instance, it provide some coverage to the election campaign of Solih. He could now use it with relative ease to promote his views. Also, despite their failure to nominate their candidate in the presidential elections, the Birlik leaders were permitted to use the republic’s press to discuss sensitive issues such as rules and regulations governing the presidential election. Of course, they were dissatisfied with the existing rules and called upon the Uzbek government to democratize them. The Uzbek rulers tolerated this criticism of the electoral system, though they did not concede to any of these demands.

The relative liberalism of the Uzbek authorities discussed in the preceding pages by no means suggests that they ever lowered their guard during this period. In fact, as it happened during the glasnost period, the Uzbek leadership ran two parallel processes in the immediate post-independence period, relaxing certain political controls and keeping in place certain restrictions, including repressive measures, in order to keep the political situation under its firm control. It allowed all the registered and unregistered organizations to engage only in easily controlled activities. The requests of most of these organizations to hold public rallies in support of their causes were rarely approved. Rather, at times their efforts to hold unauthorized public demonstrations were unhesitatingly crushed with all available means, including the use of force.
Even during this period of relative openness, the Uzbek authorities continued to keep under control all sorts of unwanted mass activities. The Uzbek authorities dispersed a Birlik-organized mass meeting held in support of the democratic forces in Russia in September 1991. Almost one hundred participants, including the Birlik leadership, were arrested and fined. The second effort Birlik made within days to organize another protest rally met with a similar fate. A delegation from Russia and journalists from the British television company, CNC, who were in Tashkent to cover the Birlik-organized rally were detained (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no.37, 1991:15-16). In fact, the Uzbek authorities made use of all the means at their disposal to ensure that opposition forces did not become a serious challenge to them. All kinds of legal procedures were put in place to legalize actions of an exclusionary, controlling, repressive nature against the opposition forces.

The 1991 presidential election was ostensibly open to all qualified parties, but the Uzbek authorities manipulated electoral procedures to preclude any real contest in the election. Erk, a very small party allegedly created with official support and with no real chance to win, was permitted to participate in the presidential election. Whereas Birlik, a much stronger party, was kept out of the election race for the obvious purpose of avoiding a real contest. Even Erk reported several violations of the election laws. It alleged that it was not represented in election commissions at all levels. The Erk leadership also charged that the state-owned press was willing to publish neither information about the electoral procedures nor criticism of the Uzbek government. The Uzbek authorities were blamed for other malpractices, including the
delivery of extra ballots to the polling stations (Fierman, 1997:380-1). Some other violations of the election laws were also committed.  

Birlik was the strongest of all the registered and unregistered opposition groups whose existence the Uzbek authorities tolerated during the period of relative openness before the beginning of 1992. Its claim of having thousands of members is partially supported by the fact that it was able to gather within days more than 60,000 signatures required under the electoral law to nominate its candidate in the presidential election. Instead of outperforming Birlik in the presidential election with the help of their tremendous material and organizational resources, the Uzbek authorities rather manipulated its exclusion by declaring 25,000 signatures as invalid. In fact, this exclusion was not an isolated incident, but rather one more piece of evidence of selective political openness during this period and the Uzbek authorities' patterned behavior toward Birlik. It is no exaggeration to say that Birlik was singled out for increasingly harsh treatment.

Even during the period of relative openness before 1992, Uzbek rulers never lost sight of their goal of a systematic emasculation of Birlik as a political force in Uzbek society. They would not hesitate to use force, if necessary, to prevent Birlik from expanding its base and promoting its ideas through public rallies. Its exclusion from the presidential election was ensured through the manipulation of electoral rules. Although the Uzbek authorities permitted the state-controlled media to adopt a more favorable stance toward Birlik during this period than during the previous period, they shut down Birlik's own publications.
This discriminatory and repressive attitude toward Birlik worsened in the period that followed the 1991 presidential election. However, this worsening was part of an overall intensification in repression which engulfed not only Birlik but other opposition groups, too. It is no exaggeration to say that once the presidential election was over, the period of limited political openness in Uzbekistan was also over.

Following the presidential election, Karimov was able to control intra-party dissension, consolidate his position in the party, and reduce the parliament to a pliant institution. In addition, he was able to win support of both the Russian authorities (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 9, 1994:20) and his Russian-speaking population which was frightened by democratic slogans (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 51, 1993:24) and whose leadership was supportive of Karimov’s repression of the opposition forces (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 31, 1993:10). It is no exaggeration that once the parliament and other prominent ex-communist leaders lost the clout vis-a-vis the president and he was able to consolidate his power position, he unleashed an intensified repression against almost all forms of independent political activity, marking an end of the short-lived period of limited political openness.

The next portion of the chapter will examine the repressive policy the Uzbek authorities pursued toward in the period that followed the 1991 presidential election. We will focus on the salient outcomes such as almost complete emasculation of independent opposition forces, effective curtailment of the rise of a viable political alternative to the incumbent Uzbek regime, the exclusion of independent political
forces from the electoral process, and repression of independent institutions of mass media.

THOROUGH REPRESSION OF INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTIVITY

It did not take the Uzbek leadership long after the 1991 presidential elections to mark the end of whatever limited political openness it had made available to Uzbek society before and after independence. In January 1992, the student body in Tashkent provided the Uzbek government the first opportunity to demonstrate its utter aversion to protest politics, dissent, and acts of disobedience and its readiness to crush such acts with an iron hand.

Despite their recognition of the importance of social protection of the population during the transition period, the Uzbek authorities did not adopt adequate and timely measures in this regard before freeing prices on January 16, 1992. This act of freeing prices hit the students hard and compounded their growing frustration over delays in the payment of their stipends. On the same day the government freed prices, almost 5,000 students held a protest rally in front of the presidential palace in support of their demands. On their refusal to disperse, the special security forces opened fire on the protesting students. The police chased the fleeing students, sprayed their dormitories with bullets, broke into them, and beat up students with clubs. According to official reports, two students were killed and two were wounded as a result of the police firing. However, unofficial sources disputed this figure. The very next day the students held another demonstration. They not only presented their economic demands but also raised banners demanding the resignation of Karimov and
others responsible for the death of their comrades. The security forces again used force to disperse the protesters. The Uzbek government closed educational institutions and sent students home on an unscheduled long winter vacation in the middle of the exams (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, No. 3, 1992:27).

The Tashkent students were not alone in suffering a fate of this sort. The fate of other independent opposition forces after the 1991 presidential election was also not enviable. As already mentioned, several independent groups were organized in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Most of them survived into 1992. New groups were also formed in 1992 (Hunter, 1996:51-52; Haghayeghi, 1995:84-127; Fierman, 1997:367-388). However, in the post-1991 period, it became increasingly very difficult for them to engage in open political activity. As a result, most of them were forced into underground and semi-underground positions within a year or so after the presidential election. In fact, in the post-1991 era, the Uzbek leadership was not willing to make even modest concessions to the opposition forces, despite the fact that certain opposition members made goodwill gestures to it during the explosive situation arising out of the student demonstration. Instead of exploiting the explosive situation to their advantage, the Birlik and Erk leaders urged the protesting students to maintain calm. The Uzbek president appreciated this positive act and promised in public to register Birlik and IRP (Fierman, 1997:383). Like so many his other promises, this one, too, proved a false promise. Interestingly, in January 1992, Birlik gathered more than the required number of signatures for registration as a legal political party. However, contrary to the promise of the Uzbek president, its application was rejected.
Like Birlik, other parties were also denied registration in 1992. In fact, the government amended the law on public associations. The new law prohibited the formation of political parties based on religion and ethnicity. The government used this law to deny registration to many political parties, including the IRP and the People’s Movement of Turkestan. The latter called for unification of the Muslim Central Asian republics (US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992:975).

The use of force to put down the student demonstrations and the rejection of Birlik’s application for official recognition constitute part of the evidence which amply shows that what the Uzbek authorities sought in the post-1991 era was a thorough and systematic emasculation of independent opposition forces. All sorts of repressive and cooptive measures were used to silence the leaders and activists of independent opposition forces with various orientations. Also, Uzbek rulers sought to block the access of their opponents to all the potential sources of support inside (including the government circles) and outside the country.

After rejecting Birlik’s application for registration, the Uzbek authorities began to adopt regulations which imposed insuperable restrictions on the functioning of opposition groups and served as a legal basis for repressing any opposition group of their choosing. One of these measures was to prevent the illegal financing of public associations. In April 1992, the Supreme Soviet presidium passed a resolution which made it illegal for public associations pursuing political objectives to solicit money for their publications from domestic religious formations or foreign sources. The same
resolution called upon the Ministry of Finance to ensure strict observance of this and other relevant regulations on public associations. It was also instructed "to review declaration on sources of funding for all associations seeking registration in the republic" (Fierman, 1997:384). In addition to this restrictive measure, the Uzbek authorities made effective use of several other measures to repress the opposition forces.

The Uzbek opposition forces were conscious of the fact that a determined effort was underway to eliminate all the potential sources of opposition to the incumbent regime in their country. They were, however, not willing to give up their struggle and leave the political scene to the Uzbek rulers so easily. In addition to old groups which tried to sustain their activities, new opposition groups with new programs came into existence. Babur Shakirov, a political dissident of the Soviet era, challenged the legitimacy of the existing political system. In May 1992, he tried to organize Milly Majlis, which was to serve as an alternate parliament. The repression of such an organization was a foregone conclusion. The government blocked the effort after the first meeting of the Milly Majlis. The participants of the first meeting were interrogated by the security forces. Three leaders of the Milly Majlis, Babur Shakirov, Hazaratkul Khodaberdiev, and Atanzar Aripov, were arrested on charges of attempting to overthrow the constitutional government (US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992:973).

Another organization which emerged during 1992, with a new program was the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU). Abdumannob Pulatov, the brother
Abdurrahim Pulatov, a Birlik leader, headed this human rights organization. This was a smart move because it could potentially internationalize the cause of the opposition forces and enlist the support of foreign governments and other powerful international agencies working to promote human rights around the world. However important, this human rights organization met more or less the same fate that other opposition groups were suffering at the hands of the Karimov government. Its application for official recognition was rejected and its leaders and activists were tortured, imprisoned, and exiled.

The increasing repression brought the two most important competing parties, Birlik and Erk, closer to each other. It was clear to them that they ought to cooperate if they wanted any true relaxation of the existing repressive political system in their country. As repression intensified, Solih, who was accused of pro-government tendencies, became convinced of the futility of his cooperation with the Uzbek government. In May 1992, he expressed his frustration in an article. He made it clear in that article that cooperation of his party "with the official powers was on the basis of mutual respect, pluralism of opinions, and political freedom." He also underlined the possibility and necessity of cooperation with "other political forces...in the interests of civil peace and a stable society" (Fierman, 1997:385, 406). Instead of criticizing each other, the Erk and Birlik leaders marked the beginning of their cooperation at a joint conference held in May 1992 to demand dissolution of the parliament and new parliamentary elections. In the same news conference, they
announced their plans to hold demonstrations in Tashkent and other cities in support of these demands.

Instead of receiving a sympathetic ear from Karimov, who himself, as already mentioned, had earlier suggested the possibility of holding new parliamentary elections in 1992 (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 37, 1991:16), these demands rather provoked a harsh reaction from his government. In fact, as of May 1992, with the parliament and the ruling party more or less under full executive control, the Uzbek authorities were not willing to tolerate any challenge to their legitimacy and other acts of dissent such as those announced in the joint news conference of Birlik and Erk. On May 28, 1992, some men attacked the Birlik leader, Abdurrahim Pulatov, with iron rods. He suffered serious injuries and was taken to the hospital for treatment. This incident happened when Pulatov left the headquarters of the Internal Ministry where he was called in for questioning just two days before the announced demonstration. The opposition quarters blamed the Uzbek government for the attack. Quite expectedly, the Uzbek government denied any role in the attack; it blamed the unidentified assailants and promised to investigate the incident. As the opposition expected, investigation made no headway and consequently no one was arrested. Instead of hoping justice, Pulatov feared for his life. In view of ever increasing repression since early 1992, he left the country for Turkey in December 1992.

Like Pulatov, the Erk leader, Solih, also paid the price for his part in co-sponsoring the May 1992 protest rally in particular and his overall opposition to the Karimov government in general. By May 1992, it was clear that Solih had shed
his pro-government leanings. In view of the fact that the political opposition had little means to make itself heard, Solih tried to take advantage of his seat in the Supreme Soviet and speak in the July 1992 session of the Supreme Soviet about the growing repression in Uzbek society. However, he was prevented from doing so. In protest, he left the session and resigned from the Supreme Soviet, which in his view was no more a legal body. His resignation did not satisfy the Uzbek authorities. They sought his complete silence. After Solih's departure from the Supreme Soviet, the Uzbek authorities mounted tremendous pressure on him and his party. He was accused of high treason for alleged involvement with the Milly Majlis. As a result, before he could be arrested and put on trial, he fled the country in April 1993 for his life—quite a satisfactory outcome from the official point of view.

Like Solih, other independent parliamentarians were either removed or kept under constant threat of removal under a law passed within weeks after Solih's departure from the Supreme Soviet. As part of their repressive strategy against Solih and his party, Erk, the Uzbek authorities removed a number of Erk deputies from their parliamentary positions. Erk deputies Jahangir Mamedov, Murat Djuraev, Inamjan Tursunov, and Atajan Palvanov were deprived of their parliamentary seats through dubious legal means. Those means involved constituents' meetings which were held to recall their respective representatives from the parliament. Some deputies quietly gave in to outright threats (US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1993:1143).
Beating of political opponents has been a regular feature of government strategy to deal with its political opponents in the post-1991 period. The case of Pulatov is already mentioned. He was not alone in suffering street beating. In separate incidents, other opposition activists were also beaten on the streets by unknown men who were never arrested and punished. Independent sources argued on the basis of circumstantial evidence that such beatings were part of a calculated government effort to intimidate the opposition. Among the prominent victims who were subjected to street beatings in 1992 were Abdulla Yusupov, the Khorezm Regional Chairman of Birlik, Miralym Adylov, Birlik Presidium member who was beaten thrice, and Ravshan Dzuraev, the leader of Birlik's youth movement. Like Birlik leaders mentioned above, the leader of the People's Movement of Turkestan, Bahram Gaib, was also beaten on the street in 1992.

The above pattern of 1992 beatings continued in 1993. On different occasions throughout the year, several opposition activists were beaten in the streets. In separate cases involving important political figures, those who were beaten in 1993 included Shukrat Ismatullaev, co-chairman of Birlik, Shukrulla Mirsaidov, former vice president, and Samat Murad, chief secretary of Erk Party. All suffered serious injuries (US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992 and 1993:971 and 1138, respectively). The number of street beatings of opposition figures declined in the subsequent years for the simple reason that as a result of severe political repression fewer and fewer people were willing to challenge the Karimov government.
In addition to arresting and beating, the Uzbek government also dismissed its political opponents from jobs as part of its systematic strategy to thoroughly emasculate the opposition (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 3, 1993:11). In 1992-93, political repression engulfed universities and colleges. Many opposition figures, especially from Erk and Birlik, were dismissed during this period. In 1992-93, almost 100 people from Birlik and Erk were claimed to have been dismissed from their positions for their political affiliation and views. Notable among them include Birlik co-chairman Shukrat Ismatullaev, Marat Zakhidov (a Birlik activist), Talib Yakubov (all three were professors at the Tashkent State University), Yadgar Obid and Gulchekhra Nurallaeva (both members of the Writers’ Union). In 1994, three students of journalism were expelled from the Tashkent State University after they criticized the way the government-controlled press was treating the Erk leader, Solih. The department of journalism was also closed. Later, the students were allowed to reenter the university and the department was reinstated.

The leaders and activists of parties and movements other than Birlik and Erk also fell victim to the growing repression. On December 8, 1992, the Uzbek Supreme Soviet approved a new constitution with all its democratic and human rights trappings. Around the time the constitution was approved, the Uzbek authorities detained leaders of Erk, Birlik, the HRSU, and the Free Peasants’ Party in order to prevent them from attending an international conference "Human Rights and the Fate of Nations" organized by an American Jewish human rights organization and the Uzbek and Kyrgyz human rights organizations in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. All roads
leading to Bishkek were blocked and the conference invitees were taken to police stations and were forced to sign statements that they would not leave the country (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 49, 1992:27).

On the same day when the parliament approved the constitution, the Uzbek special security forces abducted and repatriated three Uzbek dissidents and human rights activists, including Abdumannob Pulatov, from Bishkek. The abductees were in Bishkek to attend the international human rights conference. On his repatriation, Pulatov was tried on charges of using the news media to insult the honor of the president. He was found guilty and sentenced to three years in a corrective labor colony, though he was later amnestied under a presidential decree (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 4, 1993:31). Like his brother who had left the country earlier, Pulatov also fled the country in February 1993. He soon arrived in the United States and since then has been involved in monitoring and publicizing human rights abuses in his country.

Unlike Pulatov who was arrested for an explicit political offense, most opposition activists were arrested for nonpolitical crimes. Those arrested were often accused of drunkenness, hooliganism, illegal possession of narcotics and weapons, etc. In 1992, Pulat Akhunov, a Birlik activist, was arrested for hooliganism, and Bahram Gaib, the leader of the People's Movement of Turkestan, was arrested for drunkenness. In July 1993, while in prison serving his term, Akhunov was charged with illegal possession of narcotics and sentenced to an additional three years in prison. In February 1993, Inamjan Tursonov, the regional chairman of the Erk Party
in the Fergana Valley and a former deputy, was found guilty of hooliganism and sentenced to two years in prison.

The pattern continued in the subsequent period. In 1994 alone, six prominent opposition figures were arrested on charges of drug possession, weapon possession, hooliganism, misappropriation of government funds, and possession of unlawful printed material. Those arrested on such charges included Mikhail Ardzinov (a prominent leader of Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan), Mamadan Makhmudo (an Uzbek writer and close friend of Solih), Nasrullah Saidov (Erk secretary in Bukhara), Saparboy Bekchanov (an Erk activist), Nosir Zokir (Erk chairman of the Namangan province), Atmatkhan Turakhanov (Erk chairman of the city of Namangan), and Vasilya Inoyatova (one of the three human rights activists held in jail in order to prevent them from attending human rights conference in Kazakhstan in April 1994).

In March 1995, Ibragim Buriev, an opposition activist, was arrested for possession of weapons and drugs. The Islamic activists were favorite targets to be rounded up on such charges. Beginning with the arrest of activists of Adolat in 1992, the government has routinely booked Islamic dissidents on nonpolitical charges. In 1995, religious leaders from the Kokand area were charged with narcotics and ammunition.

Less prominent opposition activists were also subjected to various repressive measures, including imprisonment, detention, beatings, harassment, dismissals, etc. Those not too fearful to continue to dissent were forcibly prevented from relating their plight to visiting international dignitaries, especially from the Western countries (CSCE, March 1997:2).
In addition to the above cited repressive measures, the Uzbek authorities did not hesitate from physically eliminating their political opponents. Politically motivated disappearances and assassinations have occurred during the post-1991 period. The Islamic activists bore the brunt of such violent measures. The first politically motivated disappearance occurred in December 1992. Abdullah Otaev, the leader of IRP, was abducted by six men, according to his wife. After that, she never heard from him. As of 1997, there were no results of government investigation, if any, into his abduction. Most independent observers suspect that he is either dead or in the custody of the Uzbek security forces (Fierman, 1997:387). In August 1995, the imam of an Andijon mosque, Abdulvali Kori Mirzaev, and his assistant were reportedly detained at the Tashkent airport by the security forces while en route to a conference in Moscow. As of 1997, there is no information on their whereabouts. In 1995, Bakhtiar Yakubov, a local businessman, died of torture in the custody at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He was a witness in a criminal case against opposition leader Ibragim Buriev. Another Islamic activist related to the above missing imam also disappeared in 1997. It is believed that these activists are either dead or in the custody of security forces (US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1995 and 1997:1111 and 1391, respectively).

The crackdown on individual opposition leaders and activists was partially producing the desired results. Not only many individual leaders and activists were still politically alive, though in a subdued form, but also opposition parties, groups and movements as collective independent political activity were reluctant to withdraw
from the political process. Besides continuing the repression of individual political leaders and activists, the Uzbek authorities set out to remove opposition parties and movements from the Uzbek political scene. The first independent organization to suffer repression and to be forced into underground position was Adolat in the Fergana Valley. After the presidential election, Karimov crushed Adolat. He arrested its members and put them on trial on various charges, including destabilizing the country, preaching fundamentalist Islamic views, possessing illegal weapons, etc. They were given varying terms of imprisonment (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 51, 1993:24). The other independent registered and unregistered parties alike soon met a similar fate.

As already mentioned, Erk was allowed to register as a political party and Birlik as a social movement in 1991. In addition to plain coercive measures, legal means were also used with the help of compliant judicial bodies to force opposition groups out of the official political process and deprive them of any legal basis for their existence and operation. In 1992, the Uzbek authorities sought to undermine the financial base of Birlik and Erk. Their bank accounts were frozen. Erk had to suffer the seizure of its assets on account of nonpayment of expenses in December 1992. Making effective use of a restrictive law it passed, the Supreme Soviet demanded an inquiry to find out Birlik’s compliance with the Law on the Public Associations in December 1992. According to findings of the inquiry, Birlik was guilty of violating several provisions of the said law. The Ministry of Justice requested the Supreme Court to abolish Birlik. It was reasoned that Birlik had repeatedly organized
unauthorized demonstrations and rallies and that "In 1991-92, 166 peoples received administrative penalties and 20 people faced criminal charges" due to activities of the Birlik leaders and activists. Other reasons included the use of the mass media to discredit the authority, honor and dignity of the president and other public officials. Without giving Birlik enough time and a fair chance to defend its position, the Supreme Court suspended the activities of Birlik for three months in its decision on January 19, 1993 (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 3, 1993:24-5).

As if what the parliament, media and courts were doing was not enough, the president used his own executive and legislative powers to expedite the process of emasculating independent opposition forces and force them out of the official political process. In March 1993, the Cabinet of Ministers passed a resolution which mandated re-registration of all public associations by October 1993. The Erk leadership did not seek re-registration. The Birlik leaders, however, decided to apply for registration. They mailed an application but the Ministry of Justice claimed that it never received the application (Fierman, 1997:388). Thus, the Uzbek authorities were able to deprive the two most active and strong opposition parties of legal foundations for their existence and operation. After the registration was over, it became clear that the government did not register even a single true opposition group. Hence, no opposition group could now legally operate in the country.

As a result of increased repression in 1992-93, independent political opposition parties and most individual opposition activists were forced underground, semi-underground, abroad or into inactivity. The extent to which the opposition was
emasculated can be assessed from the fact that, as of 1997, it did not try, after the last attempt in May 1992, to hold public rallies. In 1993-94, Karimov remained busy in building compliant political structures (which will be discussed later) and in further consolidating his power position in the republic. As a consequence of increased repression and executive-centered state-building, by 1993-94, one of the most authoritarian regimes in Central Asia was installed in Uzbekistan---a regime which had all the democratic trappings but no content, and which never ceased to extol virtues of gradual reformism in the transition from communism to political pluralism.

SHORT-LIVED TACTICAL POLITICAL OPENNESS

Once serious potential challengers from the opposition as well as within the government and the ruling party circles (which will be discussed later) were thoroughly emasculated, Karimov felt safe and decided to try his much-trumpeted gradual reformism. His hardened approach toward the opposition witnessed a thaw in 1995-96. However, rather than gradually evolving into genuine political openness and democratization, this thaw turned out to be of short duration and of fleeting nature, followed by a new wave of repression against the opposition. We shall first discuss the tactical thaw.

The first sign of the thaw appeared when the Uzbek government released five political prisoners in November 1994, almost one month before the parliamentary elections. The release of these prisoners was attributed to the effort of international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.
The Uzbek opposition viewed the release as a political move, intended to enhance Karimov's image in the eyes of US administration which had on several occasions turned down his request for an official visit to Washington (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 46, 1994:28). As we shall see, these influences and corresponding political changes proved to be of fleeting nature so far as genuine political liberalization is concerned. In addition, this short-lived thaw was intended to coopt the opposition forces rather than to let them pursue genuine independent political activity in the republic. After the opposition refused to oblige the authorities, the latter unleashed a new wave of repression.

After conducting the multi-candidate and multi-party parliamentary elections in which almost all the electoral candidates were pro-government, the government showed further magnanimity in, at least, recognizing the existence of an opposition. The first unmistakable sign in this regard was the mission of the two Uzbek cabinet ministers, Abdulaziz Kamilov (Foreign Minister) and Alishr Mardiyev (Justice Minister) to win the opposition leaders abroad and to persuade them to cease their dissident activities. In this regard, notable event was the visit of the Justice Minister to Washington in January 1995. He travelled to the United States to participate in a meeting with the opposition leaders, including Pulatov and Solih. The meeting was organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Although nothing concrete came out of the meeting, its symbolic importance was immense. That is, the meeting was an evidence of the Uzbek government's willingness to enter into a political dialogue with those political leaders who were officially accused of
serious anti-state crimes (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 13, 1995:22; CSCE, March 1997:3). Following this meeting, the government took a number of encouraging steps which promoted the impression that the much-trumpeted gradual reformism was ultimately dawning and raised hopes that more political openness was on its way to Uzbekistan.

In addition to building government-controlled institutions (such as a human rights office in the parliament in February 1995 and a commission on constitutional and civil rights in May 1995) to monitor human rights situation in the country, the Uzbek government permitted international human rights and broadcasting agencies to open their offices in Tashkent, to visit the country, and to broadcast their programs. In July 1995, the CSCE's Warsaw-based Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) opened its office in the capital city. The New York-based Human Rights Watch/Helsinki was able to send its representatives to Uzbekistan twice in 1995, after it had been denied such a visit for two and a half years. In March 1996, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was permitted to broadcast its program in Uzbekistan. One month later, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty received permission to open an office in Tashkent. In June and July 1996, the Soros Foundation's Open Society Institute and Human Rights Watch/Helsinki opened their offices in the capital city, respectively. Interestingly, before the former received permission to open an office in Tashkent, in its May report on Uzbekistan, it had reported a marked improvement in human rights situation in that country.
Around the time when these developments were occurring, Karimov publicly spoke about the need to speed up political reforms which, in his view, were lagging behind economic reforms and the gap was detrimental to overall development of the country—a position contrary to his earlier views on the sequence and pace of economic and political transitions. Ignoring his earlier views, he publicly called for greater democratization, stating that active opposition parties, a free press, and respect for citizens’ rights are essential to Uzbekistan’s development (CSCE Digest, February 1997:20).

Around this period, he signed several amnesties. In June 1996, he pardoned almost 80 political prisoners, including members of Erk, who were in jail for allegedly anti-state and terrorist activities. The list also included four organizers of the student protests in Tashkent on January 16-17, 1992 (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 25, 1996:22). He took this action just tens days before his long-sought visit to the United States. In addition, before the release of these prisoners, in its letter to President Clinton on June 10, 1996, the opposition had explicitly indicated its readiness for establishing a dialogue with the Karimov government. While in the United States, Karimov permitted Pulatov to return home without fear of repression. Earlier, he had already promised to register Pulatov’s human rights organization. His pro-reform measures are said to be linked with his desire to win his much-desired meeting with President Bill Clinton in particular and to build a good working relationship with the United States in general (CSCE, March 1997:3, 12; CSCE, March 1998:6). No matter how closely his pro-reform measures were linked to such
concerns in immediate terms, such influences proved, at best, to be of transient nature in the long run so far as the introduction of genuine political liberalization is concerned and were intended, as already mentioned, to coopt the opposition forces through persuading to engage in the so-called constructive opposition activities.

However, we must hasten to add that the pro-reform shift continued even after Karimov's June 1996 visit to the United States. In July 1996, the parliamentary commission created to monitor constitutional civil rights of the citizens was permitted to issue a report critical of government agencies for their "bureaucratic, callous, indifferent treatment" of the people (FBIS, July 18, 1996:56-57). The next month he signed another amnesty and reduced jail terms for some prisoners.

In addition, keeping his promise to Pulatov, Karimov let the former return to the country the same month. Also, in September 1996, he granted permission to Pulatov's Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan to hold a founding conference in order to meet the legal requirement for registration. However, the high point of high pro-reform shift reached when in September 1996, he permitted the ODIHR to organize an international conference on National Human Rights Institutions in Tashkent. The Karimov government created a remarkably open atmosphere for conference participants. At the conference, Pulatov, Mirsaidov, and representatives of independent Islamic community were free to speak and exchange arguments with the government representatives. The opposition's interventions at the conference were strongly critical of the government's human rights policies. Interestingly, Pulatov's interview with Uzbek state radio was aired without censoring any of his remarks.
As the ODIHR conference was over, the period of pro-reform measures was also over, ushering in a new wave of repression.

A NEW WAVE OF REPRESSION OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION

The above pro-reform developments which occurred in 1995-96 generated optimistic assessments and projections in many concerned circles about future improvements in political liberalization in Uzbekistan. However, it did not take these projections long to crash. As already mentioned, the ODIHR conference was the highest point of such assessments. Although it was only after the conference that the Uzbek government took concrete steps which decisively shattered optimism about political liberalization prospects in Uzbekistan, there were disturbing indicators even before the conference.

Around the same time in 1995 when Karimov was calling for more political reforms, Mirsaidov was beaten in the street, Erk activists were convicted of anti-state crimes such as attempting to overthrow the constitutional order of the country, and other opposition activists were arrested for nonpolitical crimes. In his address to the parliament in August 1996, Karimov declared that he would welcome constructive opposition—an opposition capable of promoting development and renovation of society. However, in his next breath, he excluded all Uzbek opposition groups from the category of constructive opposition by stating that unfortunately, he had experienced those who "pretended to be an opposition" and "choose the way of pseudo-democratic...extremist slogans and action" (CSCE, March 1997:4). Although the Karimov government had granted permission to international agencies to open...
offices in Tashkent and monitor human rights situation in the country, it showed little sensitivity to them. The broadcast of BBC and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty were reportedly jammed. Almost two weeks before the ODIHR conference, John MacLeod, the director of the recently opened Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, was picked up from a street in Tashkent during night, taken to police station, humiliated and accused of drunkenness, possession of weapons and possession of drugs. The Uzbek authorities reluctantly admitted to the police excesses against MacLeod after lot of Western pressure. In addition, they were using various bureaucratic and technical pretexts to prevent Pulatov from organizing a founding conference of the HRSU, and ultimately allowed him again under Western pressure (CSCE, March 1997:5-6).

Soon after the ODIHR conference was over, the government-controlled press printed scathing articles against the opposition leaders like Pulatov and Mirsaidov. The former was blamed for riding the wave of false democracy in the early 1990s, for engaging in protest politics, and for plunging the country into the depth of chaos and civil confrontation. He was also rebuked for his alleged failure to understand the role and place of a constructive political opposition. The latter was accused of corruption, and his advocacy for democracy and human rights was dismissed as a mere change of methods. Quite high officials such as the Foreign Minister, Abdulaziz Kamilov, participated in the attack on the opposition (CSCE, March 1997:8-9). It appears that the Uzbek leadership was expecting appreciation rather than criticism for allowing the opposition leaders to return to politics. It was displeased by the candidness the opposition leaders showed during the ODIHR conference. Also, having
served his tactical purpose of meeting with the US president, Karimov had no strong reason to change his policy toward the opposition and to move ahead toward genuine political liberalization and democratization.

After the ODIHR conference, the Karimov government quickly retrenched whatever political openness it had made available to the opposition in 1995-96. Within less than a month after the first ODIHR conference, ODIHR organized a round table on Media Issues in the Transition to Democracy in Tashkent. Unlike the previous conference, the Uzbek organizers did not invite representatives of independent media. Also, no independent advocate of media freedom or any opposition leader attended the meeting. In December 1996, the Uzbek parliament passed a law on political parties. This law made it more difficult for political parties to register. For instance, it increased the number of signatures from 3,000 to 5,000 which a parties need for official recognition.

In January 1997, the Uzbek government rejected the application of the HRSU for registration, despite Karimov's commitment to register it. Again citing technical problems, the government rejected the HRSU’s application for registration in April and August 1997. Another leader of the HRSU, Mikhail Ardzinov, after he split from Pulatov, organized the founding conference of an independent human rights organization, the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan, in August 1997. The conference took place in secret and without government approval because the authorities did not respond to his request for holding such a conference. He tried to register his organization with the government. In December 1997, the application
of Ardzinov was rejected on technical grounds. As of 1997, as a result of government restrictive registration policy and other repressive measures, there was no single independent registered opposition group legally operating in Uzbekistan. Unregistered opposition parties and movements are effectively prevented from freely operating in the country (CSCE, March 1997:6-12; CSCE, March 1998:7-8).

In addition to blocking the rise of organized independent political activity, the Uzbek government continued to repress individual political dissidents in the post-ODIHR conference period. In May 1997, the security forces confiscated the passport of Ardzinov and refused him exit visa. He was later given an exit visa in November 1997. On December 21, 1997, he was detained by the Samarkand police for organizing an illegal meeting. He was set free a day later, but was reportedly abused during his one day detention. The Islamic dissidents were special targets of government repression. In June 1997, an Islamic teacher, Rahmatjon Otaqulov, was convicted of the illegal possession of drugs and weapons. He was sentenced to imprisonment for three and a half years. Another Islamic teacher, Olimjon Gafurov, received one year prison term for similar charges. In August 1997, one more assistant of the missing imam Abduvali Mirzaev disappeared. The assistant, Nematjon Parpiev, went to the local market but never came back.

Unlike 1995, there were no specific amnesties for political prisoners in 1997. Rather, the government refused to release even those political prisoners who had served their full terms of imprisonment or were eligible for their release under annual amnesty. Using its favorite pretext, the threat of Islamic fundamentalism, the Uzbek
government charged several political prisoners and Islamic activists with minor breaches of prison regulation and blocked their release. For instance, Abduraub Gafurov, was sentenced to an additional three years in prison for such breaches. It is interesting to note that the security forces closed his trial and did not allow even foreign observers to attend it.

As of 1997, according to the list compiled by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, there were 20 to 30 political prisoners in Uzbekistan. In its August 1997 issue, the Turkistan Newsletter, affiliated with Erk, put the number of political prisoners at 40 (CSCE, March 1998:9). This figure must be read in view of the fact that in addition to official hurdles, it is difficult to document all instances of political arrest because most political dissidents are arrested on criminal, nonpolitical charges such as drunkenness and because arrests of less prominent, especially in remote areas go unnoticed. The above examples clearly show that the post-ODIHR conference period was the return of Soviet-style repressive methods.

REPRESSION OF INDEPENDENT MASS MEDIA

Accompanying the crackdown on individual leaders, activists and independent opposition formations was the systematic effort of the Uzbek authorities to ensure that neither their own repressive actions nor the views of their opponents got an extensive coverage in the mass media. It is clear in the above pages that by disallowing the opposition forces to hold public meetings, protest rallies and demonstrations, the Uzbek government had effectively blocked a very valuable means to promote their views beyond party members. As already mentioned, after 1992 the opposition did not
try to hold public rallies. The ban on such activities had, without any doubt, made it extremely difficult for the opposition forces to openly transmit their message and relate their continuing plight to the Uzbek masses. What further worsened the situation in this context was the complete government control of the state-owned mass media, its almost complete inaccessibility to the opposition forces and thorough repression of the independent media outlets.

Coinciding with their efforts to suppress dissenting individual and organized political voices, the Uzbek authorities made a systematic effort to muzzle the independent mass media and prevent their use in support of opposition causes. In fact, they instituted comprehensive censorship and established strict guidelines for the mass media to follow. These guidelines specified what was permissible in print and what was not. In this context, the Uzbek authorities identified a number of vague punishable offenses, including criticism of the president, disclosure of state secrets, and other anti-state activities. These guidelines were so vague that the Uzbek government could bend their interpretation to suit any occasion. The central and local Uzbek authorities created various hurdles for opposition publications even if they saw no violation of these guidelines. They interfered with opposition publications often without any justification. In fact, printing facilities have been under full control of the local and central authorities in Uzbekistan. As of 1997, there was no private printing house in the country. The government has effectively used its control over printing facilities to block publication of unwanted material. The opposition publications paid prohibitively high prices and at times their printing was blocked on the lame excuse
of inadequate capacity. Without giving any sound reason, even the local authorities at the level of oblast were able to block any opposition publication within their jurisdiction.

Of course, the purpose of the official guidelines for the mass media and frequent interference with opposition publications was to stem the flow of undesired information. The majority of newspapers and electronic mass media were government-controlled. The law permits the establishment of independent media outlets, including newspapers. However, mass media institutions must register with the government before they begin their operations. The government has effectively used the registration requirement against independent newspapers critical of the Karimov government. In 1992, the Uzbek authorities refused to register Birlik’s newspaper, Mustaqil haftalik. The hunger strike of Birlik activists in support of their demand for registration of the newspaper was of no avail. Birlik leaders were able to print several editions of their newspaper in Moscow and smuggle them into Uzbekistan for distribution. The security forces raided houses of Birlik activists and confiscated almost 8,000 copies of the newspaper. After 1992, Birlik ceased its effort to publish a newspapers. In April 1992, another newspaper, Businessman, was officially registered. After it published several articles critical of economic transition policies of the government, it was shut down in August the same year.

Toward the end of 1992, the code on the conduct of the mass media was further supplemented with a new article which heightened the risks for those involved in issuing publications without official permission. Of course, it was not the last legal
measure which the Uzbek authorities put in place to control access of opposition forces to the mass media. In May 1993, the Uzbek authorities devised a new statute "Law on Protection of State Secrets" which made it a punishable offense to reveal any information that would hurt not only the national security interests of the country but also its interests in "the areas of science, technology, and production and management" (Fierman, 1997:387). In addition, a cabinet resolution passed in 1993 made it unlawful for individual citizens and journalist collectives to set up a media outlet.

The Uzbek authorities readily used the criminal code to harshly cut short any attempt to move outside the vaguely defined permissible zone of journalistic activities. The government instituted comprehensive censorship, banned obstinate opposition publications, and harassed and tortured renegade journalists. Soon after the 1991 presidential election, the authorities began to tighten censorship and institute other restrictions on the flow of information. As already mentioned, because of their status as registered public associations, Erk and Birlik occasionally issued their publications. However, by the summer of 1992, it became very difficult for the editors of Erk newspaper to publish and distribute any material which was critical of the Uzbek government officials and policies. As a result, the size and the quantity of the newspaper decreased. Also, it was now available only through subscription. The Uzbek government banned it altogether in January 1993 and has not been published since then. As of 1997, Erk proved to be the last independent opposition newspaper to be published in Uzbekistan.
In addition to newspapers affiliated with Birlik and Erk, other independent publications were also subjected to repression. In the post-independence period, a number of independent publications which had sprouted up during the glasnost period and several publications affiliated with the former communist party and its affiliates such as Young Communist Leagues, began to publish articles in a democratic spirit. In addition to the publications of Birlik and Erk, the government decided to control other independent publications, too. In 1993, the government mandated reregistration of all the newspapers, weeklies, and magazines by January 1994. The reregistration procedures required these publications to provide information about the sources of funding, means of distribution, founders, and sponsors. As already mentioned, at the same time, the Cabinet of Ministers passed a resolution which prohibited individuals and journalists' collectives from establishing mass media institutions. As the reregistration of the print news media was complete by January 10, 1994, no independent and opposition publication was registered (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 2, 1994:28-29). As a result, the opposition was forced to publish their newspapers from abroad. In December 1995, Uzbek dissidents living abroad joined hands with dissidents from Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to found a magazine, Tsentralnaya Azia (Central Asia), from Switzerland. The magazine, devoted to social and political affairs of the region, became one of the chief spokesmen of the opposition (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 22, 1996:19-20). Likewise, Erk began its own newspaper, The Turkistan Newsletter from abroad (CSCE, March 1998:9).
In addition to repressing opposition publications, the Uzbek government did not spare even pro-government newspapers if they were found to be stepping out of the permissible zone of activities. Even pro-government newspapers were punished for showing nominal and symbolic independence. For instance, in August 1996, Vatan, the newspaper of a pro-government party Vatan Taraqiaty, was temporarily shut down after it published an analytical piece on the August 1996 speech of Karimov in the parliament (US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996:1214).

Like opposition newspapers, independent individual journalists who dared question the government conduct were also subjected to repressive measures, including beating and arrest, and imprisonment on various crimes. For instance, one journalist, Abdurashid Sharipov, was beaten in 1992. In 1993, the editors and key bookkeepers of Erk were tried for their involvement in misappropriation of government funds which the government allegedly provided. According to Erk activists, these charges were false because the newspaper never received any government economic assistance. Even individual citizens and political activists were arrested for possession of the banned newspapers like Erk. For instance, one of the charges under which eight Erk activists were arrested was that copies of the newspaper Erk were found in their homes. Two other activists and a Birlik leader, Vasilya Inoyatova, were arrested for the same charge in 1993. In 1997, the editor of Hurriyat (Freedom), an Uzbek-language newspaper —established in January 1997 and initially escaped censorship with the support of Karimov— received several warnings.
from officials after the newspaper published an attack on censorship and criticized
some aspects of electronic media in the country. The editor of the newspaper resigned
when it became clear that the paper will be censored (CSCE, March 1998:9).

In addition to controlling the republic's mass media, the Uzbek authorities also
sought to tame the foreign mass media operating in Uzbekistan. In fact, they made
little distinction between the national and foreign institutions of mass media and
journalists so far as their efforts to block damaging information through repressive
measures were concerned. As with the national mass media, the Uzbek authorities
spared no effort to block access of opposition forces to the international mass media
and discourage the latter from providing objective coverage to their activities.

Like the national newspapers, the government also censored foreign
newspapers printed in the country. It will suffice to mention a few salient examples
out of numerous cases. Publication of Izvestiia, a Moscow-based newspaper, was
suspended twice 1992. In the Fall of 1992, the Uzbek authorities refused to print the
edition of Izvestiia in Tashkent. What triggered this refusal was the protest of the
newspaper against the decision of the Uzbek government to remove from its Tashkent
edition an article which was critical of tightening censorship in Uzbekistan.
Following its protest, 17 workers at the printing house refused to print the paper.
They accused Izvestiia of interfering in the internal affairs of their country and
stirring up ethnic discord conducive to destabilization of the situation there. The list
of foreign newspapers which were granted accreditation by the Uzbek Ministry of
Foreign Affairs did not include the name of Izvestiia (Current Digest of Post-Soviet

During the same period, the Uzbek authorities banned the importation of another Russian newspaper, Komsomol skaia pravda. Like Izvestiia and Pravda, Argumenty 1 fakty became persona non grata in Uzbekistan (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 45, 1992:24). In 1994, another Russian newspaper, Sevodnya, was added to the list of banned publications after it published a number of critical articles on human rights situation in Uzbekistan. The well known Russian newspaper, Nezavisimaya gazeta, was also banned (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 46, 1994:28; no. 41, 1996:13-4). In short, as of 1997, after passing a number of anti-media regulations, the government did not allow general distribution of foreign newspapers and other publications, with the exceptions of two to three conservative Russian newspapers. Only subscribers have access to foreign newspapers. It must be kept in mind that newspapers critical of the government have not been allowed to come out and circulate. In addition, Russian broadcasts are available in Uzbekistan, but the government continued to black out those broadcasts which were found to be critical of its policies.

Individual writers and journalists were discouraged from reporting about the Uzbek opposition causes. Tactics the Uzbek authorities used for this purpose including detention, restriction on movements, deportation and other forms of pressure. Very tedious procedures were put in place for foreign journalists desiring to operate in Uzbekistan (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 49, 1992:32). Many
foreign journalists were denied accreditation. Some were deported from Uzbekistan for simply having contact with the opposition. Most instances of deportation involved Russian journalists (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 25, 1992:9). In October 1994, the Uzbek government refused to renew the accreditation of Steven Le Vine, a free lance journalist for several U.S. publications because of his articles critical of Karimov and his human rights record (US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1994:1040). In 1996, four Russian journalists were denied accreditation without specifying any reason. The first journalist to lose accreditation and previous privileges was the correspondent of Pravda. After him, a female correspondent for the Interfax economic news agency and head of the Itar-Tass bureau were denied accreditation. The request of the staff correspondent of Rabochaya tribuna for accreditation was rejected by the Uzbek government. The authorities even did not bother to respond to the letter of the editorial staff who wanted to known the reason for denial of accreditation (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 41, 1996:13-4).

The unaccredited journalists were denied participation in press conferences and other officials functions. In order to maintain the status of desirable staff correspondent, the accredited journalists were required to show political correctness in their publications on events in Uzbekistan. They were expected to exercise restraint in their judgement on the level of democracy and to ignore mass disturbances and political scandals in the republic. Instead, they were under an unstated obligation to report Karimov’s economic and political achievements (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 41, 1996:13-4).
Press, no. 41, 1996:14). In addition, reports of Uzbek government detaining the crew of foreign news media (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 18, 1993:20) and harassing and threatening the local translators working for foreign journalists and other foreign mass media outlets have been appearing in the post-independence period.

**REPRESSION OF DISSENT WITHIN RULING PARTY AND GOVERNMENT**

Like its position toward independent opposition forces and national and foreign mass media discussed in the above pages, the Karimov government showed no tolerance toward dissenting voices within the ruling party and government apparatus. After almost two hundred members of the Uzbek Supreme Soviet signed, as already mentioned, a letter of protest against the increasingly dictatorial position of Karimov, taming dissenting voices within his own party and government apparatus became one of his top priorities. One of the first things Karimov did after the 1991 presidential election was to restructure political power in the country. He abolished the post of vice president occupied by his potential rival, Mirsaidov. The latter was given another position in the government but he resigned in protest. Mirsaidov’s resignation did not bring his plight to an end.

In July 1992, soon after Solih quit the Uzbek Supreme Soviet, the parliament passed a law curtailing the powers of its own members. This law authorized parliament to curtail, under exceptional circumstances, the privileges of its sitting members. The exceptional circumstances which could make a sitting member lose his privileges were worded in very vague language. The law covered acts that could
"besmirch or discredit the high calling of people's deputy" or destabilize
"sociopolitical situation" in the country, or involve simple "calling for such acts..."
(Fierman, 1997:386).

Of course, the purpose of this law was to intimidate non-compliant members
of the parliament and drive them out of this body. The Uzbek rulers made effective
use of this and other laws to make an example out of Mirsaidov and other
non-compliant members of the parliament. They did not have to wait for long to reap
the fruits of this law. In August 1992, Mirsaidov resigned his seat in protest against
this law. In August 1993, he was charged with corruption and misuse of power, and
sentenced to three years in prison. Later, he was amnestied under a presidential
decree, but "was forced to live in virtual house arrest" (Fierman, 1997:386-7, 406).

Despite the fact that Mirsaidov and other convicted political figures were out
of jail, they were disqualified from running for any public office, hence effectively
barred from challenging Karimov politically (Kangas, 1994:180-2). The disgraceful
departure of Mirsaidov and other influential political figures and their disqualification
from holding any public office served Karimov well. Since then, the members of the
ruling party, government apparatus, and parliament have rarely dared challenge
Karimov's position as the primary actor in Uzbek politics rather, they have been fully
supportive of his effort to build compliant political structures and run mock
democracy in the country.
ELECTORAL PROCESS: A PLAYFIELD FOR RULING PARTY AND LOYAL OPPOSITION

As already mentioned, soon after independence the Uzbek president promised to build the republic's electoral process on democratic principles. He also alluded to the possibility of holding presidential and parliamentary elections in the near future. As these elections were held over time, it became clear that the electoral process was open for participation only to the ruling party and loyal opposition forces—individual political leaders as well as organized groups.

In fact, even well before these elections were held, there were indications that independent political groups which could pose a serious challenge to the Uzbek rulers would be kept out of the electoral process. While within weeks after independence the Uzbek president was speaking of holding democratic elections in the country in the near future, he doubted Birlik's participation for lack of its registration as a political party. True to this fateful statement, Birlik could not participate in the electoral process because it was never granted an official recognition as a political party. In fact, before it was outlawed in 1993, Birlik was recognized as a social movement, not as a political party. As a result, it was not entitled to the rights and privileges which were available to political parties, including the right to nominate a candidate in an election without submitting thousands of signatures. The Uzbek rulers found ways to block the participation of independent groups like Birlik in the electoral process even if the latter were able to gather the required signatures to nominate a candidate.

Not only independent groups were kept out of the electoral process. The Uzbek leadership also manipulated electoral rules and used other extralegal tactics to
ensure that no true contest ever took place even between the ruling party and the loyal opposition forces, preserving the dominance of the ruling party and its leadership in Uzbek politics.

The manipulation of the electoral process was quite evident in the 1991 presidential election. The 1991 presidential election was planned for December 1991, but election rules were not published until November 23. According to these rules, a registered political party could nominate its candidate. Other public associations with non-party status were required to gather a specific number of signatures of voters to be able to nominate a candidate in the upcoming presidential election. As a result, two parties, PDPU and Erk, were able to nominate their candidates, whereas Birlik was required to gather the signatures to be able to nominate its candidate. It is important to remember that Erk was then cooperating with the government.

In addition to a delay in the publication of general election rules, the procedures regarding collection of signatures were further delayed for three more days. Due to holidays and the time required to call a nomination meeting, political groups with non-party status were in effect given only one day to collect the required number of signatures (Fierman, 1997:379). As already mentioned, Birlik was still able to gather 60,000 signatures but the Uzbek authorities found a way to keep Birlik out of the presidential election through rejecting thousands of the signatures as false.

After the presidential election, the Uzbek leadership would not venture another electoral show until almost all the independent opposition forces were either forced to flee the country or driven into underground and semi-underground positions. Once it
was achieved, the Uzbek authorities set out to restructure the parliament and reformulate electoral rules. During the period from December 1993 to May 1994, a body of laws governing elections to a new parliament and all sorts of councils down to the level of town council was adopted. In September 1994, parliamentary elections were scheduled for December 1994. At the same time, a constitutional amendment was passed which increased the number of seats in the parliament from 150 to 250. According to new election laws, only two types of public associations, oblast councils and registered political parties, can nominate candidates in the parliamentary elections. Considering that most of the old relationships between masses and official powers were carried over into the post-communist era, that oblast chiefs are appointed and controlled from above, and that secret voting is not in vogue in Uzbekistan, it is not difficult to understand the reluctance of most voters to vote against the local political bosses. Through such electoral and other administrative devices, the Uzbek authorities were able to block the nomination of renegade candidates even at the local level.

In theory, the new election rules provided for a multiparty parliamentary election. Political parties were granted the right to nominate their candidates. However, a party must be registered at least six months prior to adoption of this law in order to be able to nominate its candidates. Thus, in practice, this provision reduced the December 1994 parliamentary elections to a friendly electoral contest between two parties, PDPU and Vatan Taraqiaty. As compared to the 1990 parliamentary elections, the December 1994 parliamentary elections offered the Uzbek

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electorate a greater choice of candidates. However, this choice did not involve election of potentially renegade candidates. In fact, it was still impossible for a candidate opposed to government policy to contest election. The Uzbek rulers made an example out of Rustam Usmanov, an outspoken candidate of the Vatan Taraqiay, when the Central Electoral Commission disqualified him as candidate for "preparing and distributing leaflets which denigrated citizens' constitutional rights and freedoms" (Fierman, 1997:391).

As a result of all these electoral and other administrative devices, the PDPU retained its dominant position in the parliament while giving out some parliamentary seats to its sister party, Vatan Taraqiay. Later, as already mentioned, other pro-government parties and formations were awarded parliamentary seats through unopposed by-elections.

At its first session, the new parliament voted to extend through a popular referendum the term of Karimov until the year 2000. The Soviet-style referendum took place in March 1995. According to official figures, out of 99.6 percent of the voters who voted, 99.4 percent voted yes. After the referendum, the parliament voted to include this extension of three years in his first term, making it legally possible for Karimov to run again for the second term in the year 2000. By holding the referendum, Karimov spared himself the trouble of arranging a sham contested presidential election in order to prove that the country's electoral process was competitive.
CONCLUSION

As compared to other, especially European, parts of the former Soviet Union, Gorbachev's political reform program belatedly made its way to Uzbekistan and had limited impact on Uzbek politics. However, in retrospect, Uzbek society enjoyed more political openness in the late 1980s than in the post-Soviet era. Although autonomous sociopolitical groups were not registered in the pre-independence period, their leaders were by and large able to engage in a number of independent political activities without being subjected to brutal repressive measures such as torture, imprisonment, and disappearance. The pre-independence political openness was primarily a weak reflection of the center-sponsored reform program rather than a result of the political vision of the republican communist leadership. Because the Uzbek authorities were unable to openly defy the central authorities, they, in spite of their aversion to the center-sponsored reforms, had to tolerate some independent political activity and could not unleash the level of repression they freely unleashed in the post-independence period. Although Uzbek authorities tolerated some independent political activity in the pre-independence period, they successfully resisted the inclusion of more societal elements in the democratization process in correspondence with their political vision. They were able to resist such an inclusion because they faced little effective pressure in the absence of a large, politicized Russian minority, and in the presence of a cohesive elite structure in the republic.

After independence, the Uzbek authorities built political structures and procedures with all the western democratic and constitutional ideals. Tactics aside,
these ideals turned out to be nothing more than sheer trappings and the Uzbek leadership never made a genuine effort to put them into practice. Rather, it unleashed a rein of terror to completely silence both individual and organized opposition voices in the post-independence period. After Birlik and Erk were disenchanted as political formations in 1993, no tolerated individual and organized opposition activity whatsoever existed in the republic. This was also true of the electoral process. No independent individual and organized electoral participation was allowed.

Independent media outlets met a similar fate in the post-independence period. The Uzbek authorities instituted comprehensive censorship, banned opposition publications, and harassed and tortured renegade journalists. Let alone the personal criticism of the leadership and the coverage of their repressive actions, they did not tolerate even criticism of their policies. The post-independence repressive policy engulfed the foreign mass media and journalists operating in Uzbekistan. Inconvenient foreign television broadcasts were jammed, newspapers banned and journalists deported and imprisoned.

The Uzbek leadership has postponed political liberalization on the pretext of local conditions, including political culture and stability, and put in place one of the most regressive regimes in the region. However, at the same time, it has promised to build a truly democratic polity. How long it will take the incumbent leadership to achieve the required stability before the it decides it is safe to initiate the political liberalization process? Will the incumbent leadership ever try to fulfill its promise of building a democratic polity? In other words, will it initiate the political liberalization
process by controlling its parameters? Or will it continue to postpone it and/or pass it on to its political descendants until the appropriate conditions are developed in the republic?

There is no indication that the incumbent leadership has made any preparation to initiate the political liberalization process. In fact, Karimov has consolidated personal power and is unlikely to dismantle the power structure and political machine he took lot of pains to build around himself. More importantly, he is left with little time to prepare himself for and initiate the political liberalization process. According to the law, he can not serve more than two consecutive terms. If he decides to remain in power beyond the year 2000, he will have to manipulate the constitution, keep in line ambitious political allies, keep intact the political machine he built around him, and scare away the latent opposition forces. Of course, he can not achieve all this without the continued policy of repression. In such case, there is little hope for an improvement in political liberalization.

Because the incumbent leadership appears ready to unleash excessive repression and because it has so far been able to satisfy people's basic needs without raising their expectations for sociopolitical change, adequate pressure for political liberalization is unlikely to develop from below in the foreseeable future. If the political liberalization process is to begin under the incumbent leadership, the most favorable condition for such a prospect would be the rise of a powerful challenger to the president from within the ruling alliance accompanied by a split in the hitherto cohesive elite structure along regional and tribal lines, political mobilization of
religious forces, and their formal or informal alliance with democratically oriented forces. If this happens, Karimov will face the following two likely options: a) to initiate political liberalization, enlist support of the excluded and marginalized secular societal forces in order to improve his position vis-a-vis the splintered and religious groups, and to accommodate the former in the newly created independent political space; or b) use excessive repression to neutralize the challenge. In the later case, he is likely to risk a civil war among regional and tribal forces, let alone other prohibitive costs. Such a challenge is by no means on the horizon; however, it is more likely to develop if the incumbent president decides to perpetuate his rule with no end in sight for ambitious political, regional and clan leaders. More likely but less dramatic scenario is the leadership change. In other words, a genuine movement toward political liberalization will have to await the departure of the incumbent leadership. The best hope is that after the incumbent leadership leaves office, the political machine built around it is likely to weaken and certain reformist elements in the power structure (or tribal and regional groups within the ruling alliance) may demand more independent political space for themselves and hence prove catalyst for the relaxation of excessive political control in the country.

NOTES

1. The influx of Russian settlers into the Central Asia region began with the Russian conquest of the large portion of the region in the 19th century and continued afterwards under various pretexts.

2. Ethnic Russians in Uzbekistan organized an inter-ethnic movement, Intersoyuz, in 1989. This movement failed to draw a large scale following. As a result of a small following and government pressure, Intersoyuz withered away in the post-

3. In the 1991 presidential election, they supported Karimov because he promised to maintain inter-ethnic peace in Uzbekistan (Russian Press Digest, February 4, 1992).

4. The Uzbek secret service agents reportedly harass Uzbek human rights activists in Moscow. The Russian authorities refuse to register such activists as refugees and have made it clear to them that they would not help them avoid persecution (Russian Press Digest, November 11, 1993).

5. Mirsadov resigned from the government on January 13, 1992, and warned about the advent of a dictatorial regime in the republic (Russian Press Digest, January 27, 1992). He later resigned from the parliament and was subjected to repression. However, his resignation from the government and parliament and subsequent repression by Karimov did not create any uproar among his former comrades.

6. In his telegram to George Bush, the US President, Karimov affirmed that he was strengthening the democratic foundations of society (BBC, March 11, 1992).

7. In one of his interviews, Karimov said: "I do not tire of reiterating to my critics: reforms are under way here, democratic processes are under way, and we are building a democratic society based on the rule of law. The stages through which we are passing are another matter" (BBC, June 12, 1993).

8. The Turkish model was described by Karimov as a "secular and civilized" road of development (Russian Press Digest, May 15, 1992).

9. Gorbachev continued to have a negative perception of Islam. Buying the Uzbek authorities' interpretation of the June 1989 ethnic violence in Fergana Valley that a religious political party, Islam and Democracy, fanned this violence, Gorbachev observed: "Islamic extremism has bared its teeth" in the Fergana Valley (Financial Times (London), June 14, 1989:A2; The Daily Telegraph, June 15, 1989:14).

10. Abdurrahman Pulatov, the leader of an independent but unregistered civic movement, Birlik, admitted that democratic forces were weak in the republic and that it would take time to arouse people from social passivity (Guardian, October 25, 1990:9).

12. For example, the Uzbek communist party continued to view Birlik as an extremist formation unworthy of any cooperation. Internal party reports condemned the "cliques" and "self-proclaimed leaders" for their efforts "to create extremist formations and informal associations" like "Birlik" and "Free Union of Uzbekistan Youth" (Fierman, 1997:368).

13. Birlik requested permission to hold a rally in support of Uzbek language in early 1989. When the authorities continued to refuse permission for two months, the Birlik leadership held rally without permission on March 19, 1989. A large number of people participated in the rally without government interference (Fierman 1997:367-8).

14. Solih reportedly won the 1990 election and separated from Birlik with the support of the Uzbek authorities two days after the election to create his own political party, Erk (Will). Erk had many communists in its ranks and its leadership fully supported the CPSU platform, emphasizing the need to outlaw public associations which called for violence and ethnic strife and pursued militant and unconstitutional causes (Tass, February 27, 1990). However, like Birlik, Erk also supported independence----a demand which suited the Uzbek authorities.

15. The respected Uzbek writer, Shukrullo Yusupov, who was a leading supporter of Birlik and veteran of five years in Stalin’s camps in the early 1950s, was appointed to the presidential council (Guardian, October 25, 1990:9).

16. For instance, the Birlik leadership came under severe official criticism a few days after the elections, and its attempt to hold a public rally in the town of Parkent on March 3, 1990, was quelled with the use of force which resulted in a number of deaths and scores of injuries. The attempt by the IRP to hold its founding congress in Tashkent in January 1991 met a similar official response.

17. Of course, opposition groups like Birlik and IRP were prohibited from publishing their own newspapers. International media outlets also became targets. In March 1991, the Karimov government reportedly banned the reception of the Kyrgyz television broadcast in order to prevent Uzbek people from learning about impressive democratic achievements in Kyrgyzstan (Russian Press Digest, May 7, 1991). In addition, foreign journalists, including two representatives of the Radio Liberty, were deported from the republic in 1991 before independence (BBC, August 3, 1991).

18. Uzbekistan declared sovereignty on June 20, 1990.

19. Birlik entered into alliance with Intersoyuz, an association which was founded in 1989, to represent the interests of the Russian-speaking population in Uzbekistan. Abdurrahim Pulatov, a Birlik leader, conceded that without such alliances the authorities would have crushed his movement (Russian Press Digest, October 31, 1990; BBC August 28, 1991).
20. In the immediate pre-independence period, the central authorities pushed for more relaxation of political controls, whereas the Uzbek authorities tried to retrench whatever relaxation was available to Uzbek society. In the immediate post-independence period, the Uzbek leadership was free of the central dictates and enjoyed more latitude to intensify repression of the opposition forces, but it decided otherwise. As compared to their aggressive approaches toward their critics in the immediate pre-independence and post-1991 periods, the Uzbek authorities tolerated their critics even though their repression did not involve a prohibitive cost because they lacked a strong support base in Uzbek society. Moreover, the Uzbek leadership adopted a relatively flexible approach toward them even though they were busy in discrediting it for its supportive role in the August 1991 putsch, criticizing its authoritarian methods, and mocking its decisions such as proclamation of independence as nothing more than a cover to "preserve a totalitarian regime in a separate republic" (Russian Press Digest, August 27, 1991; The New York Times, September 18, 1991:A1).

21. The Russian press which had already published reports of the growing distance between Karimov and the ex-communist party elite in the republic reported the bold behavior of "previously dormant deputies" in the parliament (Russian Press Digest, October 29, 1991).

22. Birlik received some important concessions which, the Birlik leadership believed, were reflective of the fact that the authorities had realized the ineffectiveness of authoritarian methods and therefore had begun to compromise (Russian Press Digest, November 20, 1991).

23. These activists were released in order placate the Birlik leadership which was unhappy with the decision of the authorities to turn down its application for registration as a political party. Although the authorities refused to register it as a political party in order to prevent it from fielding a candidate in the upcoming presidential elections in December 1991, they promised the Birlik leadership to register it as a movement (Russian Press Digest, October 8, 1991).

24. This development enthused the Birlik leaders. They interpreted it as the first genuine democratic step toward the democratic development of Uzbek society (Fierman, 1997:379). Of course, this official recognition meant relatively more freedom of action.

25. For instance, the election law that all the presidential candidates should have equal access to the government-controlled media was clearly violated. The state mass media provided extensive coverage to the election campaign of Karimov. The state-controlled television regularly broadcast his speeches. However, his rival, Solih, could get only 15 minutes of air time (with two minutes of his speech lost due to censorship) after Birlik and Erk activists demonstrated in support of such media coverage (Fierman, 1997:380).
26. Interestingly, it was among the Russian minority that Karimov enjoyed the greatest influence (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 51, 1993:24).

27. Babur Shakirov was imprisoned during the Soviet era for his political views. After his release he left the country. After independence he came back to participate in politics under the impression that things would be different. He was dismayed to find that old power structures were still in place in his country even after independence (Moscow News, January 16, 1993).

28. According to one report, virtually all known opposition activists were fired from their jobs (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 3, 1993:11).
CHAPTER 4

KAZAKHSTAN
THE RISE OF AN ENLIGHTENED AUTHORITARIAN REGIME?

INTRODUCTION

At the time of its independence and the formal break of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Kazakhstan was in the throes of economic and political reforms the center had sponsored under the rubrics of perestroika and glasnost. Although pre-independence economic reform measures were initially introduced in the republic in line with the central guidelines, Kazakh authorities at times went ahead of the center and took independent initiatives to deepen the process of economic transition. However, the same can not be said of political reforms. Before independence, they expressed rhetorical solidarity with the center on its political reform program but sought to subtly circumvent its full enforcement.

After independence, Kazakh authorities were free of the central dictates to decide the fate of the center-sponsored reform program. While they acknowledged enormous obstacles in their way, they publicly expressed their firm commitment to the transition process underway in the republic and to build Kazakh polity on free market and democratic principles. The Kazakh leadership made reasonable progress in dismantling, though gradually, bases of command economy and introducing instead free market principles. Although Kazakh authorities' pre-independence lack of enthusiasm for genuine political reforms raised doubts about the face value of their commitment to democratic principles and the future of such reforms, Kazakhstan witnessed an overall improvement in political liberalization in the post-independence
period. However, its record of political liberalization is modest in comparison to that of Kyrgyzstan, but it is certainly far better than that of Uzbekistan.

Kazakhstan’s middle position on the political liberalization scale is intriguing because it clearly surpasses Kyrgyzstan and roughly matches Uzbekistan in socioeconomic indicators commonly associated with political democracy. In this chapter, we intend to address this intriguing question with the help of our theoretical framework. It is our contention that the way our three independent variables, the Russian minority, elite structure, and political orientation of the Kazakh leadership, operate(d) in Kazakhstan accounts for its middle position on the political liberalization scale. Before we examine our empirical evidence on political liberalization and its correspondence with our theoretical expectations, it is important for us to first discuss the extent to which these independent variables hold in that country. A brief discussion of these variables will be useful for interpreting the empirical data and for assessing the adequacy of our theoretical framework.

Because the post-independence political liberalization is rooted in the pre-independence political reform initiatives and in order to adequately appreciate the level of political liberalization Kazakhstan achieved in the post-independence period, we will also examine the extent to which the center-sponsored political reforms under the rubric of glasnost affected that republic in the pre-independence period. In fact, such discussion will help us to properly appreciate the difference between the pre- and post-independence periods in terms political liberalization in Kazakhstan and enhance our comparative understanding of various phases of political liberalization in that
republic and across the countries under study. The remainder of the chapter will focus on various aspects of political liberalization in the post-independence period. More specifically, the rise of political parties and social movements and the freedom of action they enjoyed, the openness of the electoral process, and the freedom of the independent mass media will receive our special attention. Main findings of this chapter will be summarized in the conclusion.

A LARGE AND POLITICIZED RUSSIAN MINORITY

Kazakhstan houses the largest and the most politicized Russian minority in Central Asia. At the time of its independence, it was home of more than six million ethnic Russians who made up 37.8 percent of the total population. The Russian minority is mostly concentrated (59.1%) in Alma Ata, the capital city (see Table 3), and northern industrial regions of the republic. Ethnic Kazakhs who made up 39.5 percent of the total population at the time of independence (see Table 2) are a minority in the capital city, making up only 22.5 percent of its population (see Table 3). They are mostly concentrated in the south (Khazanov 1995:163, 258; Heleniak 1997:368-370). According to the 1996 estimate, Russians dropped to 33.9% and Kazakhs increased their share to 47% (see Table 2). In addition to their distinct geographical concentration, Kazakhs and Russians are separated by division of labor. As compared to Kazakhs who dominate in the humanities, ethnic Russians are mostly involved in natural sciences and medicine. Consequently, the bulk of technical elites, skilled labor force, and office corps in the army comes from the Russian minority (Khazanov 1995:165; Kubicek 1997:645).
The Russian minority has been increasingly shrinking in proportion to the titular nationality primarily due to its out-migration. As a result of its accelerated out-migration after the demise of the Soviet Union, its share of the total population dropped to 33.9 percent in 1996; whereas the titular nationality increased its share to 47 percent (Heleniak 1997:369). In spite of its shrinking size, the Russian minority continues to be a very resourceful, politicized ethnic group in Kazakhstan.

A number of internal and external factors significantly contribute to its resourcefulness. Internal factors include its sheer large size, concentration in the urban and northern industrial areas, technical and professional skills, economic strength, and political activism. The support of its co-ethnics in Russia, including the Russian troops based on Kazakh soil, constitutes the most important external source of its resourcefulness, and effectively underwrites its security in the republic. In fact, Kazakh authorities are seeking ways to accommodate the Russian minority not only because of its importance for economic and sociopolitical stability of the republic but also because of Russian authorities’ expressed concern with and readiness to use material and political means to promote its welfare. Not to speak of regular Russian support for those Russian political dissidents who accept the integrity of Kazakh state, Russian authorities have at times supported and sheltered even secessionist elements of the Russian minority in Kazakhstan (Khazanov 1995:171; Russian Press Digest, June 1, 1991).

The resourcefulness of the Russian minority resulting from both internal and external sources has been a valuable asset in pursuit of its interests in the republic.
Especially, the politically active members of the Russian minority greatly benefitted from it in their political competition with other sociopolitical groups, including the titular nationality, in the pre- and post-independence periods. The Russian minority demonstrated its independent political activism on many occasions after the Soviet leadership introduced political reforms in the pre-independence period. The first unmistakable sign of its independent political mobilization became visible in December 1986 when armed units of ethnic Russians beat Kazakh nationalist demonstrators who were raising anti-Russian slogans and protesting on the streets of Alma Ata the dismissal of Dinmukhamed Kunayev, a Kazakh, and the appointment of Gennady Kolbin, a Russian, as the first secretary of the Kazakh communist party (Khazanov 1995:166-7). In the wake of these nationalist riots, Kolbin set up more armed units of ethnic Russians in Alma Ata, further strengthening them in the republic (Reuter September 27, 1990).

The Russian minority did not lag behind the titular nationality in organizing its own informal sociopolitical groups such as Wisdom, Yedinstvo (Unity), and Social Democratic Party and in using protest politics to promote its interests after glasnost made its way to Kazakhstan in the late 1980s (Haghayeghi 1994:192). These groups joined hands with the communist members of the Russian minority to strongly oppose the sovereignty and language laws the Kazakh parliament passed in the late 1980s and to press for their own demands, including the status of Russian language as an official language in the republic. These groups organized a number of protest demonstrations...
in support of their demands in the pre-independence period (Pomfret 1995:79; Khazanov 1995:170).³

The Russian minority's political activism did not subside with the demise of the Soviet Union. Rather, not only the Russian minority has become more politicized but has also taken on a new dimension of secessionism in the post-Soviet period. The transition policies of Kazakh authorities in the post-independence period are in part responsible for this situation. In fact, most of these policies are tailored to the needs of the titular nationality, but are detrimental to the interests of the Russian minority. In order to promote its interests, the Russian minority has organized many vocal sociopolitical groups such as Lad (Harmony), Slavic Movement, and the Congress of Russian Communities and resorts to protest politics in the post-independence period. Its overall political mobilization, especially the rise of highly politicized and secessionist groups, renders the use of excessive repression to depoliticize it a very risky proposition for Kazakh authorities.

FRAGMENTED ELITE STRUCTURE OF KAZAKHSTAN

In Kazakhstan, the communist elite structure began to lose its cohesiveness as soon as Gorbachev introduced his reform program. As the central leadership began to deepen its reform program, a section of the Kazakh communist elites distanced itself from the republican leadership and supported the center-sponsored unabated criticism of it for a host of serious problems in the republic. The first serious split in the republican communist party became open at the 16th party congress held in February 1986 when a number of leading delegates, including the prime minister of the
republic, Sultan Nazarbayev, handed down a long list of accusations, including political corruption, to the republican leadership (BBC February 13 and 21, 1986: The Economist, February 15, 1986:49 U.S. Edition). As a result, the republican communist party split into pro- and anti-Kunayev factions. The anti-Kunayev faction, including its members in the republican press, continued to criticize the republican leadership with impunity—an unprecedented development that introduced the principle of open debate at least among the party circles.

The republican communist elites further split after the central leadership imported Kolbin into Kazakhstan to replace Kunayev as the first secretary of the republican communist party in December 1986. Kolbin's appointment suggested that no local communist leader was competent enough to assume the leadership role in the republic. Of course, it annoyed even those Kazakh communist leaders who were opposed to Kunayev. The use of massive force by Kolbin to handle the December 1986 Alma Ata nationalist riots further angered them. Let alone the pro-Kunayev faction, even important members of the anti-Kunayev faction soon began to publicly question Kolbin's policies and style and method of leadership. The growing party split along ideological, inter- and intra-ethnic lines prompted certain communist leaders to make allies outside the communist party and promote their concerns (BBC. March 4, 1989).

The republican communist elite structure continued to disintegrate even after Kolbin was recalled to take up an assignment at the center in June 1989. In fact, in the wake of his departure, the republican communist party further split along ethnic
lines. After he left his post, activists of the titular nationality became more vocal in their demands, forced Kazakh authorities to reinterpret the 1986 riots, and received open support for their concerns from the leading Kazakh communists, including Nazarbayev who replaced the former as the first secretary of the republican communist party (Tass February 23, 1990; Russian Press Digest, September 2, 1990). The Russian communists were displeased with Kazakh authorities' attempts to make "national heroes out of the nationalist criminals" involved in the December 1980 riots (Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, November 1, 1990). Likewise, in the wake of the growing ascendancy of Kazakhstan in its relationship with the center and consequently the growing ascendancy of the titular nationality partially reflected in the language and sovereignty laws, the support for the interests of the Russian minority and opposition to pro-Kazakh policies, including the language and sovereignty laws, solidified among the Russian communists (Russian Press Digest September 28, 1990). A number of republican deputies of Russian origin formed a democratic block within the republican parliament to defend civil, political, and cultural rights of minorities and publicly opposed a number of official positions, including the language law and declaration of sovereignty (Russian Press Digest, October 1, 1990; Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, October 16 and 17, 1990; BBC November 2, 1990).

The rise of a Russian-oriented parliamentary group proved fateful for the future of the republican communist party. In fact, it turned the nascent inter-ethnic divide in the republican communist party into an enduring sharp split which in large part accounts for the failure of the party to transform itself intact, like the Uzbek
communist party, into a ruling party in the post-independence period. These deputies and other communist elites of Russian origin became more aggressive supporters of the Russian minority after Kazakh authorities and elites tried to pursue explicitly pro-Kazakh policies in the post-Soviet period. As a result of their respective intractable positions on sensitive nationalist issues, including language and economic and political reforms, most Russian and Kazakh communist elites failed to narrow their political differences and remain united in a single political party in the post-independence period. Instead, they patronized their respective ethnic communities and ethnic-oriented political groups in the post-independence period. In fact, the inter-ethnic tension and competition exist even in those parties, such as the Socialist Party and People's Congress, which are sponsored by Nazarbayev to unify political elites of different ethnic origin. Even these parties have come to be identified with specific ethnic groups, the Socialist Party with Russians and People's Congress with Kazakhs (Olcott 1993a:57).

The multiple split among the post-independence political elites was amply reflected not only outside but also inside the parliament in the post-Soviet period, prompting Kazakh authorities to work harder to strike a balance between the contending factions of political elites, including various tribal and clan leaders, in the republic (Khazanov 1995:125-6, 165-6). Soon after the 1994 parliamentary elections, a number of political parties and social movements, including ethnic-oriented and ideological ones, joined forces to form a constructive opposition bloc in the parliament. Such opposition bloc had the support of 85 deputies who held the illegal
decisions and actions of Kazakh authorities responsible for the disastrous situation in the republic and demanded the resignation of the incumbent government (Russian Press Digest, May 28, 1994). The same group of deputies later resisted the dissolution of the parliament in 1995 and entered into alliances with other political forces to oppose the authoritarian practices in the republic. In short, the disintegration of elite structure which began in the pre-independence period inexorably continued in the post-independence period, increasingly dispersing political resources and raising the cost of depoliticization of society in the republic.

NAZARBAYEV: A CAUTIOUS REFORMIST LEADER?

In the wake of the Gorbachev reform program, Nazarbayev, then the prime minister of the republic, distanced himself from his conservative mentor, Kunayev, and adopted a reformist posture. As already mentioned, at the 16th republican party congress held in February 1986, he denounced his mentor for promoting a false sense of economic success and hiding serious economic problems in the republic (BBC, February 13, 1986). By taking similar pro-reform positions in the subsequent period, he quickly succeeded in building his image as a firm supporter of the Gorbachev reform program. Such image won him the confidence of Gorbachev and the leadership position in Kazakhstan in June 1989.

After he assumed the leadership position and began to clearly articulate his views about the reform process underway in the country, it became quite clear that Nazarbayev was an enthusiastic supporter of economic rather than political reforms. However, his concept of economic reforms involved: a) economic autonomy for the
Soviet republics; and b) a movement toward market-based relations. In fact, he was convinced of the importance of market-based relations for the much-needed socioeconomic acceleration in the country. However, he left no doubt that his republic would make such shift in a gradual manner, slower than the rest of the country, and was likely to last longer, for a number of reasons, including the oriental mentality of his people, the pervasive influence of the communist party, and sociopolitical situation in the republic.

As compared to his economic approach which was gradual but reflected a genuine concern for market-based reforms, Nazarbayev adopted a more conservative outlook toward the question of political reforms. Although he supported limited democratization of internal party life (BBC, March 8, 1990), he was averse to genuine democratization of public life in the pre-independence period. Also, he called for political decentralization that was meant to enhance autonomy of the republican communist party rather than Kazakh society vis-a-vis the CPSU (Tass, February 23 and March 19, 1990). Given his growing control in the republic, such autonomy essentially meant his own autonomy in the republican affairs.

Although Nazarbayev praised the Gorbachev reform processes for enabling the Kazakh people to speak loudly of their national aspirations (Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, May 31, 1991), he resented the sequence of such processes. More specifically, he believed that one of most serious mistakes the central leadership made in the transition process was that it let political reforms take precedence over economic reforms (BBC, November 29, 1991). According to his
understanding, a smooth transition to a market economy requires strict discipline and full scale democratization of society during the transition is a sure recipe for social unrest. Responding to an assertion that the relative social peace in the republic was a product of its lagging behind the country in the democratization process, Nazarbayev remarked that he was "proud of such a lag" and attributed it to "the civic and political maturity of the population of Kazakhstan" (Russian Press Digest, June 13, 1990).

Likewise, the Kazakh leader saw the rise of new public associations of "different nationalities, views, convictions and....interests" as a positive development which could potentially "cement society hundreds of times stronger than the party-state monopoly on everything" (Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, May 31, 1991), and suggested to implement their productive proposals without delay and to find mutual understanding with them, instead of rejecting them (Tass, August 25, 1989 and December 11, 1990). However, he was averse to their involvement in protest politics and was unwilling to provide them expansive independent political space. He rather wanted to coopt their leaders into responsible positions in the party and government (Tass, August 25, 1991).

Independence brought little or no notable change in Nazarbayev's views about political reforms. If anything, he became more candid in their expression in the post-independence period. While he viewed the rise of various political movements and parties as part of a "logical, democratic process" in the post-independence period (BBC, May 14, 1993), he continued to express his utter aversion to their protest actions and call them a potential source of a "serious rupture" in society (Agence
France Presse, June 18, 1992). In fact, in his scheme of things, economic reforms continue to take precedence over political reforms. The Kazakh president almost always referred to the need for economic acceleration to justify his political machinations, including institutional engineering\(^{10}\) and the postponement of full scale democratization of society.

More importantly, he did not hide his inclination toward authoritarianism as a transitional stage on the road from totalitarianism to a market economy and democracy (Khazanov 1995:148). And, if his views are of any guidance, this transitional stage is bound to last long. Reacting to the negative international assessment of the March 1994 parliamentary elections, Nazarbayev left no doubt about it in his following remarks: "We have not lived to reach the European standard yet --- in terms of either our economy, our development, or our democracy. Yesterday's party discipline...(means) it is a long way to democracy. We cannot have such a level of democracy (that) exists in France or Britain" (BBC, March 12, 1994).

Almost a year later, he reiterated this position. In a response to his critics who described the April 1995 referendum held to extend his term of office until the year 2000 as another example of 'renewed authoritarianism' in Central Asia,\(^{11}\) the Kazakh president justified it in the following words: "We are Asian countries --- we have our own certain mentality. It's impossible in the last three or four years to establish the same kind of democracy you have in England" (The Associated Press, April 30, 1995). He also reminded them that "Democracy is only just knocking at our door"
and they "don't have to mourn for something we never had" (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, April 30, 1995).

The preceding discussion makes it clear that, in spite of his somewhat favorable opinion about the Gorbachev reform program, Nazarbayev was primarily a leader with little sympathy for genuine political openness. In the light of his views, we can expect him to tolerate modest political openness but not full scale democratization of Kazakh society. Also, we can expect him to temper factors conducive to speedy and expansive political liberalization both in the pre- and post-independence periods.

GLASNOST BEFORE INDEPENDENCE: THE KUNAYEV ERA

Almost one month before Mikhail Gorbachev was named the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) on March 10, 1985, Dinmukhamed Kunayev, the first secretary of the communist party of Kazakhstan was proclaiming that his republic was rising to the "new heights of socioeconomic and cultural development" (BBC, February 13, 1985). However, challenging such lofty claims within less two weeks after the former assumed power, the central newspapers, especially Pravda, began to depict a rather bleak picture of the socioeconomic and cultural development of the republic and blamed it on the republican leadership. The central authorities soon joined the press in this crusade (Pravda, March 18, 1985; Current Digest of the Soviet Press no. 11, 1985:3; Pravda, March 29, 1985; BBC, December 29, 1986).
The Kazakh leadership immediately abandoned its earlier complacent view of the socioeconomic and cultural development of the republic. It conceded to the existence of serious problems in the party discipline and distortions in the socialist development of the republic and promised to correct the situation and promised to rectify the situation (BBC, July 13, 1985). Kazakhstan saw a flurry of activities geared toward socioeconomic revitalization but no reported movement toward the formation of autonomous sociopolitical groups and independent institutions of mass media during the last one and a half year of the Kunayev rule. Although limited democratization of party life made the republican leadership accessible to intra-party criticism which was regularly reported in the central and republican press, it was still beyond the reach of criticism from non-party sources. In fact, this situation was very much in accordance with the central authorities' focus on economic acceleration and party discipline rather than on democratization of public life during this period.14

Although a hostile approach of the republican leadership toward the potential sources of independent political activity15 remained intact during one and a half year of the Kunayev era, it can be safely said that at least a basis for the rise of such activity was truly laid during this period.

As a result of a number of reasons, including the center's unabated sharp criticism of Kunayev and his close associates, and local rivalries among the republican party elites, a section of the republican party distanced itself from him and joined the central authorities in their criticism of him for a host of serious problems in the republic (BBC, February 13 and 21, 1986; The Economist, February 15, 1986:49

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As a result, the republican communist party split into pro- and anti-Kunayev factions. In the wake of this split and increasing central pressure for socioeconomic acceleration, Kunayev had little choice but to tolerate his critics in the spirit of openness and socialist democracy---an unprecedented development that facilitated the introduction of the principle of open debate, and rendered the leadership open to criticism, among the party cadres. Once established for party cadres to discredit Kunayev, it became difficult for his successors to deny it to both party cadres and non-party activists concerned with a host of societal issues.

In addition to introducing the principle of openness, the Kunayev era can also be credited for raising a number of issues such as environment around which various autonomous sociopolitical groups were later organized. In fact, a number of such issues were raised in an exchange of criticism and counter-criticism between the central leadership and its local allies on the one hand and pro-Kunayev faction on the other. After acknowledging a number of serious problems facing the republic, it became difficult for both the republican and central leaders to justify repression of the communist and non-communist activists who advocated these issues and sought to organize sociopolitical groups around them in the subsequent period.

In spite of this open debate about the republic's problems and massive purges of the corrupt party cadres carried out under his supervision, Kunayev failed to please the central authorities and continued to face unabated sharp criticism for political cronyism and poor economic performance in the republic. The lack of improvement in the situation was squarely blamed on the political machine he built over the last
two decades. Because this political machine was built under and around Kunayev, the central leadership became convinced that it was extremely difficult to completely break it while he was in power. As a result, the central authorities sent a senior representative to oversee his replacement in a plenary session of the republican communist party central committee on December 16, 1986.17

GLASNOST BEFORE INDEPENDENCE: THE KOLBIN ERA

Kunayev’s removal hardly surprised anyone. It was long expected.18 In fact, the surprising and fateful decision was the appointment of Gennady Kolbin, breaking the traditional practice of appointing a member of the titular nationality as first secretary, with a Russian as second secretary, in a non-Russian republic. It also suggested that no local party leader was reliable and fit for the job the central authorities wanted to accomplish in Kazakhstan— an offensive proposition even for the anti-Kunayev faction in the republican communist party.

Almost within 24 hours of the announcement of the decision to replace Kunayev with Kolbin, student-led riots broke out in Alma-Ata against this decision.19 The central and republican authorities were shocked because such riots were unheard of for a long time. In addition to showing disapproval of the above decision, the Alma-Ata riots displayed an anti-Russian content. However, it was blown out of proportion by the authorities. Angered by the false and provocative rumors that the rioters were seizing Russian educational institutions and killing Russians in the streets (FBIS, December 9, 1988:71), the authorities used massive force to quell the riots.
According to the questionable initial official figures, at least two people died, almost two hundred were injured and one hundred were detained.\textsuperscript{20}

In his immediate reaction, Kolbin strongly condemned the prevalence and manifestation of nationalist sentiments in the republic and resolved and sought to activate available resources to combat this negative phenomenon. He led a massive campaign to expose and punish those who incited and took part in the riots.\textsuperscript{21} His campaign contained, albeit temporarily, the eruption of independent political activity along the lines in Russia and the Baltic republics. It created an atmosphere of fear, coerced Kazakh activists into a low profile, and contained the galvanizing impact of these riots on Kazakh society, hence its immediate further politicization.\textsuperscript{22} However, this situation did not persist for a long time and restricted glasnost made its way to Kazakhstan during the Kolbin period for a number of reasons.

First, it was difficult to insulate Kazakh society from the impact of the intensifying reform program underway in the country for a long time without brutal repression and enormous cost. In fact, Kolbin was imported into Kazakhstan to implement the center-sponsored reform program, not to insulate the republic from it. The fact that the central leadership was increasingly calling for more political openness across the country rendered it difficult for Kolbin, its trusted representative, to defy it and continue his confrontational approach toward Kazakh society.

Second, the split in the republican party made it difficult to effectively pursue reform program, let alone a sustained confrontational approach. In fact, the very decision of the central authorities to import Kolbin into the republic annoyed even
those Kazakh leaders who were opposed to Kunayev. The way the authorities handled the Alma-Ata riots further angered them. Let alone the pro-Kunayev faction, even important Kazakh leaders of the anti-Kunayev faction soon began to question Kolbin's policies and style and method of leadership. In fact, Kolbin remained an outsider, exposed to criticism under the principle of openness he himself championed in his attack on the previous republican leadership, and did not receive the kind of cooperation he needed for his success. The party split, which further deepened with the passage of time, not only complicated his anti-corruption campaign (and pursuit of perestroika) but also made it difficult for him to arrest the growth of what he called subversive activities of independent sociopolitical associations. It became a difficult task because certain party activists and bodies reportedly protected those members of informal associations who were allegedly involved in such activities (BBC, March 4, 1989).23

Third, Kolbin's approach toward the Alma Ata riots and corrective measures he adopted to fix mistakes in the nationality policy of his predecessor(s) obliged him to discontinue his initial hostile approach to Kazakh nationalists. In their initial analysis of the riots, central and republican authorities blamed that the flawed nationality policy of Kunayev unduly benefitted the Kazakh nationality and in part caused these riots. This analysis infuriated many leading Kazakh figures, including party members, who began to speak of socioeconomic and cultural injustices done to the Kazakh nationality. For instance, an increasingly number of leading members of Kazakh intelligentsia came forward and began to highlight how the Kazakh language
was restrained and the scope of its use was narrowed in the republic over time and called for measures, including legal guarantees, to promote it (FBIS, December 9, 1988:70; Tass, August 22, 1989). The authorities soon realized that it was very difficult to improve the situation without addressing genuine grievances of the Kazakh nationality and reducing inter-ethnic tension in the republic. In addition, Kolbin knew that he had authorized the use of massive force on the basis of false information and had annoyed many leading Kazakh communists in the process (FBIS, December 9, 1988:71). He later tried to compensate his mistake by adopting a relaxed approach toward Kazakh society, if not toward the corrupt party cadres. Although purges of corrupt party cadres continued unabated, an appeasement policy toward the Kazakhs nationality and its concerns, including the language, was underway within weeks after the riots.24

Party and nonparty activists surprised Kolbin when they quickly seized upon the opportunity his appeasement policy had created for them to come out in support of their causes, including the language, sovereignty, and environment.25 Partly encouraged by his defensive and apologetic stance on a number of issues, including the riots, they began to speak and organize autonomous sociopolitical groups for their causes. In spite of his aversion to the rise of autonomous sociopolitical forces,26 he found it difficult after his call for reconciliation (The Associated Press, January 22, 1987) to crush them and undo his own claims of progress in the republic. As a result, limited independent space became available to Kazakh society and a host of autonomous sociopolitical groups began to form around various causes during the
Kolbin period. Almost 70 to 100 autonomous sociopolitical groups were reportedly active in Kazakhstan by the time Kolbin left office in June 1989 (BBC, December 24, 1988; BBC, January 14, 1989).27

Although Kolbin relaxed his approach toward independent sociopolitical initiatives, this relaxed approach was by no means comprehensive. In other words, the independent space his relaxed approach initially created was available to certain forces for limited activities. More specifically, such space was available to those autonomous sociopolitical forces who, although critical of the flawed policies of the party and government, did not seek to challenge the party dominance, avoided politics of rallies aimed at discrediting the party leadership, and expressed, at least rhetorical, support to the center-sponsored reform program. Those independent sociopolitical initiatives which, in the eyes of the republican authorities, represented a threat to the social peace and existing power structure were in most cases repressed and their advocates were subjected to punitive measures, including arrest and imprisonment.28 In addition, autonomous sociopolitical groups could not freely establish independent institutions of the mass media and participate in the electoral process29 in the republic during the Kolbin era.

In spite of these restrictions on autonomous sociopolitical forces, there is no denying the fact that glasnost made its way to Kazakhstan during the Kolbin period. The fact that political groups such as the Democratic Union and Popular Front could form and engage in independent political activities, however limited, especially toward the end of the Kolbin era shows that the republican authorities relaxed their
approach, at least in practical if not in rhetorical terms, even toward those groups which aspired to the role of opposition to the communist party and made no secret of their objective of changing the communist system in the country (BBC December 24, 1988). Hence, we can safely say that in spite of the aversion of the republican party and authorities to independent political space, it was surely expanding when Kolbin left his post in June 1989.

GLASNOST BEFORE INDEPENDENCE: THE NAZARBAYEV ERA

The central committee of the republican communist party relieved Kolbin of his duties and elected Sultan Nazarbayev as first secretary of the party on June 22, 1989. Independent political space further expanded under the latter. In fact, it is no exaggeration that autonomous sociopolitical initiatives, in spite of the republican leadership's aversion to them, acquired greater salience under Nazarbayev than under his two predecessors. A number of reasons account for the qualitative improvement glasnost experienced during the Nazarbayev era before independence.

First, central authorities introduced more profound political reforms, including the sanctioning of political parties, independent newspapers, and organized non-communist participation in the electoral process. These reforms reverberated in Kazakhstan, too, as the republican authorities were obliged to follow suit, at least partially in order to demonstrate their commitment to such reforms.

Second, in the wake of the departure of Kolbin, Kazakh activists became more aggressive in voicing their demands and received open support from the leading Kazakh communists, including Nazarbayev himself. Likewise, ethnic Russian rapidly
became politicized and began to aggressively voice their own demands in the wake of growing ascendancy of the Kazakh nationality in the republic. A number of Russian sociopolitical formations, in addition to the armed units of Russian volunteers set up by Kolbin to protect 'citizens' in Alma-Ata in the wake of the 1986 riots, arose in the republic. Like supporters of the titular nationality, there were supporters of the Russian minority in the republican communist party. The support for the Russian minority solidified within the party as the republican authorities began to pursue pro-Kazakh policies. Thus, the political mobilization of the two most resourceful ethnic groups complicated the excessive use of repression in the republic.

Third, the fact that the support for the titular nationality and Russian minority solidified in the republican communist party deepened and accentuated the split among the republican party circles along ethnic lines. As already mentioned, a number of republican parliamentarians of Russian origin formed a democratic block within the republican parliament to defend civil, political, and cultural rights of minorities and publicly opposed a number of official positions, including the language law and declaration of sovereignty. This situation made it harder for the Kazakh authorities to suppress general societal dissent and opposition to their policies. In fact, in view of their own support for the interests of the titular nationality and their need for societal support in their efforts to strengthen their position vis-a-vis the center, let alone the central authorities' concern and the active defense of the leading republican Russian communists for the interests of the Russian nationality in Kazakhstan, the outright repression of activists of either nationality became a costlier and riskier proposition. It
was not expedient for the republican authorities to alienate Kazakh activists and lose their much-needed support through repressive policies toward them at the time when they were trying to win more autonomy from the center. At the same time, it was also not expedient for the authorities to repress Russian activists and provide justification for and strengthen secessionist voices, let alone other adverse consequences.

As a result of Nazarbayev's relaxed approach he pursued due to the above factors, many new autonomous formations, including explicitly political groups with anti-communist orientation, arose during his rule before independence. The most prominent autonomous groups formed to champion exclusively Kazakh interests included Alash Party for National Independence, and Azat (Freedom). Alash pursued a radical, anti-communist program. It openly aspired for power and called for the full independence of the republic and the establishment of an Islamic state (Current Digest of the Soviet Press, no. 16, 1991:12; Haghayeghi 1995:86). A number of localized autonomous formations exclusively committed to Russian and Cossack causes also arose. These formations included Rebirth, Cossack Society, and Popular Movement for Revival. Rebirth and Cossack Society represented secessionist tendencies. The republican authorities admonished the extremist and secessionist groups (Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, September 25, 1990), but took no practical measures to repress them.

In addition to these exclusivist Kazakh and Russian autonomous groups, a number of inter-ethnic political groups, parties, and movements arose to apparently
represent broader interests of society. These groups included Social Democratic Party, Yedinstvo (Unity), National Democratic Party, Democratic Election-90, and Democratic Kazakhstan (a parliamentary group). Although these groups were formed with inter-ethnic trappings, most of them came to be identified with the interests of one or the other nationality.31

According to official reports, more than 100 informal formations, including both political and apolitical,32 were operating in the republic in September 1990 (Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, September 25, 1990). However, because of the republican authorities' aversion to autonomous sociopolitical initiatives, a predominant majority of them was not registered. Legally, only registered formations could operate in the republic. Nonetheless, both registered and unregistered sociopolitical groups engaged in a number of independent activities, including founding conferences, public debates, and authorized and unauthorized rallies,33 for the most part, with impunity. At times these groups were very critical of the authorities. For instance, the parliamentary group, Democratic Kazakhstan, launched a scathing attack with impunity on the republican authorities for concentrating power in the executive bodies (Russian Press Digest, October 1990)34 and criticized their positions on the questions of sovereignty and official language.

In spite of their aversion to rallies held in support of causes contrary to their purposes, Kazakh authorities, for the most part, refrained from the use of force to control such rallies and put away their organizers. Rather, they resorted to manipulative practices to curtail the incidence of such activities. They blocked the
registration of many inconvenient autonomous formations, often denied permission
even to registered groups to hold rallies, reminded them of the need to preserve peace
in the republic, admonished organizers of unauthorized rallies and administered token
punishments to some of them in order to discourage them from such activities
(Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, October 18, 1990). In addition, they
tried to keep at least the capital city free of rallies and demonstrations through
negotiating with informal formations a year long moratorium on such activities in the

In addition to sociopolitical groups, the mass media also benefitted from the
somewhat relaxed approach of Nazarbayev. At times, the official mass media was
permitted to report activities and views which were critical of certain official policies,
the ruling party, and the republican as well as the central authorities. In addition to
occasionally making the official mass media accessible to opposition activists, Kazakh
authorities grudgingly allowed a number of informal formations and individuals to
publish registered newspapers such as S-Democrat, Era of Compassion, and Freedom
Banner, and tolerated the circulation of unregistered newspapers such as Alas (the
underground newspaper of Alash) (BBC, September 29, 1990 and March 15, 1991;

As compared to their somewhat relaxed approach toward the rise of
autonomous sociopolitical groups and the newspapers, the republican authorities
jealously guarded the electoral process from independent individual and organized
participation. Although the March 1990 republican parliamentary election was a multi-
candidate election, the contest was mostly among communist candidates. Kazakh authorities ensured that leading communist figures win their seats unopposed. Also, they resorted to manipulative tactics to keep unwanted party as well as independent candidates out of the electoral process. Consequently, 96.7 percent of the new deputies were members of the communist party (BBC, January 29, 1990; Tass, March 26 and April 3, 1990).

The above discussion clearly shows that in spite of many restrictions on independent sociopolitical initiatives and occasional punitive actions against activists of autonomous formations, independent political space considerably expanded during the Nazarbayev era. However, this expanded space was by no means equally available for all sorts of independent political activities. In fact, opposition activists could engage in some political activities more freely than others. More specifically, independent political space the authorities provided Kazakh society was more readily available for group-formation and to some extent rallies than for the rise of independent institutions of mass media and for independent organized participation in the electoral process before independence.

POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Although Kazakhstan formally announced its independence in December 1991, it was, like any other independent republic, free to decide the fate of political reform in the wake of the 1991 abortive coup at the center. Kazakh authorities reaffirmed their commitment to the post-communist transition after the coup. Whatever progress occurred in various areas of political liberalization before the coup remained intact.
during the period between the coup and the formal announcement of independence of the republic in December 1991.

After independence, Kazakhstan witnessed an overall improvement in political liberalization. Genuine, though weak, political opposition arose in the republic. The number of independent sociopolitical groups increased. Although certain serious restrictions remained in place on them, these groups continued to engage in a host of independent political activities. Although independent individual and organized electoral participation continued to face serious restrictions, the post-independence electoral system was still an improvement on the previous one. Independent institutions of the mass media witnessed qualitative as well as quantitative progress in the post-independence period. In spite of the fact that certain topics were declared or considered to be 'off-limits' and both the official and private mass media practiced self-censorship, they could still provide coverage to activities and views of the opposition and publish and broadcast information critical of the Kazakh government and its policies.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a detailed discussion of our empirical evidence on political liberalization and its correspondence with our theoretical expectations. More specifically, we will examine progress and lack of progress in different areas of political liberalization in the post-independence period and relate it to our three independent variables without maintaining a sequence in them: a) political orientation, decisions, and policies of the Kazakh leadership; b) political mobilization of the large, resourceful Russian minority; c) fragmented elite
structure in Kazakhstan. In the preceding pages, we have discussed in detail the extent to which these variables hold in Kazakhstan. In the following pages, we will briefly revisit them with a view to highlight their relationship with our empirical data on political liberalization.

In the wake of the August 1991 putsch, Nazarbayev (who joined, although somewhat late, the anti-putsch forces led by the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin) resigned from the CPSU. In addition, he issued a presidential decree banning the presence of all political parties, including the communist party, in state structures. According to this decree, people with formal party affiliations were forbidden to hold senior positions in the government (Reuters, August 22, 1991; BBC, August 30, 1991). In addition to resigning from the republican communist party and suggesting it to break its ties with the CPSU, he publicly resolved not to join any political party (Current Digest of the Soviet Press, no. 6, 1993:21; Haghayeghi 1995:128). In the wake of such decisions and actions, the republican communist party disbanded itself and made an unsuccessful effort to transform itself intact into a new political party; many leading communists left the party and joined other political groups or made their own.

All these developments further eroded the position and unity of the already split republican communist party and elite structure, dispersed political resources in Kazakh society, and diminished the party's usefulness as an effective tool of political control in the republic. In addition, once Nazarbayev lost attraction in the party, he had little or no incentive to use state power to promote one faction of old communists
at the cost of another faction of old communists or any other political force—a propitious situation for the rise of a multiparty political system in the post-communist period.

However, Nazarbayev was aware of the importance of an organized political support base independent of state power during the difficult time of transition and shifting political loyalties. In view of the fact that republican communist party was considerably weakened due to many reasons, including multiple deep division, and that Kazakh society and elite structure were sharply divided along ethnic lines, it was difficult to create a single strong and unified organized support base out of the existing sociopolitical forces in the republic. As a result, Nazarbayev looked toward diverse individual and organized sources of political support. In this context, he not only helped the republican communist party transform itself into a new political party, Socialist Party, but also helped create two more broad-based, inter-ethnic political parties, the People’s Congress and Union of National Unity of Kazakhstan, in order to muster support of as many political elites as possible in the post-independence period.

Although these parties lent support to Nazarbayev on different issues, they at times criticized him and his policies. In addition, these parties competed with each other and at times entered into alliances with other more independent nationalist parties. This situation complicated and increased the cost of outright repression of active political forces in society because it meant repression of his own allies, including political leaders of international repute and with considerable political clout.
in society, and Kazakh- and Russian-oriented nationalist parties he needed for equally
important reasons. The rise of nationalist parties served two purposes for Nazarbayev. First, he used the presence and demands of Kazakh nationalist parties to convince the Russian-speaking population in the republic and Russian authorities that as compared to other potential alternatives he was best suited to serve their interests and to win their support. Second, he allowed moderate Kazakh and Russian nationalist parties to operate but repressed radical Kazakh and Russian political groups and activists who he perceived as his most hardened and dangerous enemies.

Another important restraint against the option of indiscriminate repression of opposition forces, along the lines in Uzbekistan, has been the large, resourceful Russian-speaking population of the republic. In the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union, the political loyalty of the Russian nationality largely shifted to "Mother Russia" rather than to the new political identity, the Kazakh state. Russians living in the Russian-dominated northern and eastern provinces feel as if they still live in "Mother Russian" (Olcott, 1995b:182). In fact, the Russian-speaking population has increasingly become disgruntled, politicized, and organized in response to a number of developments, including the change in its status from a dominant ethnic group to a minority ethnic group and its slow but steady marginalization in Kazakh society in the wake of perestroika, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and ethnonationalist policies of the Kazakh state.

The growing resentment among the Russian-speaking population has manifested itself in moderate as well as radical demands ranging from local control
and autonomy to secession of the Russian-dominated areas. This situation posed a potential threat to the territorial integrity of the new Kazakh state. What unnerved Kazakh authorities most was the statement of the Russian authorities in the fall 1991, indicating their intention to readjust the Russian borders with its neighbors. Nazarbayev had to expend enormous political capital and work hard to extract a public commitment of Yeltsin to the territorial integrity of his republic. However, the specter of the Russian intervention still hanged over his head due to the new Russian foreign policy doctrine under which the Russian government reserved the right to use force, if necessary, to protect the Russian-speaking population in the 'near abroad'. In view of this situation, Kazakh authorities found it expedient to exercise caution especially in their dealing with the Russian-speaking population in the republic.

Kazakh authorities recognized that the Russian-speaking population was most unlikely to offer real political allegiance to them in the foreseeable future. In addition, it increasingly became difficult for them to create a loyal political group acceptable to the majority of this population. An indiscriminate policy of repression of political activists of the Russian nationality was also ill-advised because it would heighten the importance of the secession option and transform the low profile local struggle of secessionist forces into an active struggle with potentially adverse consequences for the territorial integrity of the country. In fact, this was a real possibility because many of them looked toward Russian authorities for a signal to agitate for their demands (Olcott, 1995b:182). More importantly, it would certainly internationalize their cause, further infuriate Russian nationalist politicians like Zhirinovsky who threatened to
make war on Kazakhstan to protect Russian-speaking population (The San Francisco Chronicle, December 20, 1993:A12), and provoke Russian authorities to invoke their right to intervene in the 'near abroad' on behalf of the Russian-speaking population and to renege on their public commitment to the territorial integrity of Kazakhstan.

Kazakh authorities adopted a multiple approach toward this problem which further facilitated the rise of genuine political opposition in the republic. In order to assure Russian authorities of the safety and welfare of the Russian-speaking population in Kazakhstan and to win support and cooperation, if not political loyalty, of this population, Nazarbayev made a public commitment to protect its interests and offered it a number of cultural, economic, and political concessions, including the extraordinary degree of local autonomy for some Russian cities and towns (Olcott, 1995b:182) and the freedom to organize moderate political groups devoted to the interests of the Russian nationality in the republic.

However, it was obvious that Nazarbayev would brook neither secessionist claims nor a serious challenge to his authority. Also, in accordance with his overall conservative approach toward political reforms and his understanding of limited acceptable political openness during the transition, he was expected to temper the potential favorable impact of the Russian political activism and fragmented elite structure on political liberalization and resist greater democratization of public life in the post-independence period. In view of the presence of structural constraints of the Russian minority and fragmented elite structure, he made a very selective use of repression in order to deal with secessionist claims, challenges to his authority, and
pressures of autonomous political forces for political openness beyond acceptable limits. In fact, the Kazakh leader made a skillful use of the pretext of inter-ethnic accord to occasionally justify repression of both Kazakh and Russian radical groups. Because independent political space was available to Kazakh society and because Kazakh authorities avoided extreme repressive measures such as political assassinations and long term imprisonments for political offenses, even radical groups and individual activists kept coming back into the political arena and could intermittently engage in a number of independent political activities in the republic.

The net effect of the above conducive and nonconducive factors was a mixed record of Kazakhstan on political liberalization in the post-independence period. Still, as compared to its record in the pre-independence period, Kazakhstan witnessed an overall improvement in almost all areas of political liberalization in the post-independence period. And, this improvement earned Kazakhstan a middle position on the political liberalization scale between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

THE RISE OF WEAK BUT GENUINE POLITICAL OPPOSITION

The freedom of political forces to organize themselves is one area of political liberalization which recorded sustained progress in the post-independence period. The autonomous sociopolitical groups formed in the pre-independence period continued to exist and operate after independence. Not only many of the pre-independence autonomous groups evolved into explicitly political groups and played the role of an active opposition but also new political groups continued to arise and oppose the Kazakh authorities in the post-independence period.
The range of independent political activities these opposition groups could (and did) engage in also widened after independence. This assertion does not suggest that opposition groups and individual activists were never subjected to repression for their political activities. Quite the contrary. However, it is important to note that Kazakh authorities made a very cautious and selective use of repression against their opponents. In other words, unlike the Uzbek political opposition which was totally crushed through brutal repressive measures, including assassinations, Kazakh opposition was largely spared of indiscriminate and brutal repression and was able to enjoy a sizable independent political space in the post-independence period. This fact is amply reflected in the area of group formation.

As of 1997, Kazakhstan housed more than a dozen autonomous political formations of various orientations, in addition to independent human rights groups and independent professional associations and almost over one hundred other socioeconomic and cultural associations. A detailed discussion of all the existing independent sociopolitical formations and their orientations is outside the scope of this inquiry. For the purpose of this study, it will suffice to briefly mention important political formations, their orientations, and the freedom of action they enjoyed in the post-independence period.

A number of autonomous political formations Kazakhstan housed in the post-independence period can be broadly divided into liberal democratic, ethnonationalist, and communist parties and movements. The major liberal democratic formations include the Socialist Party, the People's Congress, National Democratic Party, and the
Party of the Law-Based Development of Kazakhstan. The prominent ethnonationalist parties and movements formed to promote the interests of the titular nationality include Zheltoqsan, Alash, Azat, and the Republican Party of Kazakhstan. The major autonomous formations formed to exclusively promote the interests of the Russian-speaking population include Yedinstvo, Social Democratic Party, Lad (Harmony), the Semirechye Cossack Society, Party of Democratic Progress, the Russian Community of North Kazakhstan, and the Russian Center. In 1992, the Communist Party was formed to promote Leninist principles.

In addition to these groups, Kazakhstan housed a number of other autonomous associations which pursued agendas with political overtones. As a result, they often found themselves in opposition to the authorities. These associations included human rights groups and labor and trade unions. Independent human rights groups included the Kazakh-American Bureau on Human Rights and the Rule of Law, the Alma-Ata Helsinki Commission and Legal Development of Kazakhstan, and the Democratic Committee on Human Rights. Independent labor and trade unions include groups like Independent Trade Union Center and Worker’s Movement (an affiliate group of the Communist party). A number of the above explicitly political and other groups have also joined hands to create two broad-based national movements, Republic and Azamat. In addition to these two broad-based national movements, autonomous groups of various orientations have been entering into loose alliances in support of their causes. Alliances of this sort include Kazakhstan’s Social Protection Coalition, antitotalitarian league, and People’s Front.
Kazakh authorities at times bent the law on public associations, which is not only illiberal but also loose and liable to misuse, to delay, block, and cancel registration of various autonomous formations, including Kazakh radical groups like Alash and Russian radical groups like Semirecheye Cossack Society. However, the sheer presence of a large number of registered autonomous groups, including Russian-oriented moderate groups like Lad, partly confirms that the constitutional right of association is generally respected, if somewhat circumscribed, in Kazakhstan.

In addition to enjoying considerable freedom of action in the area of group formation, most independent sociopolitical groups, both registered and unregistered, have been able to engage in a host independent political activities with impunity in the post-independence period. They have been able to hold press conferences to criticize human rights violations and heavy-handedness of Kazakh authorities toward opposition (BBC, November 14, 1996 and December 30, 1997), party congresses, and round tables to form alliances and to discuss important political issues, including platforms and strategies to counter one man and/or one party rule (Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, no. 7, 1993:22; Russian Press Digest, December 2, 1993; BBC April 14, 1994 and September 26, 1996).

In fact, let alone the registered parties and movements, unregistered autonomous sociopolitical formations have also been able to hold public meetings, publish their own newspapers, and run cultural centers in the post-independence period (U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997:1144). More importantly, autonomous formations, especially the registered ones,
conducted and/or strove for their right to conduct activities Kazakh authorities abhor most. More precisely, these groups continued to hold rallies, authorized and unauthorized, publicly criticize the authorities, talk about sensitive topics like ethnic relations, participate (or continued to push for participation) in elections, and set up independent institutions of mass media. However, unlike the activities discussed in the preceding paragraph which entailed little or no serious punishment for those who conducted them, most of these activities did entail punitive consequences for those who were involved in them. In fact, most of political dissidents who were persecuted for political reasons were persecuted for their participation in unauthorized rallies, for their attempts to fan social tensions, for their actions prejudicial to the security and integrity of the state, and for sullying honor and integrity of the leading state officials, first and foremost the head of state.

According to the law, public associations, including political parties, need a prior approval to hold protest rallies in support of their demands and causes. Unauthorized rallies, protests, marches, and demonstrations are considered illegal. Those who organize them and participate in them are subject to prosecution. Only registered public associations could be granted permission for such activities. How did Kazakh authorities apply the law? In other words, how far was the constitutional right of peaceful assembly respected in Kazakhstan in the post-independence period? Kazakh authorities’ record in this context is mixed.

As already mentioned, the Kazakh leadership was averse to politics of rallies and made no secret of it. Ideally, it wanted autonomous sociopolitical formations to
voluntarily renounce it. Most opposition formations refused to oblige them in this regard. Unlike Uzbekistan where no opposition rally was allowed to take place from 1993 through 1997, numerous rallies, authorized and unauthorized, were held by both registered and unregistered sociopolitical groups in Kazakhstan in the post-independence period. Both sanctioned and unsanctioned protest rallies were held on a number of occasions to publicize and support various opposition demands and causes, including exclusive Kazakh and Russian interests (Reuters, November 30, 1991; BBC, December 20, 1991), resignation of the government due to flawed economic policies (Russian Press Digest, June 22, 1992), opposition to extending the president’s term of office and adopting the constitution through a referendum (BBC, April 27, and August 17, 1995), and protest against falling living standards (BBC, November 14, 1996).

More importantly, unauthorized rallies were held to protest widespread official corruption and the president’s dictatorial policies, including political persecution of opposition parties (Agence France Presse, December 8, 1996; BBC, September 11 and December 1, 1997).

In spite of their aversion to protest rallies and demonstrations, Kazakh authorities avoided brutal repressive measures to completely rid politics of such activities because of the prohibitive cost involved in depoliticizing political activists of both the titular nationality and Russian minority. Thus, Kazakh authorities’ aversion to protest action and the prohibitive cost of ridding politics of such activities partly account for their erratic approach in this regard. In some cases, they readily allowed the registered independent sociopolitical groups to hold public meetings, rallies, and
demonstrations. As of 1997, many authorized rallies were reportedly held in different parts of the country. However, in most instances, they delayed or denied permits for such activities (BBC, July 20, 1995 and November 14, 1996) on many grounds, including lame excuses. However, the most common reason the authorities cited to refuse to issue a permit was the presumed inability of rally organizers to guarantee public safety and order (BBC, November 14, 1996).

The denial of permits for protest actions failed to stop opposition groups from organizing such activities in support of their causes. Most of the opposition groups which planned protest rallies held them even if they were denied a permit for such activities. As of 1997, more unsanctioned rallies have been held than the sanctioned rallies in Kazakhstan. The authorities pursued a less than consistent approach toward unsanctioned rallies.

In some cases, they took no punitive measures and tolerated unsanctioned rallies. In other cases, they issued symbolic administrative warnings and reprimands without prosecuting rally organizers. Certain rally organizers and opposition leaders were harassed and intimidated with the threats of prosecution on corruption charges. Those who were harassed and intimidated include the former speaker of the parliament, Serikbolsyn Abdildin (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 17, 1995:22) and the co-chairman of the Azamat movement and the former cabinet minister, Petr Svoik (U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights for 1996:991). Both attempts, however, failed to intimidate the two leaders and Kazakh authorities decided not to initiate legal proceedings against them.

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In most cases, they prosecuted and punished rally organizers. In fact, as of 1997, more opposition leaders were persecuted for their role in unsanctioned rallies than for other offenses combined. Leaders of almost all ardent opposition groups (such as Alash, Azat, Zheltoqsan, Azamat, Workers’ Movement of Kazakhstan, and others representing Russian causes) have been reprimanded, fined, arrested, put in jails and/or beaten for their participation in unauthorized activities (BBC, August 24, 1995 and December 30, 1997). Those prosecuted and convicted for their role in unsanctioned public activities received varying sentences. In most cases, these sentences included small fines and/or short jail terms of 7 to 30 days (BBC August 24, 1995, November 30, 1996 and December 30, 1997). Only few received longer sentences of a year or so (BBC, September 11 and 22, 1997).43

In addition, certain autonomous groups faced suspension or threat of suspension but not brutal repression for their role in certain unsanctioned rallies held in support of causes the authorities found offensive to the constitution, the security and the integrity of the country. The sociopolitical groups which faced such threats include Lad and the Communist Party.44

Unlike Uzbekistan where rallies have been broken and participants shot at and killed, Kazakh authorities, for the most part, avoided such approach to curb politics of rallies. Save a couple of reported incidents in which the authorities dispersed demonstrators without shooting at them and without any deaths (Agence France Presse, June 18, 1992; U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1995:911), the Kazakh authorities avoided to interfere with protest
rallies, demonstrations, marches, and strikes while they were in progress, even if the protesters chanted derogatory slogans against Nazarbayev (Agence France Presse, December 8, 1996). Legal proceedings were almost always initiated after rallies were over.

In fact, Kazakh authorities avoided the violent use of force to disperse even those rallies and public gatherings which were organized by secessionist forces and/or in support of causes prejudicial to the constitution, the security and the integrity of the country. Because such rallies were mostly organized by Russian-speaking population, it was too risky for the authorities to apply brutal force to disperse these rallies and gatherings. The Kazakh president rather used other manipulative methods such as seeking help from Russian authorities to stop them and sponsoring counter-rallies and gatherings of Kazakh ethnonationalist groups to convince the Russian-speaking population that he is the best choice for them and to justify measures like occasional suspension of activities of inconvenient formations and arrest of leaders involved in such activities in the name of inter-ethnic accord (Russian Press Digest, June 1 and September 17, 1991; BBC, September 13, 18, 20, and November 30, 1991; Olcott 1993b:326).

The explanation of the considerable restraint the Kazakh leadership exercised in punishing opposition formations and their leaders for holding unauthorized rallies partly lies in the fact that such groups were led by well-known leaders (of national and international repute), including former members of the parliament and former communist party members who happened to be important members of their respective
ethnic communities, and it was of the considerable pressure their longer imprisonment could potentially generate within and outside the republic. In the light of Kazakh authorities’ bitter and expensive experience with the arrest and imprisonment of an important Russian activist and journalist, Boris Suprynuk, for his allegedly incendiary writings and a Cossack leader, Nikolai Gunkin, in 1995 for his role in two unauthorized rallies and the mounting pressure they faced from the Russian-speaking population of the republic, Russian political parties, and Russian authorities for their release, it was expedient for them to avoid a harsh treatment and rather rely on other token punishments of leaders of Russian origin (like Petr Svoik) in order to discourage them from politics of protest rallies.

If Nazarbayev avoided an outright and thorough repression of Russian ethnonationalist groups and individual political leaders for fear of further alienating the Russian-speaking population, reinforcing secessionist tendencies, and provoking the Russian authorities to come to the help of their compatriots in his republic, he avoided a thorough repression of Kazakh ethnonationalist groups and important individual political leaders because it would have cost him his nationalist credentials, weakened his support base among his co-ethnics, and undercut his manipulative tactics to deal with the Russian nationality in general and the secessionist forces in particular.

As Kazakh authorities avoided the option of thorough repression and allowed genuine political opposition forces to arise in the post-independence period, the fact that these forces would take independent positions on different matters, publicize their ideas, and publicly criticize the authorities and their policies was a foregone
conclusion. The option then the authorities faced and pursued was not how to completely stop opposition forces from taking independent position and criticizing them but how to either convince them or coerce them to tone down criticism.

Like their record on unsanctioned rallies, Kazakh authorities’ record of their tolerance toward their critics is mixed, too. In some cases, the authorities tolerated open criticism or discussion of certain topics. In other cases, they persecuted their critics for such criticism. Interestingly, while some opposition activists were allowed to blame Kazakh authorities for serious lapses such as corruption and authoritarian practices, others were arrested and convicted on minor, presumptive and fake charges.

The law provided for the freedom of speech. However, the law also imposed restrictions which could be bent to punish any criticism or misdemeanor of opposition. The subjects which were considered 'off-limits' included insulting the president, members of the parliament, and senior public officials, inciting inter-ethnic and social tensions, and endangering the security and integrity of the country. Kazakh authorities used the law on the protection of the honor and dignity of the president to prosecute a number of opposition activists, including the seven members of the Alash party in 1991-92 (BBC, October 8, 1992). Although the most important subject considered to be 'off-limits' was the personal criticism of the president, some opposition activists were prosecuted for other offenses, too.

In spite of such cases of persecution, criticism of Kazakh authorities, including the president, and their policies continued throughout the post-independence
period. In view of the fact that many cases of scathing criticism of the authorities went unnoticed and unpunished, the above cases of persecution of opposition activists suggest that they were intended to reduce rather than completely suppress the volume of open criticism of them. A cursory look at the subjects opposition activists addressed, the demands they made, the slogans they shouted, and speeches they made at news conferences, round tables of political parties, party congresses, and protest rallies clearly supports this view.

As already mentioned, Kazakh authorities faced criticism of their economic, social, and ethnic policies, their unconstitutional ways to dissolve the parliament and to adopt the constitution and extend the president's term of office through a referendum, their manipulative electoral practices, their corruption, and their authoritarian policies and practices. In addition, opposition leaders demanded resignation of the government and publicly appealed the mass to either boycott or vote against Nazarbayev in the 1995 referendum on the extension of his term of office (BBC, April 8, 1995).

More importantly, on a number of occasions, the Kazakh president was personally criticized and his critics went unpunished. For instance, the leader of the Democratic Movement of Kazakhstan, Erkin Sultanbeko, and disgruntled members of the dissolved parliament and leaders of the Republic, an alliance group of many opposition formations, publicly criticized the unconstitutional tactics of the president to enhance his power at the cost of legislative authority, described the enhancement of his personal power as the most serious problem the country was faced with, and
demanded his resignation (Russian Press Digest, December 2, 1993; BBC, August 18, 1994 and April 8, 1995). In yet another instance, at a press conference held on December 23, 1997, to protest the imprisonment of the leaders of the Azamat movement for organizing an unauthorized rally at the end of November 1997, the leader of the Communist Party and former chairman of the parliament, Serikbolsyn Abdildin, said: "As long as Nursultan Nazarbayev is in power, the country will be unable to overcome its crisis" (BBC, December 30, 1997 and January 13, 1998). Still more derogatory language was used in the slogans the demonstrators shouted during an authorized rally held in June 1992, in protest against the president and the delay in the payment of salaries.49 There are no reports to indicate that Kazakh authorities took any punitive action against these demonstrators and their leaders.

The preceding discussion suggests that although Kazakh authorities persecuted their some critics for certain forms of criticism, they tolerated others who subjected them to the same and/or other scathing criticism. It also shows that in addition to considerable freedom of action autonomous sociopolitical groups enjoyed in holding founding conferences, party congresses, press conferences, round tables, public gatherings, and protest demonstrations, they showed remarkable independence in their positions they took on various important matters, including institutional engineering and authoritarian practices of the president.

THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL PROCESS: OPPOSITION ON THE SIDELINES?

As compared to the considerable freedom of action in the area of group formation, Kazakh authorities provided their citizens with relatively little freedom in
the exercise of their constitutional political right to choose their representatives through a free and fair election. A number of factors explain why the Kazakh leadership continued to exercise relatively tight control over the electoral process. As already mentioned, Nazarbayev believed that Kazakh society needed to pass through enlightened authoritarianism in order to make a smooth transition from totalitarianism to a market economy and democracy. In addition, he believed that economic reforms must take precedence over political reforms in such transition. A fair, free and competitive electoral process could potentially democratize society beyond limits acceptable to him. He feared that such democratization could ruin his economic reform project. Such outlook induced him to try to keep the electoral process under his control and temper pressures of individual and organized political forces, including political activists of the Russian minority and other important communist and non-communist political leaders, for an unhindered access to the electoral process in the country. In other words, it led him to manipulate presidential and successive parliamentary elections to his favor, keeping unwanted elements on the sidelines of the electoral process.

Although there were apparently no real electoral competitors to the president, the free and fair executive election held during the difficult times of the post-communist transition carried the potential risk of his replacement, let alone other adverse consequences such as free access of opposition candidates to the masses and their potential mobilization against him and his reform policies. The 1991 uncontested
presidential election and the extension of his term through a referendum rather than a presidential election in 1995 partly illustrate his manipulative approach.

In addition, due to deep and multiple division among the former communist elites, sharp division of society along ethnic lines, and the consequent dispersion of political resources, the free and fair parliamentary elections carried the potential risk of an independent and divided parliament coming into existence which was most likely to complicate the scheme of things the incumbent executive leadership wanted to pursue. After he faced serious challenges from the two seemingly compliant parliaments elected in 1990 and 1994, such prospect was sure to greatly worry the president bent upon running the country single-handedly. The president wanted to have his men dominate the parliament, avoiding potential risks associated with the election of an independent parliament.

Given the potential costs of the indiscriminate use of repression of opposition forces (which meant hundreds of inconvenient electoral candidates, including ex-members of the parliament) and the adequacy of the procedural and judicial methods to avoid these risks, Kazakh authorities adroitly used the latter methods toward those ends. In addition, due to the short duration and rarity of election seasons (which meant the quick evaporation of the election-produced activism without the use of repression), they could and did safely and adroitly employ the judicial process and electoral procedures to deny most opposition candidates the access to the electoral process and to maintain a firm control over it. However, in order to placate certain independent political forces, including ethnonationalist activists of Kazakh and Russian
origin, Kazakh authorities allowed a very limited number of their candidates to participate in and win parliamentary elections.

As of 1997, Kazakh citizens have been allowed to vote in a number of elections and referendums. A popular uncontested presidential election, two parliamentary elections, and a number of referendums have been held in the republic since it achieved its de facto independence in the wake of the 1991 coup. A number of local bodies elections have also been held during this period. However, we will confine our focus to national elections and their openness to opposition participation.

The first national election which took place in the wake of the 1991 abortive coup was the general uncontested presidential election held on December 1, 1991. As already mentioned, the pre-independence republican parliament had elected Nazarbayev as president in 1990. He could serve out his remaining term of office. He instead chose and justified the need to renew his popular mandate and legitimacy through a general presidential election (BBC, October 18, 1991). In principle, all candidates who could get the required 100,000 signatures of the electorate could contest the presidential election.

In addition to Nazarbayev, only two more candidates, Hassen Kozhakhmetov, the leader of the National Democratic Party, and Olzhas Suleimenov, the leader of the People's Congress announced their plans to run in the election. Olzhas Suleimenov, the leader of the People's Congress, withdrew from the race because he claimed that he had no chance of winning the election (Tass, November 2, 1991). Kozhakhmetov tried to collect the required number of signatures to contest the presidential election.
However, he did not submit his nomination papers, ensuring the president an uncontested victory. The National Democratic Party alleged that some unidentified persons had stolen the list of 40,000 signatures it had collected in support of its candidate (The Reuter Library Report, November 12, 1991). However, it must be mentioned that there are no reported cases to show that Kazakh authorities used force or other intimidating methods to prevent the leadership of the National Democratic Party from collecting the required number of signatures.

The second national level election took place in March 1994. It was held to elect the first post-independence national parliament. After the presidential election, opposition parties increasingly questioned the legitimacy of the pre-independence communist-dominated parliament, depicted it as a vestige of the communist era, and demanded its ouster (BBC, June 19, 1992). Although Nazarbayev immediately and squarely rejected the opposition demands (Russian Press Digest, June 22, 1992; Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 24, 1995:26), he increasingly became supportive of the demand for a new parliament for his own reasons.

The parliament, for the most part, cooperated with the president. However, it proved less compliant than he wanted it to be. At times, it refused to support him in a slavish manner and exercised its constitutional authority which was at variance with his preferences. A number of deputies, backed by Kazakh ethnonationalist groups, criticized the president’s plan for an economic union treaty with Russia and for remaining within the ruble zone (Russian Press Digest, October 1, 1993). The parliament also reportedly angered him when it began checking the enforcement of
laws by the government (Russian Press Digest, October 2, 1993). More importantly, the parliament rejected a president-sponsored resolution that was intended to give powers to him to speed up economic reforms in November 1993 (CSCE, March 1994:1).

In addition, he wanted to reward members of loyal parties and other individuals faithful to him. A sizable number of members of the former communist party and parliamentarians had not joined the pro-president parties (Olcott, 1993b:326). Of course, the president could not take their cooperation for granted. Also, the fact that the parliament acted at variance with the executive preferences demonstrated that such a parliament, with lot of constitutional powers invested in it, could potentially pose a serious challenge to the executive authority—a worrisome situation for the president.

Not only the national but also the local legislative bodies acted in ways at variance with the president's preferences (CSCE, March 1994:3; BBC, December 7, 1993). In order to deal with this situation, he began to engineer self-dissolution of the local legislative bodies and emphasized the need for a professional national parliament with a new popular mandate (Tass, November 8, 1993). The president tried to sell to the parliament the idea of its graceful exit. Although, in December 1993, the parliament publicly agreed to dissolve itself due to his forceful persuasion, he reportedly threatened to withdraw his men from the parliament if it refused to accept his idea of an honorable exit, leaving it devoid of the needed quorum to function and, hence, paralyzed. He had already adopted such method to paralyze many local
legislative bodies (Russian Press Digest, October 1, November 23, and December 2, 1993). In order to ensure the desired outcome, a group of 190 pro-president deputies were made to resign before the parliament began its session on December 8, 1993. These members urged their fellow members to follow suit (The Reuter Library Report, December 8, 1993).

On December 8, 1993, 218 out of 360 deputies voted behind closed doors to dissolve the parliament and scheduled the election to parliament for March 7, 1994. In addition, they voted to give the president extra powers, including legislative ones, in the interim so that he could run the country in the absence of a legislature.33

A detailed analysis of the pre-term election to parliament is outside the scope of this study. However, a discussion of a question directly relevant to political liberalization deserves our attention. That is, the government interference with the electoral process. In this regard, we will focus on three issues: a) openness of the elections to popular and independent participation; b) campaign and voting; and c) electoral outcome. In order to discuss these issues in proper perspective, we need to look at the law under which these elections were held.

According to the new constitution of the republic passed in 1993, there were 177 seats in the new parliament (Supreme Kenges), including 42 reserved for candidates on the "state list" or the so-called president's list. The registered political parties and civic associations and movements could nominate their candidates. The self-nomination of candidates was also provided for in the law. However, in order to be able to run in the elections, independent candidates needed 3,000 signatures. In
addition, all candidates had to give an amount, almost five times their monthly wage, to the election commission. The law stipulated that those who could not receive five percent of the polled votes in their constituency would lose their money. Each candidate had the right to get 10 minutes of free airtime on radio and televisions, in addition to 100 lines of newspaper space. However, it was unlawful for candidates to promote hatred and enmity among the residents of Kazakhstan through ideas of racial, national, religious, and social exceptionality (Tass, March 5, 1994; CSCE, 1994:6-7).

The pre-term election to the parliament began with the nomination of candidates from December 25, 1993 through January 25, 1994. Except few reported problems like the delay in the availability of official signature form to some independent candidates, there are no reports to the effect that there was massive official interference with the nomination process. However, the same can be said of the registration process.

A period of two weeks from January 26 through February 8, 1994, was reserved for the registration of candidates. A total of 754 candidates were registered. Altogether 29 public associations, including three registered political parties, the Union of National Unity of Kazakhstan (a party closely associated with the president), the Socialist Party (the reincarnated communist party), and the People’s Congress, and popular and ethnonationalist associations like LAD (a Russian-oriented group) were able to register their candidates (BBC, March 19, 1994; CSCE, March 1994:7-9). A number of independent candidates were also registered. Interestingly, Alash, a radical nationalist-cum-religious movement accused of extremism, could not nominate
its candidates because it was not registered, but its deputy chairman was registered and contested election as an independent candidate (CSCE, March 1994:8).

Although a number of independent individual and party candidates were registered, the registration process was used to screen out inconvenient candidates. According to the press reports, more than 900 candidates tried to register as candidates in the pre-term parliamentary election, but Kazakh authorities refused to register about 200 candidates, including independent journalists, leaders of independent trade unions, ethnonationalist groups, and critics of the central and local authorities (The Washington Post, March 8, 1994:A14; BBC, February 15, 1994). In fact, most registered candidates were president’s men in one way or another. Some analysts believed that the list of 754 registered candidates was prepared by the national and regional authorities who intentionally prevented many prospective candidates and associations from registering for the election (Financial Times (London), March 8, 1994:4).

A large number of truly independent candidates complained that the local election commissions rejected their nomination papers and refused to register them for unjustified reasons, including false signatures (The Washington Times, March 9, 1994:A12; BBC, February 15, 1994; Agence France Presse, March 4, 1994). For instance, the Russian ethnonationalist association, LAD, protested to the central election commission that the local election commission chairman in Kokshetau openly said that the commission would not register candidates who advocate the desirability of dual citizenship (CSCE, March 1994:11). The disqualified candidates also had
often little time to appeal their disqualifications. In certain cases, the appellate courts could not reportedly overrule the decisions of the local election commissions even if the complaint of a disqualified candidate was found to be justified (CSCE, March 1994:10).

Although a large number of independent candidates of different ethnic origin received arbitrary treatment, candidates of Russian minority who would promote its controversial causes such as dual nationality and Russian language in the parliament were specially targeted in this regard. They lodged a strong protest over the discriminatory treatment they received in the registration process by pointing out the fact that Kazakh authorities registered only 128 Russian-speaking candidates as compared to 566 Kazakhs (Financial Times (London), March 8, 1994:4; CSCE 1994:6)—an unrepresentative figure of their share of the population of the republic. Speaking at a press conference held to protest over the biased attitude of the local and central election commissions, Leonid Solomin, the leader of the Independent Trade Union Center, pointed out that Russian-speakers constitute 70% of the population of the Tastak rayon of Alma-Ata but authorities knocked out "virtually all Russian-speaking candidates" for a number of reasons (BBC, February 15, 1994). Of course, this is by no means an exhaustive inventory of fraud cases in the registration phase. The press reported numerous stories of the heavy-handedness of the authorities toward opposition candidates in the registration phase (Agence France Presse, March 4, 1994).
Kazakh authorities partially respected the law which allowed candidates to freely campaign and publicize their program. They provided the allotted 10 minutes free airtime on state radio and television to the registered candidates. The candidates were also able to make use of the allotted 100 lines in newspapers. In addition, they could and did freely organize meetings with their voters. While a predominant majority of the candidates touched common and general issues such as economic reforms and inter-ethnic harmony, a number of candidates were very critical of the authorities and presented bold and independent platforms. For instance, the deputy chairman of Alash ran newspaper advertisements which accused the president and his administration of incompetence and branded them as a "bureaucratic-criminal mafia" (CSCE, March 1994:8). Kazakh authorities patiently put up with some instances of independent and critical campaign activity like this.

However, most independent candidates were not so lucky. They faced serious restrictions on their campaign activities. Beyond the allotted airtime on the state-controlled radio and television and 100 lines in the official newspapers, the state mass media did not cover election programs of most independent candidates. The official newspapers at times censored the election program of independent candidates before publishing it. For instance, one candidate of LAD complained that important points such as the need for dual citizenship and making Russian a state language were deleted from her 100 lines printed in the official press (CSCE, March 1994:10). Kazakh authorities also reportedly prohibited television stations not under direct state.
control from providing any coverage to opposition candidates or their election program (Agence France Presse, March 4, 1994).

In addition, some institutions of independent media were shut down for supporting independent and opposing pro-government candidates. For instance, the local authorities in the capital city closed down an independent television station during the campaign for broadcasting stories critical of the city's mayor and the election itself. The television station was owned by Sergei Duvanov whose application for registration as a candidate in the election was rejected by the authorities (The Washington Post, March 8, 1994:A14). In another instance, state-controlled printing facilities ceased printing 17 newspapers, including opposition ones, during the campaign period on the pretext that such a move was unavoidable due to paper shortage and mechanical problems in the facilities (Agence France Presse, March 4, 1994). The authorities also used other intimidating methods to obstruct the campaign of independent candidates. For instance, LAD complained that the authorities shut down the headquarters of local chapters of independent associations (CSCE, March, 1994:10-11) and Hassen Kozhahmet, a leader of the Kazakh nationalist movement, Zheltoqsan, had to suspend his campaign because his campaign agents were subjected to mounting pressure (Agence France Presse, March 4, 1994).

Like the registration and campaign, the voting also had both positive and negative sides. In some cases, the chairman of the polling station observed the election rules and conducted the voting in a fair way. However, in many cases, the voting was marred by numerous violations. These violations included multiple voting,
returning officers telling voters how to vote, harassment of media, and ballot stuffing resulting in discrepancies in the number of votes cast and the votes counted (CSCE, March 1994:11-12; Reuters World Service, March 9, 1994).

Although there is no hard evidence to impute these irregularities to the executive leadership and these clearly appeared to be the handiwork of the local authorities and election commissions, a look at the election results leads one to reasonably suspect that the local authorities enjoyed some sort of blessing of the executive leadership in this handiwork. The electoral outcome surely pleased the president because the new parliament was dominated by his men. In addition to 42 seats on the president's list, 33 seats went to the president's party, the Union of National Unity of Kazakhstan, and 11 seats were won by the Federation of Trade Union, another public association closely associated with the president and involved in harassing independent trade unions (CSCE, March 1994:9, 13). A number of other associations which each won one seat were also pro-government. The People's Congress won 9 seats and the Socialist Party 8 seats. Although at times both parties took independent positions on various matters and have been critical of certain policies of the president, both were expected, in view of the president's hand in their creation and subsequent close cooperation with him, to support him in the new parliament. However, in addition to a number of individual independent candidates, the truly independent public association with a noticeable presence in the parliament was LAD which won 4 seats in the election (CSCE, March 1994:13). The total
opposition seats were 32, according to one press report (The Christian Science
Monitor, March 11, 1994:8).

The electoral outcome hardly pleased opposition parties and they loudly
protested. LAD was the first opposition group (followed by others) to lodge its formal
protest over serious violations which occurred in the voting. In a letter delivered to
the central election commission, a leader of LAD condemned serious violations in the
election and demanded its cancellation (Rueter World Service, March 9, 1994). The
Kazakh nationality was overrepresented with 105 seats (or 60 percent of seats) in the
parliament, whereas they constituted close to 43 percent of the population. The
Russian nationality was underrepresented with 49 seats (or 28 percent of seats) in the
parliament, whereas they constituted close to 37 percent of the population. The
Russian individual activists and associations like LAD protested over this situation.
Their complaints were supported by the Russian government officials (Tass, March
11, 1994; Agence France Presses, March 10, 1994; Official Kremlin International
News Broadcast, March 11, 1994).55

The victorious candidates represented other nationalities, too. There were 10
Ukrainians, 3 Germans, 3 Jews, and a number of other nationalities each with one
seat (CSCE, March 1994:13). It looked, at least at that time, as if the president got
what he wanted—a pliant parliament made up of deputies representing various
nationalities.

However, the immediate jubilation of the executive leadership over the
electoral outcome was dampened by the negative assessment of some important
international observers such as the delegations from CSCE's Parliamentary Assembly and the Helsinki Commission, the Russian mass media, and the local press (The Christian Science Monitor, March 11, 1994:8; Reuter World Service, March 9, 1994; CSCE, March 1994:12). While these international observers praised the government for holding multiparty elections, allowing opposition groups to participate in the election, inviting international observers, and showing "a desire...to move toward democracy" (Los Angeles Times, March 9, 994:A7), they in the final analysis concluded that the election did not meet international standards and refused to consider it free and fair (CSCE, March 1994:12).

Although some international monitors, including the French members of the CSCE's parliamentary delegation, came to his rescue by observing that the election was relatively free and fair and that many problems resulted from inexperience rather than from deliberate attempts to rig elections (CSCE, March 1994:13; Los Angeles Times, March 9, 1994:A7; The Reuter European Community Report, March 15, 1994), the negative assessment of some important international observers cast a shadow on the authenticity of electoral results and greatly angered the president and his administration. He vehemently rejected the charges and considered election democratic in a televised address on March 10, 1994 (CSCE, March 1994:13). However, this defense later came to haunt him when the Constitutional Court invalidated the 1994 parliamentary election on the basis of a number of irregularities, including multiple voting.
The second reason that dampened the jubilation of the executive leadership over the electoral outcome was that it soon learnt that its efforts to create a pro-presidential parliament were coming to naught. Soon after the election, a number of parties and movements joined forces to form a constructive opposition bloc which was to promote democratic-building through its faction in the parliament. The so-called constructive opposition bloc publicly said that the main reason for the disastrous position of the people was not "legal but often illegal decisions and actions by Kazakhstan's state authorities" (BBC, April 19 and May 18, 1994).

After the opening session which went smoothly, the opposition faction, Legal Development of Kazakhstan, circulated a statement that sharply criticized the government and demanded the resignation of the government. Within days 85 members of the parliament supported the statement (Russian Press Digest, May 28, 1994). Although the president was able to avert the immediate crisis with the help of his allies in the parliament, he later appointed a new government which entered into a dialogue with the disgruntled deputies (Russian Press Digest, May 28, 1994; BBC, October 22, 1994). The lesson of this crisis was clear to the president: He could no more trust the parliament as a united presidential bloc. What made this lesson more clear was the fact that the parliament resisted the president on a number of important issues. For instance, it rejected his proposal to convert the parliament into bicameral parliament and overruled him when he vetoed the laws on social security issues, including the minimum wage (BBC, August 18, 1994).
In March 1995, the Constitutional Court provided much-needed relief to the president when it decided a complaint about the legality of the 1994 parliamentary election. The Constitutional Court ruled that the election was illegal because of a number of irregularities, including discrepancies between the number of votes cast and the actual number of voters. Both the president and the parliament objected to the ruling, but the Constitutional Court reconfirmed its decision.

Whether the president engineered it, as some of his critics (including the members of the parliament) and political analysts claim (Agence France Presse, March 15, 1995; Deutsche Presse-Agentur, April 12, 1995) or not, the ruling surely provided him with a unique opportunity to try to restructure political system with the executive position impervious to future institutional challenges.

After the Constitutional Court rejected his objection to its ruling, Nazarbayev decreed that the parliament ceased its existence as of March 6, 1995, the day the court handed down the decision to this effect. Most parliament members tried to defy the judicial verdict as well as the presidential decree. They suspended certain articles of the constitutions, passed resolutions, staged hunger strike, and set up an alternative People's Parliament, but all came to naught. The president prevailed (Russian Press Digest, March 14, 1995; Agence France Presse, March 15, 1995). He assumed special powers, both executive and legislative, which were bestowed upon by the parliament in December 1993, and promised to hold the next parliamentary election within two to three months. However, he soon abandoned the idea, inaugurated a
period of presidential rule by decree, and attended the project of political restructuring in order to make his position impervious to the parliamentary pressure.

The first thing he did was that he convened a People's Assembly which voted to extend his tenure as president until 2000. He then held a successful national referendum to seek a popular approval of the extension in April 1995. He single-handedly drafted a new constitution and held another successful national referendum to approve it in August 1995. All of this was being done over the objection and protest of a number of leading individual politicians, opposition parties, and above all the judges of the Constitutional Court. After the Constitutional Court judges expressed their views that the draft constitution published in June 1995 contained undemocratic provisions which would give the president extensive powers (but would not hold him responsible for anything), greatly limit the power of parliament to only lawmaking (but with no right to change the constitution), and infringe on human rights (Russian Press Digest, August 30, 1995), the president dropped the provision of the Constitutional Court in the final draft and instead proposed a Constitutional Council controlled and guided by the chief executive (Agence France Presse, August 31, 1995).

After the referendum on the 1995 constitution, he scheduled legislative elections for December 5 and 9, 1995. The new constitution restructured the parliament. The new parliament was composed of two chambers, the Majlis (or lower house) with 67 seats and the Senate (or upper house) with 47 seats. The lower house members would be elected in a one-seat territorial constituencies through direct vote, whereas two senators will be elected in each of the republic's 19 regions and the

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capital city through electorate college of the representative bodies of the regions. The president would hand-pick 7 more senators.

Nomination of candidates for the upper house took place between October 10 and November 4, and the period for nomination of candidates began from October 10 through October 29, 1995. The registration results were announced on November 17, 1995. A total of 49 candidates were registered to contest 40 seats in the upper house. 285 candidates vied for 67 seats in the lower house. A total of 30 public associations, including political parties and movements, took part in the election (Tass, November 3, 1995) and nominated a total of 193 candidates. 138 candidates were self-nominated, including 10 for the upper house and 128 for the lower house (Tass, December 9, 1995).

The majority of candidates were nominated by the pro-president sociopolitical associations such as the Union of People's Unity of Kazakhstan (38), the Federation of Trade Unions, candidates (21), the Democratic Party (22), and the Kazakh Peasant Union (13). The representation of real opposition parties was quite small (Tass, November 17, 1995). Most of the registered candidates were leading local officials, businessmen, managers in state-run enterprises and companies, and members of the sociopolitical associations close to the president (Russian Press Digest, December 1, 1995; BBC, November 19, 1995).

As compared to the 1994 parliamentary election, there were fewer complaints about the nomination and registration processes in the 1995 elections. In fact, the main reason for fewer complaints and small representation of opposition parties was
that the main opposition parties and movements such as the Socialist Party, Azat, the Worker’s Movement and Social Democratic Party boycotted the election (Agence France Presse, December 5, 1995). In fact, immediately after the election commission announced the time table for the legislative elections, most opposition parties and movements met in the capital city to express their fears about the "complete dependence of the future parliament on the executive structures" and about its inability "to work as a full-fledged legislative body" (BBC, October 14, 1995). They also doubted the legality of the elections held in accordance with the constitution which was illegally adopted and feared that the executive bodies and election commissions formed by them might create obstacles in the way of opposition parties. As a result, they announced their reluctance to take part in the 1995 legislative elections. Of all the parties which attended the meeting, only the Communist Party took a different decision and participated in the elections because it had thought it could win seats in the upper house (BBC, October 14, 1995; Agence France Presse, December 5, 1995). Interestingly, the Communist Party fielded only 10 candidates for both the houses (Agence France Presse, December 5, 1995).

Although a number of independent candidates were allowed to register, Kazakh authorities did not hesitate to block their arch critics or those candidates whose campaigning was judged to be contrary to the constitution from running in the election. In one important instance, the authorities arrested a Cossack leader, Nikolai Gunkin, in Alma-Ata on October 28, 1995. He was reportedly trying to register himself as a candidate in the election for the lower house. The authorities took him in
custody on charges of holding illegal rallies (BBC, October 31, November 2 and 4, 1995) in January 1995. The time lapse between the rally and the arrest raised serious questions about the motives of the authorities and provoked strong protest from the Cossack community and a short-lived crisis in Russian-Kazakh relations (BBC, November 6 and 20, 1995; Russian Press Digest, November 14, 1995; Tass, November 20, 1995). In addition, the authorities canceled the registrations of a number of candidates for specific campaign violations. However, as compared to the 1994 elections, the number of such incidents was insignificant, thanks to the boycott of most opposition parties, in the 1995 legislative elections, and, as a result, helped the authorities receive an overall satisfactory assessment from most international monitors.

Almost 100 international observers monitored the elections. The lack of alternative candidates in the upper house was too apparent to escape their eyes (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Dec 5, 1995). In addition, they noted a number of previous but less serious violations, although most international observers, including the European Parliament's delegation, considered the conduct of the 1995 legislative elections as an improvement on the previous one (The Reuters European Community Report, December 14, 1995). While crediting the Kazakh authorities for adopting a number of international observers' recommendations such as "simpler candidate registration process, greater dissemination of opposition views, more funding opportunities for candidates and the inclusion of independent domestic" monitors, the
OSCE delegation noted the downside of the elections, including the practice of family voting and the lack of standardized voting procedures across the country.

Of course, such violations were far less serious than the ones committed in the previous legislative elections. In addition, the OSCE delegation noted that the election campaign was "exceptionally quiet, with little debate or information" (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, December 11, 1995). Of course, when most candidates were the president's men and members of the pro-president parties, and when most opposition parties were staying out of the elections, it could hardly been otherwise. In any event, thanks to the opposition boycott which saved Kazakh authorities the trouble of keeping inconvenient candidates out of the electoral process under the close scrutiny of international observers and the consequent international embarrassment, they were able to finally put in place a truly pliant parliament—an outcome which hardly surprised opposition circles and others, including journalists and analysts, who were expecting it.

The preceding discussion of the electoral process highlights two important points. First, although independent individual candidates and political parties were provided a limited access to the post-independence electoral process, Kazakh authorities made it sure that this restricted access did not result in any strategic advantage for the opposition forces. In other words, because of their limited access to the electoral process, opposition forces would have no real chance of either replacing the executive leadership or dominate the parliament. Second, Kazakh authorities
predominantly relied on manipulative practices and procedures rather than on outright repressive methods to avoid these potential risks.

THE RISE OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA WITH DEFINITE LIMITS

Like their approach toward other aspects of political liberalization, Kazakh authorities pursued a less than consistent approach toward the mass media in the post-independence period. As compared to the pre-independence period, independent sociopolitical forces were also relatively free to set up independent media outlets in the post-independence period. In fact, as already mentioned, independent institutions of the mass media witnessed quantitative as well as qualitative progress in the post-independence period. In other words, not only the number of independent media outlets increased in the post-independence period but also they continued to put out certain information and material quite critical of Kazakh authorities. However, they continued to face a number of serious restrictions and were subjected to various repressive measures in the post-independence period.

As already mentioned, once they allowed a number of autonomous formations to arise in the post-independence period due to the high cost involved in the complete depoliticization of opposition forces, including political activists of the resourceful Russian minority and important communist and non-communist political leaders, Kazakh authorities lost, for all practical purposes, the option of completely stopping them from all sort of independent political activity. Hence, the fact that these groups would engage in a number of independent activities, including efforts to set up their own media outlets, was a foregone conclusion. In addition, once they allowed
opposition groups to hold press conferences, party congresses, round tables, and protest rallies (both authorized and unauthorized), the fact that the media outlets, both the state-owned and independent, would cover these events with critical remarks about them and their policies was yet another foregone conclusion. The use of outright and indiscriminate repression of independent and opposition media outlets could potentially entail by and large similar repercussions and costs which in the first place obliged the Kazakh leadership to tolerate the rise of autonomous sociopolitical groups and their engagement in a number of independent activities. The truly affordable option then Kazakh authorities faced and pursued was not how to completely stop opposition forces from setting up their own media outlets and from criticizing them but what topics to keep off-limits, how to keep independent media outlets within definite limits, and how to reduce the volume of overall criticism of their policies. Thus, Kazakh authorities' less than consistent approach toward the mass media is the product of the interplay between their desire (and attempts) to slow down the democratization process and pro-reform pressures generated by the political activism of the Russian minority and members of the split elite structure in the post-independence period. In the following pages, we will discuss our empirical data on the mixed record of the Kazakh leadership on the question of the press freedom.

While the law guaranteed freedom of the mass media and the Kazakh leadership generally tolerated independent media outlets in the post-independence period, certain restrictions, including the registration requirement and the prohibition of discussion of certain 'off-limits' subjects discussed in the preceding pages, were
also codified in order to apparently prevent the abuse of such freedom. In addition, Kazakh authorities’ control over printing facilities, printing paper, distribution system, and subsidies further increased the vulnerability of independent media outlets to official pressure and manipulation.

Although the law contained a number of restrictive provisions, Kazakh authorities mostly refrained from overstretching them in order to curb all sorts of criticism in the media and prosecute every seeming violation of such provisions. In fact, they discretely invoked these restrictive provisions to curb the discussion of 'off-limits' subjects in the media, encourage independent media outlets to practice self-censorship in other matters, coerce their certain critics in the media, and curtail freedom of independent media outlets without attempting to completely eliminate them.

Kazakh authorities adopted varied responses toward their critics in the media, and independent journalists and media outlets that were judged to have violated the media code. In some cases, they took no action. However, in most cases, the authorities did take some action against those who were judged to have stepped outside the loosely defined limits. A variety of sources, including the press and human rights groups, have reported and documented these varied anti-media actions throughout the post-independence years.

In some cases, independent journalists and media outlets found to be in violation of the guidelines were only warned and cited. In other cases, critics of the authorities in the press and electronic media were tacitly harassed by the national
and local authorities. In other words, they took administrative actions to harass independent media outlets but did not formally charge and prosecute them. The outlets which were dealt with in this way include Birlesu (the independent trade union publication), Telemax (an independent television station in the capital city), the Almaatinsky Birzhevoy Vestnik (Almaty Stock Exchange News), ABV (Auction Bulletin), Karavan (the most independent newspaper in the capital city and the largest circulation newspaper in Central Asia), and Zvezda Priirtyshya (Star of the Irtysh River Region).

The case of Karavan deserves further comments because it clearly illustrates how even tacit anti-media actions contributed to the impulse of the largest circulation paper in Central Asia to self-censorship. Karavan has been the target of the disguised pressure from local authorities for its independent views from the outset. However, close to the 1994 parliamentary election, a specific incident which increased the official disguised pressure was that it (and the Almaty Stock Exchange News) published an open letter from the head of a major corporation who questioned the mayor's ability to administer the capital city. As a result, the newspaper was subjected to various administrative measures without facing a formal charge in the court (Tass, February 18, 1994). In addition, the newspaper ran critical stories about the dissolution of the parliament in March 1995—a step which constituted an indirect criticism of the president. After the newspaper ran such stories, a warehouse of Karavan burned down for reasons disputed between the newspaper and the authorities. In any case, a loss of about 1 million dollars in the fire incident caused the newspaper

A look at such harassment cases shows that most cases occurred during the national election and referendum periods. In other words, it suggests that Kazakh authorities became more sensitive to open criticism and relatively more aggressive in their dealing with opposition and independent media outlets during these periods. The opposition and independent media outlets, including those run by powerful economic and political figures, acknowledged this connection, and yet increased the volume of criticism of the national and local authorities during such periods (Tass, February 18, 1994) to resist official heavy-handedness and to protect the available independent space.

In still other cases, a number of critics in the media were subjected to some sort of undisguised punitive measures such as dismissal from service, detention, arrest, prosecution, and conviction for their criticism of Kazakh authorities and for other offenses ranging from insulting the honor of the president and leading public officials to inciting ethnic tension in the republic. In addition, a number of independent media outlets were either banned altogether or suspended temporarily or sued or threatened with a law suit under similar charges. The fate of the state-owned media which tried to step out of the loosely defined limits was no different from that of independent media outlets. For instance, the General Prosecutor's office closed down the official newspaper, Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, and initiated legal
action against the editor of the newspaper for inciting ethnic tension in the republic (BBC, April 6, 1995).

In addition to the preceding anti-media actions toward national journalists and media outlets, Kazakh authorities displayed heavy-handedness toward foreign journalists and media outlets as well. A number of international journalists have been reportedly expelled, warned, detained, arrested and/or convicted for violating the media code. In one instance, the authorities blocked Russian correspondents from transmitting reports to Moscow about ethnic tensions in May 1993. International media outlets were also subjected to official heavy-handedness for similar violations. For instance, in April 1996, Kazakh authorities charged a Russian newspaper, Komsomolskaya Pravda, with fanning ethnic tension and requested the court to suspend the newspaper for six months. In fact, the newspaper had published an article of a Russian writer, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who advocated annexation of northern provinces of Kazakhstan with Russia. After independent journalists requested the court not to take any action and more importantly after the newspaper dissociated itself from the article and its claims, the authorities dropped the case (Tass, June 7, 1996; Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, no. 19, 1996:17; BBC, July 26, 1996).

In addition to the above clear-cut example of official heavy-handedness toward both national and international independent journalists and media outlets, there are a number of doubtful cases of the closure of certain independent media outlets. In other words, Kazakh authorities on the one hand and opposition and independent sources on the other offered different versions about why and how some media outlets went out

The official heavy-handedness toward independent journalists and media outlets, the fear of punitive official reactions to concocted violations of the law, the government control over printing facilities, printing paper, subsidies, and registration surely contributed to the impulse to self-censorship and reduced the volume of criticism of Kazakh authorities in the media. A wide variety of anti-media actions, disguised and undisguised, and so many victims of such actions can understandably create an impression that the mass media in Kazakhstan enjoyed little or no freedom in the post-independence period. A number of opposition and independent sources, including the Association of Independent Electronic Media of Central Asia (ANESMI) hold this view (CSCE, March 1998:36; U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997:1141). In spite of the above large body of indisputable evidence, this view is partly true. There is also an almost equal amount of indisputable evidence which persuasively tells the second half of the story. That is, in spite of many restrictions and many examples of heavy-handedness of Kazakh authorities, independent media outlets have been able to arise, create a sizable independent space for themselves, and win an official, however grudging, recognition of this space in the post-independence period.
In fact, all the available evidence on the official heavy-handedness toward independent media outlets does not prove the case that Kazakh authorities ever launched a frontal attack to eliminate all of their critics in the media, independent journalists and media outlets. There is strong evidence to show that, in spite of their heavy-handedness in many cases, the authorities tolerated sizable independent space for the mass media in the post-independence period. Throughout the post-independence years, independent media outlets continued to express their own views on various important matters and criticize the authorities, of course within definite limits, with impunity.

A comprehensive look at the total available evidence in this context suggests that both the state-owned and independent institutions of mass media continued to appear and disappear in the post-independence period for political and economic reasons and that both restrictions and freedoms characterize the post-independence period. If some independent media outlets were at times shut down by the government for political reasons, other independent institutions of mass media were allowed to arise and operate. If the local authorities cut off electricity to the television station Telemax for its critical broadcast, they tolerated its critical broadcast from a different location and continued to allow its affiliate radio stations to broadcast news critical of them (U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Practices for 1994:859).

There are several other similar instances which further illustrate the fact of the continued existence of independent institutions of mass media in Kazakhstan in the post-independence period. The fact that independent media outlets, especially the
press, have been relatively free in Kazakhstan throughout the post-independence years is acknowledged by opposition political parties and other independent associations, including human rights groups (CSCE, March 1998:35). Of course, leaders of most opposition parties and independent human rights groups can not fail to confirm this relative freedom of the mass media because their press conferences, party congresses, round tables, unauthorized rallies, and their speeches and remarks critical of the authorities have, for the most part, regularly appeared in both the state-owned and independent media outlets without any punitive action against the reporting media.

By the end of the first year of its independence, Kazakhstan was reported to have a large number of both registered and unregistered independent publications and electronic media companies. Most opposition groups, including unregistered and radical groups, could and did publish their own newspapers in the post-independence period (BBC, August 27, 1992; U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992:815). By and large, this situation persisted throughout the post-independence period. As of 1997, there were 31 independent radio and television stations in country, including 11 in the capital city alone; each population center housed at least one independent publication; the capital city alone housed 7 major independent newspapers (U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997:1140-1141). It is outside the scope of this study to discuss in detail each and every opposition and independent newspapers and other institutions of mass media which existed in Kazakhstan in the post-independence period. It will suffice for our purpose here to list notable opposition and independent
media outlets and briefly discuss the freedom of expression they enjoyed in the post-independence period.

In addition to some independent media outlets cited in the preceding pages, other notable independent and opposition newspapers which were allowed to appear in the post-independence period include Delovaya Nedelya (Business Weekly), Novoye Pokleniye (New Generation), Karavan Blitz, and Twenty-first Century. The newspapers like Delovaya Nedelya, Novoye Pokleniye, and Twenty-first Century truly emerged as voices for the opposition.

In addition to providing considerable coverage to the opposition's activities and positions critical of Kazakh authorities (BBC, September 26 and November 27, 1996), independent (and official) newspapers debated several unsavory issues in ways critical of the government and its policies. The flawed economic transition policies, poor social policies (BBC, August 18, 1994), bureaucratic mismanagement, and heavy-handedness of law-enforcement forces (BBC, September 26, 1996) were common unsavory issues the press could and did freely report on and debate (BBC, November 21, 1997). More unsavory topics the independent press discreetly reported on and debated with impunity include concentration of power in the president, constitutional matters (Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, no. 16, 1995:22), power struggle between the executive and the parliament, (BBC, January 28, 1993), electoral violations (Tass, February 18, 1994), and official corruption. In addition, independent print media increasingly criticized not only the parliament but also certain...
presidential decisions, including the agreement with Russia on the lease of Baikonur space center (BBC, July 25, 1995).

Although the key subjects which have remained and have been considered to be "off-limits" almost throughout the post-independence period were the ethnic relations, personal criticism of the president and his family, and corruption of political office holders, the press has taken remarkably bold steps to print critical material about some of these topics. Some independent newspapers have lately dared touch on most 'off-limits' subjects. Karavan has reportedly gained respect and become the most widely circulated newspaper in the republic for its independent stance on various issue. It was admired for "taking on Alma Ata's powerful former mayor, and publishing detailed articles on the discontent of Kazakhstan's Russian population" (Financial Times (London), February 13, 1995:2). Its affiliate, Karavan Blitz, a tabloid newspaper, also carried news about hard economic conditions in Russian-dominated towns and cities (BBC, October 18, 1996).

In August 1996, Karavan and another independent newspapers, Delovaya nedelya (a Russian-language business weekly in the capital city) "broke a national taboo by criticizing" the president and got away with it (Financial Times (London), September 10, 1996:6). Karavan carried an article by a former cabinet minister and the leader of Azamat, Petr Svoik. The writer described Kazakhstan a "banana republic" and accused Kazakh authorities of nepotism. He blamed the president rather than his advisers for the lack of progress in democratic reforms in the republic (Financial Times (London), September 10, 1996:6). The second article published in
Delovaya Nedelya lashed out at foreigner investors for questionable practices, including hiring relatives of senior officials, to ensure lucrative contracts. The author with the pseudonym of Maxim Mikhailichenko lamented the role of bribes and connections in shaping things in the republic. He went on to assert that there were no equal opportunities and that if he had been married to the daughter of the president he would be one of the "wealthiest businessmen" in the country. The one day detention of Svoik by police for driving a stolen car during his tour of the country can be attributed to the article but no action was taken against both Karavan (the most critical newspaper published by one of the most resourceful person in the republic) and Delovaya Nedelya (Financial Times (London), September 10, 1996:6).

The publication of the two articles was not the last time that the press broke a national taboo. In fact, Karavan dared publish two more articles on October 3, 1997, which contained sharp and direct criticism of both the president and the prime minister. The first letter called upon the president to oust the prime minister, Akezhan Kazhegeldin, for leading the country to a "catastrophe" and for his image "among businessmen and high government bureaucrats" as a corrupt person who "does not just take (bribes and kickbacks), he takes a lot" (CSCE, March 1998:35). Although the letter was ostensibly aimed at the prime minister, no one could mistake that it implicitly tried to discredit the president, too, for presiding over this situation. The second letter was far more explosive and direct in its attack on the president. It was first published in the Moscow press. However, Karavan reprinted it, unedited. The letter chronicled, in an accusatory fashion, his political engineering in the post-
independence period and levelled a number of other serious charges. More specifically, it accused the president for incessantly experimenting with the constitutions and governments, for dissolving two disobedient parliaments and creating one totally under his control, for wielding unlimited authority without being responsible for any action, for placing family members in lucrative positions, for creating personal dictatorship with the potential for a family dynasty, for coercing and intimidating leaders of autonomous sociopolitical associations on a regular basis, and for allowing the overwhelming majority to impoverish and a small group of people in power to appropriate great riches (CSCE, March 1998:36-36). The letter stopped short of personally accusing the president of corruption.

There are various theories as to how the authors dared and why Karavan published such letters and why the authorities tolerated them. According to one theory, the second letter was sponsored by the prime minister and his close ally, Boris Giller, the publisher of Karavan and the biggest media tycoon in Central Asia. The motive behind their sponsorship of the letter was to prepare the way for the former to become a formidable challenge to the president in Kazakh politics, especially in the next presidential election. If this theory is true, it means that division and political struggle among powerful elites contributes, as we expected, to political liberalization in the post-communist countries in Central Asia. According to another view, the president himself sanctioned the publication of the letter to demonstrate how open is Kazakhstan under his rule (CSCE, March 1998:36). Whatever the case may be, the fact that the newspaper was not punished underscored the possibility of open and
personal criticism of the president who was once considered to be the key 'off-limits' subject.

The preceding discussion suggests that in view of political mobilization of the large, resourceful Russian minority and the split elite structure, the affordable option Kazakh authorities faced and pursued in line with their desire to avoid full scale democratization of society was not a frontal attack but a selective use of coercion to reduce rather than eliminate criticism of them in the mass media. If some independent media outlets were at times closed, others were permitted to arise and operate. In other words, both restrictions and freedoms characterize the post-independence relationship between Kazakh authorities and the mass media outlets.

CONCLUSION

In the pre-independence period, political openness belatedly made its way to Kazakhstan initially as a weak reflection of the center-sponsored reform program. However, ethnonationalist policies of Kazakh authorities, political activism of ethnic groups, especially the Russian minority and the titular nationality, and the growing fragmentation of the communist elite structure later supplemented the positive impact of the perestroika and glasnost processes on political liberalization. The political liberalization process experienced an incremental improvement during the three successive leaders, Kunayev, Kolbin, and Nazarbayev, who oversaw the implementation of the Gorbachev reform program, in spite of their continued aversion to independent sociopolitical initiatives. In spite of the greater salience independent
sociopolitical initiatives acquired under him, Nazarbayev, like his predecessors, jealously guarded the electoral process from the rising autonomous societal forces.

After independence, an overall improvement occurred in various areas of political liberalization in the republic. A weak, but genuine, political opposition was able to arise and function within definite limits. Not only the number of independent political groups increased but also the range of independent activities in which they could engage widened in the post-independence period. The independent mass media also witnessed qualitative as well as quantitative progress in the post-independence period. A sizable number of independent institutions of mass media continued to appear and disappear for both economic and political reasons in the post-independence period. Of course, some topics were declared or considered to be 'off-limits' and both the official and private mass media practiced self-censorship. However, they could still cover activities and views of opposition forces, take independent position on important matters, and publish and broadcast information critical of Kazakh authorities and their policies. Of all the areas of political liberalization, the independent individual and organized electoral participation experienced least progress. Because a fair, free and competitive electoral process could potentially politicize, mobilize, and empower social groups, including the Russian minority, beyond limits acceptable to them, Kazakh authorities jealously guarded the post-independence electoral process from independent individual and organized participation. In spite of this, the post-independence electoral system was still an improvement on the previous one.
In line with its cautious reform approach in which enlightened authoritarianism is a stage in the transition from totalitarianism to a market economy and democracy and economic reforms take precedence over political reforms, the Kazakh leadership moderates pro-reform pressures and tries to keep the post-independence political liberalization process within definite limits acceptable to it rather than to seek complete depoliticization of society. In fact, to seek complete depoliticization of society is not a safe and feasible option for Kazakh authorities because it requires excessive and indiscriminate repression which, in the presence of a large, resourceful Russian population and fragmented elite structure along ideological, ethnic and tribal lines, entails a prohibitive cost. Thus, the safe option which they face and pursue is how to keep the political liberalization process within acceptable limits. The result of this pursuit is that both freedoms and restrictions characterize the post-independence political scene in the republic. In other words, as a result of an interplay between pro-reform pressures and cautious reform approach of the Kazakh leadership, the overall record of Kazakhstan on political liberalization in the post-independence period is mixed, earning it a place between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on the political liberalization scale.

How long is Kazakhstan likely to stay at this point on the political liberalization scale? Is the republic likely to slide in either direction on the political liberalization scale in the foreseeable future? What are the future prospects of political liberalization in the republic? Indeed, it is hard to predict with confidence the future of the political liberalization process in countries like Kazakhstan which are passing
through the unprecedented, monumental post-communist transition and rank low on socioeconomic indicators commonly associated with political democracy. However, broad, educated speculations about the future direction of the political liberalization process are possible on the basis of our theoretically informed analysis and certain evident objective conditions.

Kazakh authorities have thus far postponed full scale democratization of their society on various pretexts, including Asian mentality, economic recovery through a transition to market-based relations, and inter-ethnic accord. If this is a genuine assessment, it can be safely said that full scale democratization of public life is a distant prospect in Kazakhstan and that the Kazakh leadership is more likely to stay the present course of permitting political liberalization within definite limits acceptable to it. In fact, both economic recovery and inter-ethnic accord are still illusive goals for Kazakhstan. And, we have no persuasive reason to expect the so-called oriental mentality to experience a sudden, fundamental pro-democratic change in the foreseeable future.

However, we have other reasons to expect that full scale democratization of public life is not on the horizon in the republic, but it will continue to experience political liberalization within definite limits in the foreseeable future. There is no indication that the incumbent leadership has developed any detailed blueprints for launching an intensive and extensive democratization process in the near future. In fact, quite the contrary. Nazarbayev has consolidated his personal power and built a rigid institutional power structure around him. He is in no mood to decentralize it.
Rather, he can be tempted to misuse it again to prolong his rule beyond the year 2000. If he does so, he is more likely to rely on institutional engineering and political manipulation accompanied with limited repression rather than massive repression which is really not a safe option for him in this context. In other words, even if he chooses to perpetuate his personal rule, Kazakhstan will continue to experience some sort of political liberalization due to certain safeguards, including the large, resourceful Russian minority and fragmented elite structure, against its backsliding into a despotic state like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The most serious threat to the present level of political liberalization arises from the breakout of armed hostilities due to the intensification of already sharp subcultural differences in the republic. In particular, the armed resistance of the Russian minority for one reason or another can potentially lead to a complete breakdown of the ongoing political liberalization process at least for some period of time, though it may deepen the democratization process in the long run if Kazakh authorities found a negotiated settlement with the help of Russian authorities. If the past experience is of any guide, Kazakh authorities are more likely to offer their Russian population limited political concessions, including limited local autonomy and access to national political processes, to preempt the rise of such armed resistance. In other words, the continued presence of a large, resourceful Russian minority enjoying the potential support of Russian authorities is an effective safeguard against the rise of an abject repressive regime in Kazakhstan. Hence, we expect the republic to continue to experience some sort of political liberalization in the foreseeable future. What
further enhances this prospect is the fact that there is little or no chance of consensus building among most elites of different colors and ethnic origins on the need to roll back the political liberalization process underway in the republic within definite limits.

The preceding assertions by no means suggest that full scale democratization of public life is out of question for the foreseeable future. In fact, in order for Kazakhstan to move out of the present middle position between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and climb up on the political liberalization scale in the near future, it requires certain favorable conditions. More specifically, the full scale democratization process is more likely to begin in the republic under the three most propitious conditions, in addition to the ones discussed above. First, the replacement of the incumbent cautious leadership with a more forward looking, reform-oriented leadership in Kazakhstan. Second, the replacement of the incumbent Russian leadership by a democratically oriented leadership with a genuine commitment to promote socioeconomic welfare and democratic rights of the Russian population in the former Soviet space. Third, an enduring alliance between political elites of different colors and ethnic origins, especially Kazakh and Russian, to build effective pressure from below on Kazakh authorities to deepen the democratization process in the country.

NOTES

1. Nazarbayev hired foreign experts to plan economic transition. Gorbachev and the local party bosses in Kazakhstan expressed displeasure with him for hiring foreigners to resolve domestic economic problems (Russian Press Digest, March 27, 1991).
2. Wisdom was national-patriotic club of reserve soldiers of Russian origin. In a meeting held in May and June 1988, the group issued a slogan to the masses forbidding the marriage of Russian people with foreigners and calling for the expulsion of Jewish and other immigrants to their historic homelands (BBC, January 14, 1989).

3. In October 1990, the republican parliament declared Kazakhstan a sovereign republic. This declaration shifted control of natural resources and economy of the republic from central to the republican authorities. The legislation provoked protests in the Slav-dominated cities in the north (Pomfret 1995:79).

4. Nazarbayev later stated that Kolbin was "selected by the apparatus in the worst tradition of the stagnation period" as the central committee members tacitly voted for him without asking any question (Tass, February 23, 1990).

5. Nazarbayev is described as a cautious, moderate reformist by many observers of Kazakhstan (Khazanov 1995:148; The Washington Post, March 8, 1994:A14). According to Olcott, he "is content to permit diversity of opinion and expression as long as it does not interfere with the state's ability to fulfill its basic functions" (Olcott 1995:220).


7. To the displeasure of Gorbachev and some local communists who described his economic approach as radical, the Kazakh leader hired Western economists to help him prepare for a shift to a market economy (Russian Press Digest, March 27, 1991).

8. In one of his statements, he made it clear that "there will be no swift turn" due to "our oriental ways" (The Times, March 14, 1991). His prime minister, U. Karamanov, cited the need for "iron-clad social guarantees." He also proudly announced that his government was able to elaborate its own concept of transition to a market economy which took into account "ethnic and regional peculiarities" (Russian Press Digest, June 13, 1990). The Kazakh deputy premier, Karatai Turysov, also expressed similar views (Tass, October 9, 1990).

9. Close associates of Nazarbayev also made no secret of such views. While speaking of the need for strict discipline, they refer to the economic miracles of South Korea and Taiwan and relate them to the dictatorial regimes in those countries (BBC, July 18, 1991).

10. According to his opinion, a strong executive is necessary in order for his country to make a smooth transition to a market economy because it has "no parliamentary culture or seasoned multi-party system" (Agence France Presse, August 31, 1995).

12. Kunayev was addressing an election rally in Alma-Ata on February 11, 1985. In his speech, he also paid rich tribute to Chernenko's enormous experience, strength and energy (BBC, February 13, 1985).

13. The republican leadership was accused of a number of lapses, including arbitrary planning, inertia of thinking, disrespect for public opinion, repression of criticism, a near total absence of self-criticism, violation of the principles of social justice, promotion of incompetent and corrupt personnel on the basis of tribal and regional affiliation, report-padding, and misappropriation of socialist property (Pravda, March 18, 1985; Current Digest of the Soviet Press no. 11, 1985:3; Pravda, March 29, 1985; BBC, December 29, 1986).

14. In addition to his call for socioeconomic and cultural revitalization of the country, Gorbachev did speak of the need to deepen socialist democracy (Current Digest of Soviet Press no. 8, 1986:11). However, at the initial stage of his reform program, the deepening of socialist democracy essentially meant freedom for the party cadres to express their concerns and to support him in his effort to expose corrupt party leaders and remove obstacles to the socioeconomic and cultural development of the country.

15. Religion could be a potential source of autonomous societal organization in the republic, but the Kunayev administration adopted a hostile and repressive policy toward religion during this period. In fact, this policy was also very much in accordance with the hostile approach of the central authorities toward religion in the Central Asian republics.

16. The central authorities blamed the Kazakh leadership for environmental degradation. Whereas the republican press published articles on such problems as soil erosion and held the previous central authorities responsible for them.

17. The central leadership sent Gyorgy P. Razumovsky, the secretary of the CPSU central committee for organizational and personnel questions, for this purpose (Reuters, December 16, 1986; Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 51, 1987:1).

18. In fact, his removal was being expected since Gorbachev came to power. Many observers expressed surprise when he was re-elected first secretary of the republic communist party in February 1986 (The Associated Press Dec. 16, 1986). Just one day before his retirement, international press was predicting his removal (U.S. News & World Report, December 15, 1986:45).

19. According to initial official reports several hundred but according to official figures disclosed years later, almost 3,000 people participated in these riots which lasted for two days (Los Angeles Times, February 19, 1987:10). According to
Western sources, almost 10,000 people marched on the republican communist party headquarters (Guardian Weekly, December 28, 1986:7).

20. According to the report of the parliamentary commission set up (years later) on the demands of people to reinvestigate the riots, almost 58 people died and two hundred were hospitalized out of 768 wounded. According to some sources, at least 7 policemen and 13 demonstrators died (The Guardian, December 28, 1986:7). In addition, thousands of people were arrested and some of them were beaten at the police stations (Russian Press Digest, September 2, 1990).

21. As a result of this campaign, 83 out of 99 people who were put on trial were convicted and imprisoned; 707 people were arrested under administrative charges; 1164 cadres were expelled from the communist youth organization, Komsomol; and 266 students were expelled from educational institutions. In addition, scores of party members were expelled and more than a thousand were admonished and reprimanded (Russian Press Digest, September 2, 1990).

22. In 1987-88, when independent political activity was erupting in Russia and the Baltic republics and their authorities were increasingly being challenged by the new political forces, the Kazakh authorities were focused, in one way or another, on the Alma-Ata riots and anti-corruption campaign and Kazakh activists were slowly coming out of the shock of the riots and were in search of less provocative causes and less provocative methods to promote them. A small number of people who dared to engage in organized or unorganized political activities in one way or another adopted a very low profile and avoided an open confrontation with the republic authorities along the line of confrontation then underway in Russia and the Baltic republics.

23. Kazakhstanskaya pravda (February 8, 1989) accused the group of communist scientistic movement under the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee—in the city of Temirtau in Karaganda oblast. It alleged that this group did not involve in any kind of scientific movement, rather it tried its best to protect and extol those members of independent organizations who were deliberately conducting subversive work.

24. A Russian was replaced from a top post and a Kazakh was appointed in his place (The New York Times, January 11, 1987:A8; Los Angeles Times, January 11, 1987:13). The press also reported that republican authorities would give useful jobs to rioting students who were expelled from colleges (Reuters, January 11, 1987; The New York Times, January 11, 1987:A8). In particular, Kolbin began to speak of the need and introduce a number of measures to promote Kazakh language and urge other nationalities in the republic to learn it. In addition, he changed his earlier position of holding the Kazakh nationalism solely responsible for the riots. He conceded that "People of various nationalities were among opponents of perestroika who provoked riots in 1986. So there are no grounds to talk about the nationalism of the Kazakh people" (BBC, June 24, 1988).
25. In fact, Kolbin had thought that the rise of independent sociopolitical initiatives in the republic was a remote possibility (FBIS, December 9, 1988:69).


27. A host of autonomous sociopolitical formations that were active toward the end of the Kolbin era included environmental groups such as Green Front, Initiative, Ekologiya (Ecology) and Nevada Movement, peace groups such as the Kazakh Peace Committee, socioeconomic groups such as Youth Housing Complex Movement (which was involved in building houses for homeless), ethnic groups such as Wisdom (a Russian-oriented group), Zheltokstan (a Kazakh-oriented group), and political groups such as the Alma-Ata People's Front and Democratic Union (FBIS, December 9, 1988:68-74; BBC, December 24, 1988; January 14, 1989; Tass, February 7 and March 10, 1989).

28. For instance, in 1987, a freelance journalist working with a magazine, Ara (Bumblebee), was sent to jail for five days for a critical publication (BBC, February 3, 1987) and people like Daukenov, a serviceman and republican communist party activist in Dzhambul, were taken under control for what the authorities called unhealthy activities aimed at destroying social peace and inter-ethnic harmony. In the case of Daukenov, he was arrested for his attempt to hold a founding congress to set up "Atameken (Fatherland) Society"---a political group which the authorities claimed was being organized around a program dangerous to the welfare of Kazakh society. More specifically, what reportedly irked the authorities most was its program which allegedly called for "the unification of Kazakhs and their isolation from the other people of the USSR, first and foremost in the sphere of language" (FBIS December 9, 1988:72).

29. Kolbin used pressure and other manipulative tactics to keep inconvenient candidates out of the March 1989 election for the all-union parliament. The republican authorities and press sought to discredit them and emphasized the need to protect the masses from their anti-social, subversive platforms and actions (BBC, March 4, 1989).

30. Rebirth questioned the legality of the inclusion of the Urals area in Kazakhstan and demanded to revoke all the decrees issued in this context (BBC September 29, 1990). Cossack Society demanded a referendum in eight norther regions of the republic on the question of their accession to Russia (Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, September 25, 1990).

31. For instance, National Democratic Party was critical of the imperial policies of the center and rejoiced over the declaration of sovereignty for republic---an unwelcome development for an overwhelming majority of the Russian nationality. Although Yedinstvo was formed to promote inter-ethnic peace and harmony in the republic, its opposition to the sovereignty declaration and its demands (such as recognition of
Russian language as a state language on equal footing with the Kazakh language (Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, September 21, 1990) provoked Kazakh protests and sullied its reputation as an inter-ethnic association among Kazakh activists.

32. Kazakhstan also witnessed the rise of a large number of apolitical groups which on many occasions made potentially political demands. Human rights groups like Sakharov Committee and Kazakhstan Committee, trade and labor unions like Workers' Movement and Independent Union of Miners, environmental groups like Union for the Salvation of the Aral and Amu Darya, and historical and educational society like Adilet (Justice) can be included in this category of apolitical groups.

33. According to an official source, autonomous groups held 40 rallies, demonstrations, and protests in Alma-Ata from January through October 1990 (Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, October 18, 1990).

34. The deputies asked Nazarbayev to drop the post of first secretary of the party (Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, October 16, 1990).

35. For example, the official press published statements and views of the leaders of Democratic Kazakhstan and Azat who lashed out at the republican authorities for their respective reasons (Russian Press Digest, October 1, 1990; BBC, July 18, 1991).

36. The Kazakhstan's Social Protection Coalition was reportedly made of almost 250 political parties, civic and national movements, and religious organizations (Russian Press Digest, January 23, 1993).

37. It was set up on May 24, 1997 at a round table meeting initiated by the Liberal Movement of Kazakhstan (BBC May 26, 1997).

38. People’s Front was created in late 1997. The members of this front include the communist party, the Worker’s Movement, the Azat, the Lad, and others (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 52, 1998:17).

39. Kazakh authorities refused to reregister Yedinstvo because it called for making the Russian an official language; suspended activities of the Semirecheye Cossack Society in November 1994 because of its involvement in paramilitary activities and for its efforts to promote ethnic intolerance (U.S. State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992 and 1994:816 and 860 respectively). The Cossacks of Petropavlovsk rejected the offer that their association would be registered if they recognize the borders of the republic (CSCE, March 1994:6).

40. Nazarbayev has all along appealed for preserving social peace and sought to convince opposition forces that politics of rallies was harmful to national interest during the transition period. As he did in the pre-independence, he proposed a year
long moratorium on protest actions in the pre-independence period. Pro-government formations demanded and accepted it but most opposition groups rejected it (U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997:1143).


42. In June 1992, opposition parties, including unregistered ones, held a series of unauthorized protest rallies which lasted for several days in front of the parliament building. In spite of their threatening tone, Kazakh authorities took no punitive action involving persecution of the protesters (BBC, June 18, 1992).

43. One of political dissidents to have received a longer sentence of one year was Madel Ismailov, the leader of the ardent opposition group, the Worker’s Movement of Kazakhstan, for holding an unauthorized rally in support of pensioners (BBC, September 22, 1997).

44. For instance, Kazakh authorities suspended activities of the local branch of the Russian ethnonationalist group, LAD, in Ust-Mamenogorsk and began investigation of the Communist Party, threatened to suspend its activities and fined a number of its local chapters for their sponsorship of unauthorized rallies held in support of the Russian parliament’s vote to invalidate the 1991 decision to break up the former Soviet Union. Both formations had to bring their chapters into compliance with the law and acknowledge Kazakhstani sovereignty in order to renew their registration (U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996:994).

45. The arrest and sentence of Gunkin became an inter-state issue between Russia and Kazakhstan. After this and other incidents of arrest of a number of other Cossacks, Russia decided to deploy Cossack units on its borders with Kazakhstan. Kazakh authorities dreaded the prospect of cooperation between these units and its Cossack population and protested to Russian authorities over this action but of no avail.

46. For instance, in June 1992, Nazarbayev threatened to start criminal proceedings against those participants in unauthorized rallies who insulted him and members of the parliament (BBC, June 18, 1992). However, the threatened action was not taken.

47. Others who were persecuted include a university instructor in 1992-93 for publishing the information that the president slapped a popular poet and politician, Madel Ismailov, the leader of the Worker’s Movement of Kazakhstan, in 1997 (Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, no. 52, 1998:17), and three youths for writing anti-presidential slogans on the walls in the town of Uralsk in 1997 (Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997:1142).
For instance, a Cossack journalist, Boris Suprynuk, was convicted for inciting inter-ethnic enmity, insulting a public prosecutor and using "bad language" during his trial in 1995; and a prominent leader of an ethnic Russian movement was arrested, beaten during her detention, and put on a trial for insulting the public officials and assault on the court representatives in 1996.

According to the press accounts, the demonstrators chanted the following slogans: The "head of bandits govern us," "Step down on your own," "Nazarbayev: You are our Hitler" (Agence France Presse, December 8, 1996).

Given a high rating of Nazarbayev (Tass, November 22, 1991) and support of major political parties, including the Socialist Party, the People’s Congress and Azat, Kozhakhmetov was unlikely to win this election.

In June 1992, opposition parties held a series of unauthorized rallies in front of the parliament building for a number of demands, including the ouster of the former communists and seats for opposition parties in the national legislature (BBC, June 18 and 19, 1992).

Nazarbayev also blamed the national-radical elements for fanning inter-ethnic tensions, suggested the parliament to ban activities of unregistered associations, and threatened to prosecute the protesters for insulting the president and the members of the parliament (BBC, June 18 and 19, 1992; Russian Press Digest, June 22, 1992; Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 24, 1995:26).

Some deputies saw the self-dissolution of the parliament as a "coup d’état" masterminded by the president (CSCE, March 1994:4; The Reuters Library Report, December 8 and 9, 1993). Some opposition groups like the Democratic Committee on Human Rights criticized the president’s machinations to engineer the self-dissolution of the parliament. They rather demanded his resignation (Russian Press Digest, October 2, 1993).

According to one press report, out of 754 registered candidates, 169 were directors of state enterprises, 101 member of the government apparatus, 72 former parliamentarians, and 53 heads of the local administration. After looking at the breakdown of candidates, one Western observer remarked that these figures show us in advance "what kind of parliament Kazakhstan is going to get" (Agence France Presse, March 4, 1994).

The observer team of the Russian parliament complained about the treatment the Russian-speaking population was receiving from the Kazakh government. It went to the extent of saying that the election was won before the vote was cast (Tass, March 11, 1994). Andronik Migranyan, a political adviser to Boris Yeltsin remarked that "There was evident discrimination... (and) this was another attempt to preserve the
dominant position for the native Kazakhs over everybody else" (Agence France Presse, March 10, 1994).

56. The local press also joined the international observers. Kazakhstanskaya pravda and Sovety Kazakhstan in their March 10 issues wrote about such violations. The former noted that "the violations are so varied that just listing them would create the impression of chaos" (CSCE, March 1994:12).

57. For instance, an ethnic Russian candidate was dropped from the electoral race because her electoral program contain, in the eyes of the authorities, provisions which could incite "ethnic hatred" (U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1995:913).

58. The weekly newspaper, Economika Segodnya, was cited for not including in its masthead all the information required by the government regulation. In addition, after questioning its editor about an article which quoted an opposition leader criticizing the president, Kazakh authorities warned him that one more citation would result in the suspension of its business license (U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997:1140).

59. Independent institutions of mass media which were banned, suspended temporarily or sued under these charges include Khak (Truth, the Alash party’s press organ), Kazakhskaya Pravda (Kazakh Truth, a Kazakh nationalist newspaper), Rabocheye Delo (the Communist Party’s newspaper), Tvin (an independent television station), Dozhivem do ponedelinka and Orda (the mouthpiece of the Republican Party of Kazakhstan). Khak was banned for spreading radical religious views in 1992 (BBC, August 27, 1992); Kazakhskaya Pravda was temporarily shut down in April 1994 under the charges of inciting ethnic tension (Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, No. 16, 1995:22); and Rabocheye Delo was closed down in June 1997, after Kazakh authorities refused to re-register it because the newspaper had allegedly called for a violent overthrow of the social system—a claim the Communist Party contested and unsuccessfully sued the authorities for their heavy-handedness (BBC, June 30, 1997).

60. Not to talk of opposition publications, many independent newspapers and journalists have criticized the new bicameral parliament as a "tame parliament in the President’s pocket" (U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996:993).
CHAPTER 5

KYRGYZSTAN
FROM "OASIS OF DEMOCRACY" TO THE THRESHOLD
OF DICTATORSHIP?

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the August 1991 abortive putsch in Moscow, Askar Akayev, the president of Kyrgyzstan, one of the 15 Soviet republics, declared full independence for his republic on August 31, 1991. Like other Soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan was in the throes of the center-sponsored economic and political reform measures at the time of the August 1991 coup and the subsequent formal breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991. However, unlike other Central Asian republics which were governed by more or less politically unreformed communist elites, Kyrgyzstan was ruled by a non-communist reformist president at the time of its independence. Consequently, it surpassed them in dismantling the communist order and in deepening political liberalization—an area in which it was well ahead of them at the time of independence—in the post-independence period. As a result of his impressive democratic record in the early post-independence period, laudatory titles such as "a true Jeffersonian democrat" (CSCE 1995:2) and "as an oasis of democracy in an authoritarian desert" (CSCE 1998:17) were awarded to Akayev and his republic respectively.

Although by mid-1994 the political liberalization process which was making impressive strides began to falter as Akayev launched a limited and selective authoritarian offensive primarily against the opposition press and journalists, this
authoritarian offensive did not degenerate into an abject repressive regime as has been the case with Tajikistan (from late 1992 to mid-1997), Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In spite of several reversals which the political liberalization process suffered down the road, Kyrgyzstan continued to surpass other Central Asian republics in terms of political liberalization. One of the premises of this study is that the post-communist regime Akayev built in the post-independence period is the prime example of politically reformed regimes in Central Asia.

The impressive record of Kyrgyzstan in the area of political liberalization is intriguing because socioeconomic indicators commonly associated with it are comparatively quite weak in that country. In this chapter, we intend to address this intriguing question. We will examine our empirical evidence on political liberalization and its correspondence with our theoretical expectations. Before we examine our empirical data, it is important for us to first discuss the extent to which our three independent variables, the Russian minority, elite structure, and political attitudes of the leadership, hold in the republic. A concise discussion in this regard will be useful for interpreting the empirical evidence and for assessing its correspondence with our theoretical expectations.

In order to adequately appreciate the level of political liberalization Kyrgyzstan achieved in the post-independence period, we will examine glasnost under both Akayev and his predecessor, Absamat Masaliyev, in the pre-independence period. The remainder of the chapter will focus on various aspects of political liberalization in the post-independence period. More specifically, the rise of political parties and social
movements, politics of the electoral process, and freedom of the independent mass media will receive our special attention. The politics of the authoritarian turn beginning in mid-1994 will also be examined with the special focus on the confrontation between the presidential leadership on the one hand and the opposition print media and independent journalists on the other. Main findings of this chapter will be summarized in the conclusion.

A LARGE AND POLITICALLY ACTIVE RUSSIAN MINORITY

At the time of independence, Kyrgyzstan housed almost one million ethnic Russians who made up 21.5% of the population (see Table 1). The Russian minority is mostly concentrated in the capital city, Bishkek, making up 55.8% of its population (see Table 3). Although the titular ethnic group, Kyrgyz, made up 52% of the total population, it made up only 22.7% of the capital city's population in 1989 (see Tables 2 and 3; Huskey 1995:6; Heleniak 1997:370). A sizable number of ethnic Russians also live on the most fertile and arable lands in southern Kyrgyzstan (Khazanov 1995:150). According to the 1996 estimate, the size of ethnic Russians shrank to 15% and Kyrgyz increased their share of the total population to 59.9% (see Table 2).

Although the Russian minority has been increasingly shrinking in proportion to the titular nationality primarily due to its out-migration since the 1980s,² it continues to be a very resourceful ethnic group in Kyrgyzstan. In addition to its large size, its concentration in the urban areas, and occupation of fertile lands, its technical and professional skills and the official and private support it draws from its co-ethnics in
Russia significantly contribute to the resourcefulness of the Russian minority in the republic.

Industry, medicine, and other important fields are mostly manned and managed by ethnic Russians, and their out-migration is reportedly decimating these important fields, accelerating the economic decline of the republic (Olcott 1995a:219; 1997:213; Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 17, 1993:12). This situation caused serious concerns in the republican political leadership which has been offering its Russian minority a number of incentives to prevent the exodus of a skilled labor force (Huskey 1995:829; Heleniak 1997:372). The Russian government’s concerns regarding the welfare of the Russian minority also account for such incentives. Russian authorities have not only provided critical political support to ethnic Russians by taking up their causes with Kyrgyz authorities at the bilateral level but have also provide material aid to them. The presence of Russian troops on Kyrgyz soil further underwrites the security of the Russian minority in the republic.

The resourcefulness of the Russian minority resulting from both internal and external factors is not without consequences. Its resourcefulness has induced its members to set up sociopolitical organizations to pursue their interests, compete with other social groups, including the titular nationality, in the republic, and make demands on the state. A number of ethnic Russians in Kyrgyzstan were among the leading elements who answered the call of the central reform-oriented forces to advance the cause of perestroika in Kyrgyzstan (FBIS October 7, 1987:53-7; June 8, 1988:66-7; July 29, 1988:64-5). Gennadii Shipitko, the local correspondent of Izvestia
and arch rival of Masaliyev was one of such people. He also contested the March 1989 all-union parliamentary elections as an independent candidate and defeated his communist competitor in the capital city.

Of course, Shipitko and three other independent candidates who defeated their communist competitors owed their victory to the Russian residents of Bishkek. The electoral victory of these independent candidates clearly signified the readiness and willingness of the Russian minority to defy the communist leadership in the republic. In fact, ethnic Russians were among the pioneers who organized the first informal group, Demos—a political discussion club formed in the capital city in spring 1987 (Huskey 1995:832). The subsequent organization of informal political groups was also facilitated by the active participation of the Russian minority. For instance, its members actively participated in the formation of the Voter’s Club which played an instrumental role in the victory of a sizable minority of independent candidates in the cities, including Bishkek, in the February 1990 parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan. The same independent candidates later played, in collaboration with the Voter’s Club and other independent political formations, an important role in the defeat of the communist leadership in the October 1990 presidential elections and the victory of Akayev, a non-party reformist candidate.

The Russian minority’s political activism did not end with the independence of Kyrgyzstan. If anything, the Russian minority has become more alert due to the transition policies of the government in the post-independence period because most of these policies are tailored to the interests of the titular nationality. In order to promote
its interests, it has set up many sociopolitical formations in the post-independence period. Notable among them are the Slavic Fund, the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan, Soglasie (Accord), and Association of Ethnic Russians. These Russian-oriented formations advocate social equality and press for making the Russian the second state language in Kyrgyzstan (CSCE 1995:6; 1998:16). Some of these groups have pooled their resources to publish their own newspapers, Soglasie, in Osh in order to educate their own co-ethnics and influence public opinion and decision making process in the republic. In short, the Russian minority continues to survive as a resourceful ethnic group with a capacity to enormously increase the price of its repression in the post-independence period.

FRAGMENTED ELITE STRUCTURE IN KYRGYZSTAN

In the early days of glasnost, the republican communist leadership was in firm control of political life in Kyrgyzstan. The republican communists supported Masaliyev's efforts to circumvent the center-sponsored reform program. However, this unity of purpose did not last long. As the central authorities began to deepen their political reform program, an increasing number of republican communist elites deserted their conservative leadership to join the central and republican reform-oriented forces.

The first serious crack in the communist elite structure appeared on the eve of the March 1989 all-union parliamentary elections. In fact, these elections exposed to public view serious rifts and fault lines among the republican communist elites, especially between the Russified urban and Central Asian rural areas. Some
candidates like Akayev who owed their victory to the republican communist party refused to follow its leadership. As a result, Masaliyev failed, for the first time in the history of the republic, to lead a united delegation to the all-union parliament (Huskey 1995:821; 1997:250).

The February 1990 republican parliamentary elections further eroded the communist base and elite structure in Kyrgyzstan. The communist leadership failed to keep the republican communist elites in line and to reduce these elections into a Soviet variety of electoral contest with the party leadership in full control of the whole electoral process. As a consequence, the republican parliament saw the rise of a very vocal group of reformist deputies.6

Although the 1989 and 1990 elections clearly revealed widening rifts within the communist elites themselves, the most serious fissure in the Kyrgyz elite structure occurred in the wake of the Osh incident, a series of violent clashes between Uzbek and Kyrgyz ethnic communities over a piece of land in Osh in June 1990. The republican communist authorities not only failed to prevent the Osh incident but also tried to blame the extremist, anti-state, and criminal forces, including the informal groups, for the bloody incident. However, they found it hard to sell this explanation outside as well as inside the communist party circles. A sizable number of communist parliamentarians were quite dissatisfied with the performance of the republican communist leadership in handling and more so with its explanation of the incident. As a result, in September 1990, a group of 114 deputies announced its existence under
the name of "For Democratic Renewal and Civil Harmony in Kirghizia" in the parliament.

In its political platform published in the local press, the group attacked the communist leadership for its overall anti-reform approach as well as its poor handling of the Osh incident. The group also promised "to develop its own point of view on current public-political, social and economic processes through open debate, to propose legislative initiatives and to draw up alternative laws, decisions and other Supreme Soviet documents" (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 38, 1990:23).

The formation of such an independent reformist group in the parliament was an unprecedented occurrence which further eroded the communist leadership position and shook the communist elite structure to its foundation. In fact, the defection of 114 deputies proved quite fateful. The disgruntled deputies played a critical role in the failure of Masaliyev to conduct and win the October 1990 presidential election in the old Soviet style. Masaliyev had to face two other career communist leaders in this election. The electoral contest between the three career communist leaders supported by their respective supporters in the republican parliament was indicative of a serious rift among the communist elites. As victory eluded all the three candidates because none of them received the required number of votes to consummate his victory in the presidential election, the hung parliament voted Akayev, a pro-reform member of the all-union parliament, into power.

The victory of Akayev accelerated the disintegration of the communist elite structure. After he assumed power, a sizable number of communists joined his
reformist team. This disintegrative process continued in the post-independence period. The Kyrgyz communist party proved incapable of bringing back its defected members and regaining its internal unity once it was lost in 1989-90. In fact, independence further eroded the internal integrity of the communist elite structure. A number of important communist leaders either became allies of the incumbent government or left the communist party to join other sociopolitical and ethnic-oriented groups in the post-independence period. At times, important communist leaders competed against each other in national elections.

The post-independence political elites were divided not only along ideological and ethnic lines but also along regional lines. According to Martha Olcott, elite structure in the republic reflects the existence of three factions which correspond to clan-based geographic divisions: Naryn, Talas, and Osh (Olcott 1993a:55). This division is not without consequences. According to Matveeva, political barons representing these regions "put serious constraints on the extent of presidential power" (Matveeva 1999:28). In 1992, the election of Bekmamat Osmonov as the chairman of the Soviet Executive Committee of a southern province, Jalalabad, against Akayev’s will (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, March 10, 1992:5) is a case in point. In fact, this election also reflected the growing defiance of southern elites. In the February 1995 parliamentary elections, southern elites and masses defeated placemen from the north—an outcome which made it clear that southern elites were no longer ready to accept the traditional dominance of northern elites in politics.
The resistance of southern elites in general and their defiance during the 1995 election in particular, division between elites of the Russified urban and Central Asian rural areas, and the split communist party clearly revealed that the post-independence elite structure was anything but cohesive. The continued confrontation between the executive and legislative branches of the government on a number of issues, including corruption, economic reforms, and constitutional matters, in the post-independence period further supports this assertion.

The continued disintegration of elite structure in the post-independence period was not without consequences. The communist party ceased to be a cohesive political force capable of halting altogether the political reform process in the republic, although communists still occupy important positions in the government and can potentially slow it down. In addition, networks of patron-client relationship ceased to be an asset of a single political force, be it ruling group or opposition, in the post-independence period. In other words, more power was dispersed in Kyrgyz society in the post-independence period than in the pre-independence period—a situation expected to be conducive for political liberalization.

ASKAR AKAYEV: A REFORMIST POLITICAL LEADER

As compared to his successor, Masaliyev, who openly expressed his anti-reformist views (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 26, 1989:11 and no. 3, 1990:4), Akayev presented himself as a leader with a reformist political outlook. The communist party helped Akayev win his seat as a non-party candidate in the 1989 parliamentary elections. However, once in Moscow, he became active supporter of
the Gorbachev reform program. As compared to anti-reformist speeches of Masaliyev, Akayev’s speeches in the all-union parliament stressed the need to deepen political reforms and emphasized the positive consequences of democratization of public life in the country. Unlike Masaliyev who blamed democratization of public life, especially the informal groups, for negative phenomena like inter-ethnic tensions, Akayev blamed the republican communist party and its leadership rather the center-sponsored reform program for the slow pace of reform and other social problems, including inter-ethnic bloody disputes, in the republic (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 25, 1990:14). His reformist views endeared him to Gorbachev and helped him defeat the career communist candidates in the October 1990 presidential elections in the republican parliament.

As a result of their conflicting approaches toward political reform underway in the country, both president Akayev and the republican communist leadership took different sides on the eve of the August 1991 putsch in Moscow. The communist leadership supported the coup whereas Akayev opposed it. He described the supporters of the coup as "political opportunists" who were willing to sacrifice their own people for the sake of their "selfish political ambitions" (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 33, 1991:25). Unlike other Central Asian leaders, especially Karimov of Uzbekistan, Akayev viewed the republican communist party as an obstacle rather than an asset in the transformation of communist order.

In the post-independence period, Akayev’s reformist views remained unchanged. He continued to see the plurality of political views as a natural
phenomenon in the development process. According to him, people must "form a wide network of autonomous and capable civic institutions independent of the state authorities and political structures" (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 5, 1996:23)—a suggestion clearly meant to empower civil society vis-a-vis the formal state structures. The opposition press and political parties are, according to his opinion, important forces to keep the incumbent government on the right track (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 12, 1992:34). Addressing news media executives of the leading newspapers of the CIS who were attending a conference in Bishkek in March 1992, he invited them to assist him in building a law-governed civil society and in forming democratic values and ideas through their critical analysis of his policies. However, he expects opposition press to perform its functions in a civilized manner (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 12, 1992:34).

Although Akayev emphasizes the importance of order, he does not see political stability and democratization of public life as two competing goals. As compared to Karimov who prioritizes economics over politics and consequently postpones political reforms, Akayev sees both economic and political reforms as equally important goals which can be pursued simultaneously. Likewise, he refers to the underdevelopment of democratic culture of his people, but does not see it as a justification for an authoritarian regime. In fact, Akayev believes that such culture can be developed through democratic practices like competitive national and local elections. Regretting that candidates, voters, and election officials committed some excesses in the February 1995 parliamentary elections, he remarked that "All of us in Kyrgyzstan are
still beginners in democracy, and perhaps we still understand it with our heads, not with our hearts. However, he hoped that the next election would be truly democratic, free, and competitive (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 9, 1995:15).

In view of the above discussion about political outlooks of Masaliyev and Akayev, we expect different outcomes concerning political reforms in the pre- and post-independence periods. In other words, we expect Masaliyev to circumvent rather than facilitate political liberalization in the pre-independence period, but we expect Akayev to promote rather than sabotage political liberalization before and after independence.

GLASNOST BEFORE INDEPENDENCE: THE MASALIYEV ERA

Some Soviet republics experienced glasnost much earlier and more significantly than others. Like other Central Asian republics, Kyrgyzstan also witnessed its late arrival for a number of reasons. The common reasons the Central Asian republics shared for the late arrival of glasnost have already been discussed in the third chapter. Here, we shall confine our discussion to reasons specific to Kyrgyzstan.

Specific circumstances responsible for the late introduction of glasnost are related to the role of the conservative leadership of Absamat Masaliyev. In 1985, Masaliyev replaced the longtime party boss, Turdiakun Usulbaliyev, as the First Secretary of the Kyrgyz communist party. He initially cooperated with the central authorities in their anti-corruption campaign which was an important component of

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the center-sponsored reform program. However, he soon found himself at odds with the central authorities for a number of inter-related reasons, including his dislike for glasnost. He chose very sensitive forums such as All-Union CPSU Conference, USSR Supreme Soviet, and the press to express his utter dislike for the Gorbachev reform program (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 26, 1989:11 and no. 3, 1990:4). A leader so openly opposed to glasnost was unlikely to confine himself to simply expressing his anti-reformist views. He could be expected to do more. As compared to his little or no role in shaping the central reform politics, Masaliyev made serious efforts to prevent the deepening of glasnost in his own republic, especially to the extent it occurred in Russia and the Baltic republics. However, his anti-reform efforts were only partially successful. As we shall discuss below, the pressure of central authorities, active political participation of ethnic groups, and growing fragmentation among the republican communist elites counter-balanced such efforts.

As part of its reform strategy, the central reformist leadership called upon the mass media to promote the cause of restructuring. As already mentioned, a number of central newspapers tried to play the assigned role and exposed serious problems in Kyrgyzstan. Masaliyev disliked their pro-reform crusade and master-minded a counter-attack on them. However, he confined himself to a verbal counter-attack because the central press and its local Russian correspondents enjoyed the protection of central authorities and the support of the Russian minority in the republic. As a result, an independent source of information in the form of central newspapers remained available to the masses in his republic.
As compared to the central press, the republican mass media and its representatives had to endure a different fate. In fact, the latter were under the direct control of the republican government. It provided them little freedom for independent and critical coverage of many deep-seated problems in the republic. A repressive policy was pursued toward those journalists who were somewhat reluctant to toe the official line. They were subjected to various coercive and punitive measures such as character assassination, expulsion from the party, dismissal from service, and trial on various charges.

The Kyrgyz leadership was no less hostile to the formation of independent sociopolitical groups and movements. However, as compared to its effective control over the local mass media, it was less successful in curbing the rise of independent sociopolitical formations in its republic. Its hostile approach was able to delay, but could not arrest altogether, the rise of such formations. A number of discussion clubs such as Demos, Soveremennik, and Pozistsia arose in 1987-88. The Russian minority actively participated in the formation of these clubs. These clubs were allowed to debate political issues, including the political future of socialism.

In spite of a narrow scope of their activities, the above pioneer groups were indicative of the possible existence of independent associations outside the communist fold. The message was not lost on various societal forces eager to partake in socioeconomic and political processes in the republic. A number of new informal groups, initially loosely organized around economic, social, cultural, and ethnic causes, began to rise and evade the controlling hand of Kyrgyz authorities.
main apolitical groups which arose and made an important contribution to the expansion of independent political space during the Masaliyev era are: Ekolog (an environmental group), Ashar, Asaba, and Osh Aimagy (Kyrgyz-oriented groups), the United Council of Labor Collectives (a group of Russian industrial workers created to defend their interests), and Adolat (an Uzbek-oriented group). However the basic apolitical character of these groups, many of them, especially those created to promote interests of particular ethnic communities, made demands of political nature and became explicit political formations over time. Hence, the very existence of these groups and their pursuit of ostensibly non-political agendas significantly contributed to the rise of independent political activity during the Masaliyev era.

After the Kyrgyz authorities grudgingly conceded a space to independent environmental, socioeconomic, and ethnic-oriented informal associations to operate in the capital city, more explicit political groups were organized to test political waters. These groups include the City Voter’s Club and Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DMK). The former was organized in the capital city in August 1989. Although this group had an inter-ethnic character, the Russian residents of the capital city actively participated in its organization and activities. The republican communist leadership experienced for the first time the real political clout of this group in the 1990 republican and local legislative elections in the capital city. This group humbled the communist leadership with its instrumental role in securing the victory of some independent candidates over their communist competitors in these elections. The second (but the most important) political group, DMK, was a merger of 24 small and
large informal groups. It was created in May 1990 to consolidate divided independent societal forces, coordinate their activities, and build effective pressure from below to accelerate the democratization process in the republic.  

The democratization process received tremendous impetus from another development, too. That is, a growing split in the republican elite structure, especially in the wake of the Osh conflict. This split effectively frustrated Masaliyev's anti-reform efforts and ultimately cost him leadership position in the republic.

The Osh conflict claimed hundreds of lives and greatly discredited the republican leadership. As already mentioned, the republican communist authorities tried to blame the anti-state forces, including the informal groups, for the bloody incident. A sizable number of communist parliamentarians as well as independent sociopolitical forces refused to accept this explanation. They rather publicly blamed the communist leadership. Even some local newspapers joined them in their criticism of the communist leadership (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 25, 1990:15). More importantly, the disgruntled deputies formed a reformist group in the parliament in the wake of the Osh incident. This group lashed out at the communist leadership for mishandling the Osh conflict. The local press provided an extensive coverage to its platform. The same group later played an instrumental role in frustrating Masaliyev's attempt to run unopposed in the parliamentary election for president in October 1990, and in his failure to secure the office in the two rounds of election.

In line with their overall manipulative anti-reform approach, the republican authorities tried to manipulate, like other components of glasnost, the electoral
process in order to preserve firm communist control in the republic. Although they were able to secure an overwhelming victory in the March 1989 all-union and February 1990 republican legislative elections because of their better material and organizational resources and manipulation of the election rules, their successes proved temporary. Their manipulation of the electoral process failed to produce the intended enduring results. In other words, in spite of all its manipulative efforts, the communist conservative leadership failed to block the democratizing impact of the centrally mandated competitive elections on the republican politics and its replacement with a pro-reform political leadership in the republic.

The first competitive elections held under the central scrutiny were the March 1989 all-union parliamentary elections. These elections proved a painful experience for the republican leadership. In spite of its effort to transform these elections into a Soviet variety, contested elections took place in 34 out of 43 electoral districts—an unprecedented event in the electoral history of the republic. In addition, four independent candidates with the active support of Russian voters were able to defeat their communist competitors in the capital city. As already mentioned, the local correspondent of Izvestia and arch rival of Masaliyev, Gennadii Shipitko, an ethnic Russian, was among the successful independent candidates. As a result, the republican leadership failed to send to the all-union parliament a united delegation with an appropriate character reflecting various societal sections such as women, workers, peasants, and minorities.
The next competitive elections were held for republican and local legislative bodies on February 25, 1990. In spite of the fact that conservative leadership won an overwhelming compliant majority, these elections also accelerated the political liberalization process and eroded the communist base in the republic. A total of 1032 candidates stood in the parliamentary elections. Only 86 out of 350 seats were uncontested, all in the rural areas. The three-month-long election campaign produced a lot of political heat and commotion. The communist leaders had to focus on many troubling fronts during these elections, including protest rallies in the capital city.29

Still, more troublesome for the conservative leadership was the bold participation of informal groups such as the Russian-dominated Voter’s Club in the elections and the consequent victory of a sizable number of independent candidates over their communist competitors. The true value of this victory became evident at the opening session of the new parliament on April 10, 1990, when independent deputies voiced their opposition to the communist party and its practices and tried to put up their own candidate against Masaliyev in the election for the chairman of the new parliament, threatening to end the established practice of unopposed election for that office. The presence of a solid bloc of opposition deputies clearly exposed serious limitations on the capabilities of the communist leadership to shape political arena to its taste. In fact, over time its capabilities to control the political process in the republic were weakened to the extent that it failed to secure a desirable outcome in the October 1990 presidential election in the parliament.
As already mentioned, in the wake of the Osh violent incident, a sizable group of communist deputies broke ranks with the leadership and entered into an alliance with the independent deputies in the republican parliament. This alliance played a critical role in the failure of the conservative party leadership to conduct and win the October 1990 presidential election in the old Soviet style. In fact, this alliance became a formidable electoral force and a challenge for the communist leadership when the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Apas Jumagulov, joined it and decided to oppose Masaliyev in the presidential election. The defiance of Jumagulov and the central authorities’ endorsement of competitive election ruled out any real possibility of the use of force against this alliance. In addition to Jumagulov, D. Amanbayev, the first secretary of the party committee in the Issyk-Kul province, was also a contender. The electoral contest between the three career communist leaders supported by their respective supporters in the republic parliament was indicative of a serious rift among the communist elites. In other words, Masaliyev could no longer command traditional communist loyalty of the communist elites. Thus, he had little choice other than contesting the election.

In the first round of election, victory eluded all the three candidates because no one received the required 50 percent votes. In the second round of voting, Masaliyev and Jumagulov both received almost equal number of votes but each fell short of the required number of votes to consummate his electoral victory. As a result, in compliance with the exclusionary clause their names were removed from the ballot, and the parliament considered a new slate of six presidential candidates.
The hung parliament and presence of the picketers and hunger strikers outside the parliament had created a crisis-like situation in the republic. The center seized this moment and interfered in the electoral process producing unpropitious political consequences for the conservative leadership. The central reformist team preferred Akayev, a member in the all-union parliament and chairman of the National Academy of Sciences in Kyrgyzstan. More importantly, he was an ardent supporter of Gorbachev and his reform program. In addition, he had the support of certain other democratically oriented forces, including informal political groups such as DMK. In the second round of election, the republican parliament ended the electoral deadlock. It voted Akayev into power—an auspicious decision for the political liberalization process in the republic. In fact, this fateful development that some call "silk revolution" (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 8, 1994:27-8) transferred the power of political decision-making from the party leadership to a reformist president and ushered in a truly new political era remarkably conducive for greater political liberalization in Kyrgyzstan.

GLASNOST BEFORE INDEPENDENCE: THE AKAYEV ERA

As already mentioned, the republican communist authorities before Akayev assumed power were opposed to the center-sponsored political reform measures. However, in spite of their sustained opposition, political liberalization continued to progress in a slow but steady manner in Kyrgyzstan. A number of factors, including the central leadership's continued support for political reform, disintegrating communist elite structure, and willingness and readiness of Akayev to take actions
conducive for political liberalization, rendered the communist opposition ineffective. After Akayev took power, he enjoyed the support of both the central leadership and Russian minority for his effort to accelerate the reform process in his republic. His own support and encouragement became available to democratically oriented political forces in their effort to challenge the dominance of the communist party.

In line with preferences of his own, his local allies, and above all the central authorities, Akayev began to introduce political and economic reforms through presidential initiatives. The purpose of such reform initiatives was to accelerate the political liberalization process through building a strong support base for it. His 12-member presidential council was one such initiative which pioneered independent participation in the authoritative political decision-making in the republic. This council included Qazat Akhmatov, the co-chairman of the DMK (Haghayeghi, 1995:135). He permitted political forces of different colors under the central law to organize and operate without any fear of repression and systematic official obstacles. In fact, registered and unregistered autonomous political groups were able to carry out their activities without intimidation and repression under Akayev. After the republic parliament finally sanctioned political pluralism in December 1990, one important addition to the list of autonomous formations was the nationalist party, Erkin Kyrgyz, in February 1991.

Likewise, Akayev pursued a benign press and media policy in line with the August 1990 all-union law which guaranteed the press freedom. The law permitted state bodies, public organizations, political parties, social movements, and individual
citizens of 18 years to found media outlets (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 25, 1990:16-17). As a result of his faithful practice of this law, the press was made accessible to opposition forces and journalists could freely write about sensitive and controversial issues facing the republic without facing punitive reactions.

As an astute politician, Akayev tried to accelerate the political liberalization process without engaging in a direct confrontation with the party apparatus. However, because the party leadership was well aware of the grave consequences of his reform measures for the future of the party, it began to openly oppose his reform initiatives. The conservative communist deputies sought to block his reform initiatives on the one hand and passed laws with potentially harmful effects on the political liberalization process on the other. For instance, in spring 1990, a bill was passed in the parliament which recognized the republic’s territory as the exclusive property of ethnic Kyrgyz. This bill had enormous potential for provoking inter-ethnic bloody conflict, hence prejudicial for the fledgling political liberalization process in the republic.

In the wake of a number of encouraging developments such as Masaliyev’s resignation as chairman of the parliament, Akayev took many bold decisions to overcome the communist opposition and advance the political liberalization process in the republic. For instance, in January 1991, he replaced the conservative Cabinet of Ministers with a smaller relatively young reformist Cabinet. He also used his presidential veto power to kill the above bill which stipulated that the republic’s territory exclusively belonged to ethnic Kyrgyz. In addition, he took other political and economic measures which were certain to reduce the role and influence of the
communist party, providing more space to the fledgling autonomous political forces in Kyrgyz society.

The above political trends constitute part of the evidence which clearly indicates that in spite of a systematic communist effort to undermine Akayev and his reform program, political balance continued to shift over time in his favor. The republican communist leadership made the most serious move to reverse this shift during the August 1991 coup. After the coup leadership announced its takeover in Moscow, the republican communist party announced its "full and unconditional support" for it and discussed ways to remove Akayev from power. The commander of the Turkistan Military District, General Fuzhenko, was also poised to send his tanks to support an action against Akayev (Russian Press Digest, August 23, 1991; Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 34, 1991:47-8).

For his part, Akayev took all necessary precautionary and preemptive measures against the looming threat of a similar coup attempt in the republic. He ordered the republic television to repeatedly broadcast every two hours Yeltsin's declaration in which the latter called upon the people to defeat the putsch (Bozdag, 1992:282; Haghayeghi, 1995:136). He also dismissed the chairman of the republic's KGB who did not inform the former of the communist plans in time (BBC, August 22, 1991), and ordered the troops of the Interior Ministry to surround the headquarter of the republican communist party central committee. In addition to these measures, in his statement of support for anti-coup forces, Akayev lashed out at the republican communist party leadership for its support for the coup in the country. He viewed
such support as an anti-democratic and unconstitutional act. More importantly, he issued a presidential decree on departyization which effectively reduced the vanguard party to a simply another public association in the republic. After the coup failed, criminal proceedings were initiated against the First Secretary, Central Committee secretaries and politburo members for helping those who carried out an unconstitutional coup in the country (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 33, 1991:25; no. 34, 1991:47-8). In a move to further weaken the communist party, Akayev issued a decree which banned the communist party and nationalized its property in the republic.

Although Akayev's action of banning the communist party is not in line with his liberal thinking and it violates theoretical premises of political liberalization, this and his other actions such as departyization facilitated the political liberalization process in the post-independence period. In fact, in the wake of these actions, the communist party lost its open access to state resources, suffered more internal splits, and was reduced to a mere another public association. As a result, the ability of the main anti-reform political force to obstruct the reform process underway in the republic was greatly diminished, providing Akayev an unprecedented political latitude to introduce more meaningful reform measures and deepen political liberalization in the republic in the post-independence period. Thus, as we expected not only reformist political outlook but also actions (though some of them, including the ban on the communist party, did not correspond to liberal thinking) of the leadership had a positive impact on political liberalization during the Akayev era. In addition,
disintegrating communist elite structure, and the support of both the central leadership and other democratically oriented forces, including the Russian minority, for Akayev’s reform policies proved, as we expected, beneficial influences for political liberalization in the republic.

POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA

The above chain of actions and reactions which the August coup set in motion conclusively shifted political balance in Akayev’s favor, further fragmented the communist party, and eroded its dominance in society—a situation conducive for political liberalization. After independence, Akayev proceeded in alliance with democratically oriented forces, including the Russian minority, to accelerate the implementation of his political reform program. As already mentioned, his impressive democratic conduct in the early post-independence period earned him international praise. However, over time, the political liberalization process failed to maintain a linear progress in the post-independence period. It rather suffered reversals in certain areas down the road. In spite of these reversals and aberrations, Kyrgyzstan continued to surpass all other Central Asian republics in terms of an overall progress in almost all aspects of political liberalization. The remaining chapter is devoted to the discussion and explanation of the progress Kyrgyzstan made as well as reversals it experienced in various aspects of political liberalization in the post-independence period. More precisely, we shall focus on the rise of autonomous sociopolitical associations and the extent of their access to the political process, the rise of independent mass media and its relationship with the government, and the extent to
which the electoral process is transparent and open to the opposition political forces in Kyrgyzstan in the post-independence period.

THE RISE OF WEAK BUT INDEPENDENT SOCIOPOLITICAL FORMATIONS

One of the areas in which the post-independence political liberalization process recorded sustained progress with few minor aberrations is the freedom of political and social forces to organize themselves, engage in independent political activity, and pursue their stated programs. In fact, almost all the necessary parts for a multiparty political system were already in place before independence. As mentioned earlier, political pluralism was sanctioned in the central as well as republican law, and several leading independent individuals and groups were directly or indirectly involved in political activities before independence. However, the legal foundation for political pluralism was truly put in place after Akayev became president and independent sociopolitical groups had more freedom of action under him than his predecessor. After independence, in line with his favorable opinion about the plurality of political views, the legal foundation for political pluralism was further fortified, and Akayev and his team made no sustained effort to circumvent rules in order to curtail the freedom of action of various political parties, social movements, and civil groups in the republic. In fact, corresponding to his liberal outlook, Akayev took certain actions which made it much easier for a host of political and social forces to organize, receive official recognition, criticize the government and its policies, and participate in sociopolitical processes in the republic in the post-independence period.
One of such decisions conducive for political liberalization was the decision of Akayev not to join any political party in the post-independence era. Although he did not join any political party, he drew support from many existing political parties and social movements. In fact, a large number of important former communist leaders representing their respective concerns either formed or joined various sociopolitical formations. These leaders and their sociopolitical formations have a common interest: to resist their depoliticization. Therefore, the incumbent leadership has to pay a heavy price to deactivate these elites and their associations. Also, it is difficult for Akayev to unify so many important political elites with diverse interests under him—a unity which could have tempted him to use authoritarian methods to deal with the small number of remaining political dissidents.

In addition, these leaders and formations have been supportive of Akayev on some important issues such as his confrontation with the communist party leadership but have been critical of him on other relatively less important issues such as various economic and political transition policies. In this situation, an outright repression of these elites and sociopolitical associations could have eroded his own support base and weakened his position, especially vis-a-vis the unreformed communist party which could still draw on its support base inside and outside the government to complicate things for him. Although the reformed communists supported him and he patronized their political parties, the conservative faction of the communist party continued to oppose him and had the potential to regroup itself and threaten his power position in the republic. In fact, his informal shifting alliance with various sociopolitical
formations served as a counterweight against the communist party, obviated the reunion of the splintered communist (and former communist) forces, and enabled him to enhance his own leverage vis-a-vis other sociopolitical formations, including his informal democratically-oriented and reformed communist allies. Thus, the presence of a variety of sociopolitical formations posed no serious threat to his dominance in national politics, rather it improved his political standing, legitimized his rule, and confirmed his democratic credentials.

A number of additional powerful constraints rendered the option of indiscriminate repression of sociopolitical groups quite costly and, hence, less attractive for Akayev. As already mentioned, members of the Russian minority were active in sociopolitical groups like Voter's Club even before independence and later joined different political parties and movements such as the DMK. After independence, a number of explicit Russian-oriented groups arose in large part in reaction to the formation of Kyrgyz-oriented groups before and after independence. The demands of the Russian-speaking population and the titular nationality are often at variance with each other. A number of former communists of both the Russian and Kyrgyz origin also support their respective ethnic communities in pursuit of their interests, further enhancing the significance of the ethnic factor in national politics in the republic. The looming threat of a strong Russian reaction (including active intervention) to safeguard the interests of the Russian-speaking population continues to discourage Akayev from using indiscriminate repression to achieve a thorough political deactivation of various societal forces, including the Russian minority. Also,
the use of repression to deactivate the Russian-speaking population would defeat Akayev’s efforts to stop its migration out of his republic through favorable policy measures.

The selective and discriminate repression also became difficult to practice, and the republican authorities have exercised restraint in such use of repression. In fact, the republican leadership can not afford to ban Kyrgyz sociopolitical groups but allow sociopolitical groups of the Russian-speaking population to function in the republic. If it does, it would risk losing its nationalist credentials and vital support base among the titular nationality. As a result of the above factors, the republican authorities have so far refrained from hindering the group formation (and dissolution) process and from using sustained repressive measures to curtail the freedom of action of various sociopolitical groups in the republic. Thus, a host of political parties and social movements which were formed before independence continue to exist in one form or another and a number of new sociopolitical formations with diverse orientations and programs continue to proliferate in the republic in the post-independence era.

Before we discuss these sociopolitical formations, their orientations, and the freedom of action they enjoyed in the post-independence period, it is important to record a number of important observations about them. Firstly, although political and social formations proliferated and operated with greater freedom after independence, no one has been able to build a strong mass support base and become a strong force capable of shaping the course of politics in the republic. In fact, the existing political parties and social movements are weakly developed in the republic and many of them
face a real danger of marginalization in the national political life and a potential threat of an outright political extinction.

Secondly, the sociopolitical group formation process lacks a predictable character. In other words, it continues to remain fluid. As already mentioned, several informal groups which initially advocated specific, overtly apolitical causes (such as economic well-being, ethnonational and cultural revival, and environment protection) later broadened their programs to include sensitive, explicitly political demands such as sovereignty and independence for the republic and an end to the communist rule in the pre-independence period. After independence, many of them transformed themselves into political parties and strove to achieve their respective political aims. In addition, while some political and social groups continue to organize and may coalesce into larger formations, others continue to fragment into several splinter groups. The conglomerate groups such as DMK have been particularly vulnerable to fragmentation due to many reasons, including personality clashes and ideological differences among its leaders.

Thirdly, the existing political parties and social movements represent a wide variety of ideological orientations and interests ranging from radical ethnonationalist to communist to democratic. However, these orientations and interests are not fixed, but are rather mutable as it shall become clear below. And, finally, almost all notable parties and movements advocate some variant of democracy.

A detailed discussion of all the existing independent political and social formations and their orientations in Kyrgyzstan is outside the scope of this study. For
the purpose of this inquiry, it will suffice to briefly discuss a representative sample of these sociopolitical formations, their orientations, and the freedom of action they enjoyed in the post-independence period.

ETHNIC-ORIENTED (DEMOCRATIC) PARTIES AND MOVEMENTS

These groups are primarily focused on promoting interests of specific ethnic communities in Kyrgyzstan. Almost most sizable ethnic communities have formed such parties and movements to advance their respective interests. Of course, the most notable and active ethnic-oriented sociopolitical formations have been organized to protect interests of the titular nationality, ethnic Kyrgyz. The Kyrgyz ethnonationalist formations range from radical to moderate. One of the radical groups seeking to promote interests of ethnic Kyrgyz is Asaba (Banner). It advocates a political program with an exclusive focus on "the defense of the economic, social and political interests of the Kyrgyz people" (Hunter, 1996:50). Asaba has a strong anti-Russian bias. It demands an authoritative action to reduce the presence of non-Kyrgyz population in the republic and strongly opposes privatization of state sector, especially land, and the idea of dual citizenship. It has asked the parliament more than once to pass legislative measures in this regard (Haghayeghi, 1994:193; Chukin, 1994:171; CSCE, 1995:8).

In spite of its overall political support for Akayev, the Asaba leadership has been quite critical of him and his team for their insensitivity to these demands and for doing very little to improve the plight of the most under-privileged ethnic group, Kyrgyz, in the republic.
The second ethnonationalist political group formed to advance interests of ethnic Kyrgyz is Erkin (Free) Kyrgyzstan. However, it is relatively less radical than Asaba. Erkin Kyrgyzstan, which was organized and registered in the pre-independence period for Kyrgyz causes, continues to pursue them in the post-independence period. Although it never lost sight of its basic goal, it has shifted its position back and forth. Like Asaba, Erkin first demanded the expulsion of non-Kyrgyz from the republic; however, it later dropped this demand and shifted its emphasis from "Kyrgyz interests only" to "Kyrgyz interests first" (Haghayeghi, 1994:193; 1995:117). It is one of the few sociopolitical associations which publish their own newspapers.

A number of other Kyrgyz-oriented ethnonationalist formations, though relatively less significant than Asaba and Erkin Kyrgyzstan, also exist in the republic. Askar (Mutual Aid) is one such group which champions interests of ethnic Kyrgyz in the Osh region. The Kyrgyz Language Society and some local groups can also be added to the list of such groups (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 25, 1992:10; Chukin, 1994:171).

The radical ethnonational demands of the Kyrgyz-oriented formations and several other developments such as poor economic conditions in the republic, the adoption of Kyrgyz as a state language, and the declaration of independence caused multiple reactions among non-Kyrgyz ethnic communities. These reactions included migration, especially of Russian and German minorities, and the formation of a
number of non-Kyrgyz ethnonationalist groups to defend their interests in the republic.

In addition to Uzbek-oriented groups like Adolat which was an important party to the Osh conflict, several Russian-oriented formations have also arisen in Kyrgyzstan. Notable among them are the Slavic Fund, the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan, Soglasie (Accord), and the Association of Ethnic Russians. These Russian-oriented formations advocate social equality and press for making the Russian the second state language in the country (CSCE, 1995:6; 1998:16). The stated programs of these groups are of cultural nature, but some such as Slavic Fund have been politicized especially after independence and now contain radical forces. The leadership has always emphasized the cultural nature of the Slavic Fund, but the radical forces in it openly express their determination to counter ethnonationalist efforts of the Kyrgyz-oriented groups in the country (Hunter, 1996:51; Bozdag, 1992:285-6).

The Russian-oriented groups have enjoyed the same degree of freedom of action which has been available to the ethnonationalist groups of the titular nationality in the country. Some of these groups have pooled their resources to publish their own newspaper, Soglasie, in Osh (CSCE, 1995:6), and have been able to disseminate their programs and try to influence public opinion and decision making process in the republic. In addition to the above Russian-oriented formations, the Society of Germans of Kyrgyzstan, representing the interests of the German minority in the republic (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press no. 25, 1992:10), and a Cossack
organization, representing Cossack interests, has also been founded in the post-independence period.

Most of these formations have been informal political allies of Akayev in the post-independence period. As a result, the use of repression to curb them, to prevent them from articulating their demands, and to prevent from occasionally criticizing his government and policies would surely hurt his interest and weaken his position in Kyrgyz politics. In fact, he rather tried to take certain measures, such as opening a Slavic university in the capital city, to protect their interests even at the risk of displeasing his own coethnics.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES AND MOVEMENTS

A host of political parties and social movements with a liberal democratic outlook of varying degrees exist side by side with the ethnic-oriented democratic formations in Kyrgyzstan. Like the ethnonationalist democratic groups, the liberal democratic formations differ in terms of their social bases. In addition, they exhibit differences on a host of broad as well as specific issues of post-communist economic and political restructuring and social policies in the country. Like the ethnic-oriented formations, the liberal democratic parties may support or oppose the government policies depending on the nature of issues involved. Some liberal parties are product of the breakup process which ethnonationalist and liberal democratic parties alike have been experiencing in the republic.

As already mentioned, the first most significant informal political group in Kyrgyzstan before independence was the DMK with a liberal democratic charter,
although it comprised liberal as well as ethnonationalist informal groups. The temporary removal of the Kyrgyz communist party from the political arena in the immediate post-independence period left the DMK as the most significant and privileged political force in the country. However, it failed to build itself into a strong political force. In fact, the breakup process which it began to witness within six months after its formation continued in the post-independence period, greatly undermining its potential to shape post-communist politics in the republic. After several splits, the DMK under the leadership of Jepar Jeksheev was registered as a political party in July 1993. The party leadership has been quite critical of several economic policies of the Akayev government. It has also opposed certain cultural and educational policies such as opening of a Slavic university in Bishkek (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 41, 1992:8).

As an off-shoot of the DMK, the Republican People’s Party (RPP) was established and registered as a political party in March and September 1992 respectively. It claims to have come into existence "to fight against discrimination on ethnic, social, and religious grounds" (Haghayeghi 1995:122). It also claims that it would act as a constructive opposition, if not in power. The party takes a very liberal stance on many sensitive issues including language and religion. However, it is an advocate of an egalitarian society and, like several other liberal as well as ethnonationalist parties, opposes the introduction of rapid economic reforms in the country. Its estimated 3,000-membership and political and financial support comes from labor, intellectuals, parliamentarians, and businessmen.
The liberal members of the Erkin Kyrgyzstan split from its radical members to form a new political party called Ata Meken under the leadership of Kamila Kenebayeva in September 1992. It is multi-ethnic in its composition. It was officially registered in December 1992. Ata Meken reportedly came into existence with the blessings of Akayev (Huskey, 1997:263). The party leadership has often shown its willingness to cooperate with the Akayev government. However, it has been critical of it for certain monetary and economic policy measures including the introduction of national currency and privatization of agricultural sector. Ata Meken offers a liberal-centrist political alternative. It supports cultural and religious revival provided it is done within the confines of the reality of a multiethnic and secular state (Haghayeghi, 1995:121-2).

Unlike the above political parties and social movements which have been organized mainly by various non-communist societal forces, the Social Democratic Party formed and registered in July 1993 and December 1994 respectively offers a political program which has been inspired by reform communism. The party calls for introduction of democratic socialist principles. It has been under a sharp attack of its counterparts for being a party of "the present ruling nomenklatura" and a protege of Akayev (Haghayeghi 1995:130).

A number of less significant political parties and movements with issue-oriented and narrow but still democratic platforms also exist in the country. The list of such registered formations include Agrarian party and Democratic Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan (Huskey 1997:262).
THE COMMUNIST PARTY

As already mentioned, Akayev banned the Kyrgyz communist party in the wake of the 1991 abortive coup. The party, however, reentered the political arena after it held its founding congress in June 1992 and received official recognition in September 1992. Its platform espouses restoration of the Soviet Union and Soviet-era social rights. In addition, it is opposed to most economic reform measures underway in the post-communist era in the republic. Like other political formations, it has been allowed to participate in the post-independence electoral process.

HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

In conjunction with ethnonationalist, liberal democratic, and communist political parties, a number of groups have been organized to monitor the human rights situation in Kyrgyzstan in the post-independence period. In 1991, the Ministry of Justice registered one such group, the Human Rights Movement of Kyrgyzstan (HRMK). The focus of its activities was on monitoring ethnic-based discrimination in the workplace and excesses of the security forces in the country. Although in 1992 the Ministry of Justice turned down the request of a human rights organization for registration on the ground that another human rights organization was unnecessary, this policy was subsequently reversed to register a number of human rights organizations, including Kyrgyz-American Bureau on Human Rights and Law Protection. The Bureau was registered in December 1993. The aim of this group is to monitor human rights situation in the country and publicize it around the world. The Bureau, in alliance with the independent newspaper, Delo No, has publicly exposed
and criticized various constitutional violations and defended the alleged victims of the police excesses in the republic. These human rights organizations have so far smoothly operated in the republic.

AN ASSESSMENT

As already noted, all the existing political parties and social movements have so far failed to deepen their roots in Kyrgyz society. An overall poor performance of all the registered political parties and social movements in the 1995 parliamentary election must suffice to illustrate the above point. In fact, the twelve political parties and thirty social movements which contested the election failed to field their candidates in all one hundred and five electoral districts. The electoral result was more disappointing. Only 38 candidates with party affiliation won their seats as compared to 67 unaffiliated candidates (Huskey, 1997:262-264).

However accurate the observation that sociopolitical formations are weakly developed, their weakness can not be interpreted as a sorry state of political liberalization. The underdevelopment of these formations may hinder democratic consolidation. However, so far as political liberalization is concerned, it is the freedom of action available to political and social formations which defines its level in society. Judged from this standpoint, Kyrgyzstan has more or less a sustained impressive record in the post-independence period. With one important exception of the religious political formations which are prohibited in the May 1993 constitution, a host of other political and social forces have been free to establish independent formations, disseminate their views, propose alternative reform programs, hold party
and mass gatherings, publish newspapers, and participate in the electoral process in the country. Of course, there have been few aberrations at certain times which will be discussed at appropriate places below.

The constitutional right of association is generally respected in Kyrgyzstan. The law requires all political and social formations to register. Of course, in addition to bureaucratic mentality and bottlenecks, there are some complex legal requirements which make the registration process somewhat tedious. As of 1997, only a few cases have been reported where registration of certain formations was delayed. For instance, a Cossack cultural and economic organization applied three times before it was registered in 1993.30

Almost all the political and social formations which have so far sought registration have been registered. As of 1997, in addition to a number of registered human rights organizations, 17 political parties and more than 30 social movements have been registered in Kyrgyzstan. The singular reported case where registration was denied involved a Uighur organization. The organization was denied registration in 1995 because its stated mission included the establishment of an independent Uighur state in northwest China (Huskey, 1997:261-3; State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1995 and 1997:919, 1157 respectively).

In addition to the freedom of group formation, the existing political parties and social formations, including human rights groups and labor unions, have been generally free to conduct their other activities, too. As already mentioned, some of these formations, especially political parties, have openly and repeatedly criticized
certain reform policies of the government and have been able to propose alternative
reform programs within and outside the parliament.

The Akayev government has been at time sensitive and responsive to their
views. It has also been tolerant of the protest rallies these formations held in support
of their demands. The government has routinely issued permits political and social
formations require for holding public rallies and marches. Over the past six years
there have been numerous authorized and unauthorized rallies and demonstrations
across the country. The government has generally refrained from using force even
against the unauthorized rallies. As of 1997, unlike Uzbekistan where the use of force
against demonstrators has caused several deaths, there has been no report of such
incidents in Kyrgyzstan.

In addition, the government has generally respected the law allowing political
and social formations to publish their own the newspapers. Hence, Kyrgyzstan has
newspapers like Erk and Soglasie published by political parties and social movements.
In fact, the primary cause for the failure of many aspiring political and social
formations to establish their own mass media institutions, especially newspapers,
appears to be the lack of financial resources rather than insuperable official
restrictions. For example, Asaba's effort to establish its own newspaper have failed
due to a lack of financial resources (Haghayeghi 1995:116).

Of course, since mid-1994 the press has been facing growing problems and
journalists have wound up in jail. A detailed discussion of such essentially
media-related issues is conducted below. However, for our purpose here, it will

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suffice to note that these cases involved official vendetta against certain newspapers and journalists who allegedly sullied the honor of the president and other government officials. In spite of this, the law on protecting the honor and dignity of the president has not been overstretched to silence all kinds of criticism of Akayev and his policies and to curtail the freedom of political and social formations to propagandize their alternative reform programs in the country. In fact, in spite of the potential threat of punitive measures under the law on protecting the reputation of the president, various political leaders have been able to criticize various actions and policies of Akayev with impunity.

There have been no political prisoners under the above law or otherwise before the December 1995 presidential election in Kyrgyzstan. Although prior to the 1995 presidential elections, journalists and human rights monitors have reported some politically motivated prosecutions at the local level (State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992:918), there is no evidence to attribute such prosecutions to the Akayev government. The observation that political opposition enjoyed freedom of action is partially supported by the fact that while discussing human rights situation for 1993, the Human Rights Watch did not include Kyrgyzstan among the countries with a poor human rights record (Human Rights Watch, 1994). This situation, however, changed when two campaign workers of an opposition candidate, Medetkan Sherimkulov, were arrested in December 1995, in Issyk Kul oblast for distributing campaign pamphlets allegedly slandering the president. In February 1996, there was another arrest in Naryn on similar charges (State
Perhaps, more prominent case was the arrest of Topchubek Torgunaliev, chairman of the Erkin Kyrgyzstan Party, and former rector of the Bishkek Humanities University, and his assistant Timur Stamkulov on charges of theft of state property, malfeasance and abuse of power. The former was arrested on December 17, 1996, after he participated in a peaceful protest rally of pensioners in Bishkek. In January 1997, both were convicted and sent to jail to serve their sentences (CSCE, 1998:25).

The above cases do indicate an unmistakable deterioration in the level of political liberalization from the previous years. Still, Kyrgyzstan does not qualify to be lined up with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on the basis of such aberrations. Although these few cases tarnish the political liberalization record in the republic, they pale to insignificance when compared to similar cases in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In fact, these cases by no means constitute an ample evidence of a systematic official effort to silence organized political opposition and individual political activists in the country. There are several instances some of which have been cited above clearly show that political parties and their leaders critical of Akayev and his policies have not always been subjected to official vendetta. Also, the above cases involving the arrest and imprisonment of the campaign workers of the opposition presidential candidate must be seen as isolated incidents rather than part of a sustained government effort to completely close the electoral process to independent sociopolitical formations. In fact, in spite of several problems, the post-independence
electoral process in Kyrgyzstan has been much more open to independent organized participation than in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. This point is made quite clear in the next section on the electoral process.

AN OPEN AND COMPETITIVE NATIONAL ELECTORAL PROCESS?

The political right of citizens to choose their representatives and change their government through election is codified in the May 1993 constitution of Kyrgyzstan. As of 1997, two general presidential elections, one uncontested and the other contested, one competitive parliamentary election, and a number of competitive by-elections for vacant seats in the parliament have been held in the country, in addition to three national referenda. There have also been competitive local bodies elections. However, our focus in this section will be on national elections and on their openness to opposition participation.

The first national election which took place after independence was the general uncontested presidential election held on October 13, 1991. As already mentioned, Akayev was elected president in the October 1990 parliamentary election. After independence he could serve out his remaining term as the parliament was poised to do for itself. He instead decided to renew his political mandate and legitimacy through a popular presidential election. In principle, the election was open to all qualified candidates who could collect the required number of voters' signatures. There is no report that the Akayev government prevented a registered opposition party from fielding a candidate in the election. In fact, while the communist party whose candidate could have made election a genuine electoral contest was banned and other
significant sociopolitical formations chose to support his candidacy, it was unlikely that Akayev whose popularity rating was very high in the country at the time would have a real electoral competitor. The lack of organizational and material resources had made it extremely difficult for other potential individual candidates to run for office. As a result, Akayev ran unopposed and won the election receiving more than 95% of the cast votes.

In January 1994, well before the expiry of his five year term, Akayev held a successful popular referendum to ascertain the popular support for his political and economic reforms underway in the republic and whether he should serve his entire term (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 5, 1994:23; CSCE, 1995:4). What obliged Akayev to hold this confirmation referendum was a set of interactive circumstances which paved the way for the self-dissolution of the parliament in September 1994, a popular referendum on constitutional changes in October 1994, and a competitive parliamentary election in February 1995. In view of their importance, it is appropriate to briefly discuss these circumstances which led to the February 1995 parliamentary elections.

A unique political situation prevailed in Kyrgyzstan until the self-dissolution of the communist-dominated parliament in September 1994. That is, an uneasy coexistence between a communist-dominated conservative parliament and a reform-oriented non-communist president. In spite of what happened to the communist party in the wake of the 1991 putsch and its own conservative orientation, the communist-dominated parliament chose not to block most of the reform measures.
Akayev introduced after independence. However, the parliament rarely offered its support in a slavish manner as has been the case in Uzbekistan. Rather, it continued to exercise its constitutional authority which at times was at variance with the executive reform preferences. Although Akayev occasionally made use of decrees and veto power to push some of his reform initiatives and to overcome parliamentary resistance, he refrained from launching a full scale effort to end the communist dominance in the parliament or reduce the parliament to a mere rubber stamp as has been the case in both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. As a result, the uneasy coexistence between the communist-dominated parliament and reform-oriented president survived for almost two years without any serious direct confrontation between them. However, the political distance between the two widened over time, culminating into a fateful direct executive-legislative confrontation after both sides leveled corruption charges and counter-charges against each other in 1993-94.

As the post-communist transition deepened in the republic, many scandals of widespread official corruption cropped up. One such scandal focused on awarding gold mining rights to a Canadian firm, Cameco, without inviting competitive bids from other interested firms. The parliament authorized an inquiry in this regard. The communist as well as reform-oriented sections of the parliament began to openly criticize the government of the prime minister, Tursunbek Chingishev, for its corrupt practices. They also criticized the presidential leadership for its failed reform measures as well as for its failure to curb official corruption.
In response to this criticism and the mounting political crisis, Akayev initially adopted a political and conciliatory approach. Even after the 1993-94 crisis worsened, he relied on political manipulation rather than on the use of force to deal with it. In addition to his own pro-reform views and policies, a number of other factors made the use force to deal with the 1993-94 political crisis a less attractive option than political manipulation.

In fact, the use of force against those who spoke about official corruption involved prohibitive costs. In order to completely silence his critics through coercive methods, he needed a large scale repressive operation. The sheer large size of his important opponents (i.e., approximately half of the parliament members, let alone other political opposition leaders and activists), the resources (personal, party, regional, and tribal) available to them, the uproar of some of his own (former) allies—reform-oriented political figures—against the growing official corruption in the republic, and the presence of the Russian-speaking political activists surely increased the cost of a thorough political deactivation of his opponents through repression. In other words, he needed not only to disband the parliament (or at least put away his critics in it) but also to crack down on hundreds of critics outside the parliament, including his own allies and members of both Kyrgyz and Russian nationalities. The use of force against even a small number of his Russian critics would have mocked his actions he took and proposed to please Russian residents of the republic in 1994 (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no 24, 1994:13). Thus, not only his own democratic orientation but also the potential costs of such a large scale repressive
operation led him to choose political and procedural machinations rather than outright repression to deal with his critics and the growing crisis in the republic.

In order to enhance his own political stature, Akayev announced on November 29, 1993, that he would hold a confirmation referendum on his presidency in January 1994. He also indirectly challenged the parliament to renew its popular mandate. He rationalized his decision of referendum and his challenge to the parliament to renew its mandate by observing that Kyrgyzstan, like many other former Soviet republics, was in political and economic crisis situation which required "all the branches of power to strive to gain people’s trust" (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 50, 1993:24). The parliament was least interested in his proposal. It had rather different plans.

After a five-day heated debate in the second week of December 1993, the parliament passed a vote of no confidence against the prime minister. In addition to passing a vote of no confidence against the prime minister in December 1993, the parliament called upon its chairman to empower the parliamentary commission to uncover corrupt practices, especially in the privatization of state assets. The chairman empowered the commission to expose any violation of law and corrupt practices committed by parliamentarians, members of the central government, and heads of the local administration involved in the privatization process (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 27, 1994:20).

In the subsequent months, a large number of reports of massive corruption surfaced in the country. These reports implicated parliamentarians, leading executive
officials, local administrators, and relatives of state functionaries, including the wife
of Akayev and her brother. A torrent of accusations and counter-accusations which
followed created an acrimonious political atmosphere in the country. The central as
well as local state functionaries refused to cooperate with the parliamentary
commission. The newspapers took sides, publishing articles for and against the
parliamentary investigation. The government newspapers carried article and letters of
well-known individuals who asked the parliament to stop its "witch-hunt" because it
threatened to erode national unity with a potential danger of turning the country into
another Tajikistan (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 27, 1994:20; no. 36,
1994:21). Above all, Akayev decided to abandon his conciliatory approach to the
parliament and joined the battle against it.

In June 1994, for the first time he publicly accused the parliament of engaging
in "power struggle and political intrigues" (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no.
36, 1994:21). He charged that it was "stopping at nothing" in this struggle and was
undermining his reform program through its political machinations (CSCE, 1995:4).
He also charged that some members of the parliament have "accumulated capital as
fast as possible while trying to deceive the electorate with empty demagoguery"
(CSCE, 1995:4). Although Akayev quickly moved against the parliament and took a
number of steps to undermine the parliament and its constitutional role, here we will
focus on those moves which set the stage for the February 1995 parliamentary
election.
In the midst of accusations and counter-accusations of corruption, in July 1994, a group of deputies loyal to Akayev called upon the parliament to dissolve itself. In addition, the speaker of the parliament and the parliament-owned newspaper, Svobodnye gory (Free Mountains), were accused of conspiring to overthrow Akayev. In addition to his reliance on his parliamentary support, as part of his move against the parliament, Akayev entered into an informal alliance with administrative heads of the six regions in Kyrgyzstan in order to improve his position against the parliament.

In connivance with the regional heads and a group of deputies, Akayev was able to engineer the self-dissolution of the parliament. The parliamentary session slated for September 27, 1994, was expected to discuss findings of the parliamentary commission which was appointed to investigate cases of official corruption. Akayev and his allies preempted the session and, hence, its discussion of the cases of official corruption. Before the parliament convened, over half of the deputies loyal to Akayev refused to take part in the proceedings of the forthcoming parliamentary session. This deprived the parliament of a quorum it needed to carry out its legislative functions. The 23-member Cabinet of Ministers resigned and issued a statement which asserted that as a consequence of the permanent boycott of 165 deputies, the parliament has ceased its legislative work. It also called upon the president to fulfill his constitutional responsibilities to end the constitutional crisis in the country. Akayev accepted the resignation of the government. He also concurred with the majority of deputies to hold a new parliamentary election (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 36, 1994:21).
Taking advantage of the absence of the parliament, Akayev resorted to questionable practices, including holding of a national referendum in October 1994, to alter the political institutional design of the country according to his own preferences. The constitutional amendments approved in the October 1994 referendum sanctioned a bi-cameral legislature. The bi-cameral legislature comprised a 35-member lower house (Legislative Assembly) and a 70-member upper house (Assembly of People’s Representatives). These measures drew criticism from opposition quarters (CSCE, 1995:5). However, such critical voices failed to budge Akayev from his plan. As scheduled, the election was held for a 105-seat bi-cameral parliament in February 1995.

A detailed discussion of this election is outside the scope of this study. However, a discussion of an important issue directly relevant to the question of political liberalization deserves our focus. That is, the government interference with the electoral process. In this regard, we will focus on three aspects: a) openness of elections to popular participation; b) campaign and voting; and c) electoral outcome.

Although an acrimonious political atmosphere preceded the parliamentary election, there is no report to indicate that eligible individual opposition candidates or registered sociopolitical formations were forcibly kept out of the nomination and registration process. Even critics who note irregularities in certain aspects of the electoral process refrain from questioning the openness of this election to all eligible candidates (Pryde, 1995:115-8; Huskey, 1997:259-265). In fact, it was the first national election since independence which was truly multi-candidate and multi-party.
The Central Election Commission registered 921 candidates, including those who were being investigated for their involvement in financial corruption. An average of 9 candidates competed for each of the 105 seats. As already cited, 12 political parties and 30 social movements with diverse orientations nominated their candidates in the election. However, only 161 candidates were affiliated with parties. Labor collectives and residents nominated more candidates than political parties and social movements. There were also a sizable number of self-nominated candidates. Although 19 nationalities were represented, the candidates of the titular nationality disproportionally outnumbered the candidates of other nationalities. 870 candidates were Kyrgyz, 60 Russians, 46 Uzbeks, and 10 Ukranians. Other ethnic communities were represented in the single digit (CSCE, 1995:9).

As compared to the nomination and registration phase the openness and fairness of which are beyond doubt, the campaign and voting evoked mixed reactions and assessments. On the one hand, we have official circles and most international observers who maintain that in spite of certain problems during the campaign and voting, the election was generally free and fair. After noting a number of problems which marred the campaign and voting, a report of Commission on Cooperation and Security in Europe concludes that "unlike Turkmenistan, Tajikistan or Uzbekistan, which permit no opposition parties or opposition press, Kyrgyzstan held multi-party, multi-candidate contests. Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary election was much freer and fairer than elections or referendums in these other newly independent states of Central Asia" (CSCE, 1995:11). On the other hand, local critics and certain international
analysts dismiss the above overall positive assessment as politically motivated which both Akayev and his external admirers needed for a continued aid-based relationship. They rather conclude that the election was far from being free and fair and that the problems which occurred in the campaign and voting were so grave and widespread as to warrant its cancellation (Pryde, 1995:115-118; Huskey, 1997:259-265).

At least, the two groups agree that irregularities occurred during the election, although they differ on how grave and massive these problems were and the conclusions they reach, including whether the election was generally free and fair and whether the problems which occurred warranted the cancellation of the election. In order for us to reach any conclusion with respect to our concern with political liberalization, it is important to understand the nature of the reported irregularities and how far they are imputable to the Akayev government.

There were reports of pressure on and intimidation of candidates. However, it is important to note that rival candidates as well as local officials were the main sources of this pressure (Pryde, 1995:115). The local officials reportedly used a number of pressure tactics to lure rival candidates out of the electoral races or to harass them so that they were unable to effectively campaign. These pressure tactics against the rival candidates include threats of various sorts, denial of mandated airtime, use of official machinery (including mass media) in support of the favored candidates, and the dismissal of the relatives, trustees, and assistants of the rival candidates from their jobs (CSCE 1995:9; Huskey 1997:259-261). Besides local officials, individual candidates were also involved in malpractices such as intimidation
and bribing of rival candidates, and the use of money and other deficit commodities such as gasoline, food packets, flour, rice, shoes, etc., to buy votes. In this respect, the candidates who were being investigated for their involvement in corruption and were under the threat of jail sentences outperformed others. Almost 30 percent of the new deputies were under legal scrutiny for their corrupt financial dealings (Pryde, 1995:115; Huskey, 1997:260-261; CSCE, 1995:9).

Like the campaign, the voting was also marred by numerous reported violations. There were reports that the election officials ignored formal voting rules. Some reports implicate them in acts of favoritism, including the cancellation of elections. There were also numerous reports of older men voting for their wives and families and of ballot stuffing (Huskey, 1997:2610. At certain places, the election commission officials allowed voters to cast ballots without proper documents of personal identification. One correspondent of a newspaper was able to vote nine times for various candidates at one polling station. She stuffed into the ballot box a wad of papers. The two local observers did not either notice her or did not object to what she did (CSCE, 1995:10-11; State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1995:919). The victory of the former prime minister, Chingishev, and defeat of the former parliament speaker, Medektan Sherimkulov, were also imputed to serious electoral malpractices. In the initial vote tabulation, Chingishev trailed his main opponent. However, as a result of reportedly mysterious appearance of several thousand ballots for him, he was able to win his seat (Huskey, 1997:260). The second-round defeat of Sherimkulov by a candidate favored by Akayev was reportedly
a local sensation. The supporters of Sherimkulov held a protest demonstration and demanded a recount of votes. His defeat was blamed on officials in his election district. In order to look into Sherimkulov's charges of vote fraud in his election district, Akayev appointed a 34-member independent public commission which was later self-dissolved without reaching a conclusion (CSCE, 1995:11; Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 9, 1995:15; Pryde, 1995:118).

It is hard to dispute the conclusion that irregularities occurred during the campaign and voting. However, while such irregularities are highlighted, little effort is made to show how far they are imputable to the central government and whether they were part of a coherent manipulative strategy Akayev and his team pursued to produce a specific electoral outcome. In addition, no persuasive argument is presented to adequately explain why most international monitors offered a positive assessment of the 1995 parliamentary election in Kyrgyzstan. The argument that the international positive assessment was politically motivated because both Akayev and the aid donors needed it for a continued aid-based relations is less than persuasive. It is a weak argument because Kazakhstan, which was equally, if not more, admired in the West and was in need of aid, could not secure such assessment for the March 1994 parliamentary elections.

A sober look at the list of the reported shortcomings makes it abundantly clear that most cases were of individual and local nature with no plausible link with the central government. Most cases of irregularities in the campaign and voting appear to be a handiwork of local officials at various levels (especially the regional heads) and
powerful individual candidates especially from what some call "new plutocracy" comprised of directors of state enterprise and private businessmen (Huskey, 1997:260) rather than the central government. Only few cases such as the defeat of the former speaker of the parliament against a candidate supported by Akayev can arguably be imputed to the central government. Still, such cases are far from being part of a well-planned manipulative electoral strategy of the central government to secure an intended electoral outcome.

A closer look at the electoral outcome further substantiates the above assertion. After two rounds of election, 11 political parties were represented in the parliament. Interestingly, only 38 out of 105 deputies had party affiliation. The most successful political party was the Social Democratic Party with 14 seats. None of the other political party had more than four members in the parliament. 67 deputies were unaffiliated, mostly executive officials and businessmen (Huskey, 1997:261-264).

If the electoral outcome embarrassed the political parties, it displeased Akayev, too. His displeasure is confirmed even by those who have been critical of the way the election was conducted. They admit that few candidates supported by Akayev could get elected (Pryde, 1995:115; Huskey, 1997:259). If we interpret the above problems in the campaign and voting as part of a concerted effort of Akayev to produce intended results, then his failure to get his candidates elected must be explained. However, such an explanation is still lacking. It becomes more paradoxical when his failure is compared to the success of the Kazakh and Uzbek presidents in producing the intended electoral results without any difficulty.
In fact, Akayev also had some other reasons to regret the electoral outcome. As already mentioned, one of the main reasons for his direct confrontation with the previous parliament was the rising official corruption. Akayev had been facing enormous difficulties in combating official corruption. The electoral result compounded his difficulties in this regard. As already mentioned, before their electoral victories, almost 30 percent of the new deputies were under investigation for their corrupt financial dealings. Akayev himself, among many other concerned voices, voiced his concern that many new deputies sought a parliamentary seat for immunity from prosecution on charges of corruption (CSCE, 1995:9). A parliament run by such deputies was hardly the parliament Akayev desired and anticipated. It was obvious that the new parliament, like the old one, would be a reluctant partner of Akayev in the transition process. Quite expectedly, it did not take Akayev and the new parliament long to run into troubles with each other.

The reduced representation of women and non-Kyrgyz ethnic minorities in the new parliament also bothered Akayev. In fact, the new parliament was disproportionally dominated by members of the titular nationality. This outcome was hardly helpful in his effort to lure the Slavic population to stay in the country. What further disappointed Akayev, and, due to its potentially far-reaching political implications, was the victory of many local southern candidates over placemen from the north of the country. The victory of many southern candidates signalled a clear shift in the balance of power in Kyrgyzstan. It showed that the traditional political relationship between the southern and northern parts of the republic was no more
viable. In other words, it meant that the south would no longer leave to the traditionally dominant north the responsibility of managing political and economic life of the country.

In fact, from early on, the success of many southern candidates reportedly began to influence political decisions in Bishkek. Sources close to Akayev disclosed that shortcomings and outcome of the election alarmed him and he seriously contemplated cancellation of the election. The fear of potential hostile reaction of the resourceful southern deputies reportedly prevented him from taking this radical decision. It was feared that the southern deputies with their powerful interests at stake and with ample weapons in hand were likely to foment an open conflict if the election was annulled and their new privileges and parliamentary immunity withdrawn (Pryde, 1995:115-116). As our theoretical model expects and the case of the southern deputies demonstrates, although the split among the former nomenklatura cost it access to the state resources, its continued access to personal, regional, and tribal sources of support makes it harder for the government to use repression to depoliticize it. In concrete terms, in addition to his own pro-reform orientation, the potential high cost of a punitive action against the resourceful southern deputies discouraged Akayev not only from blocking their electoral participation but also from canceling the election.

In spite of his reportedly private negative assessment about the election, Akayev did refrain from openly questioning the electoral outcome. He rather accepted the electoral outcome and tried to rationalize his acceptance. In his expressed opinion, there were some, not massive, violations which occurred in the election and imputed
them to the under-development of democratic culture of society. While he sounded optimistic that the next parliamentary election would be truly democratic, competitive, free and fair, he emphasized the need to change the current electoral law which neither fit the "specific features of Kyrgyzstan" nor the "mentality of its people" (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 9, 1995:15). What the preceding discussion of the electoral outcome suggests is that the Akayev government's manipulation and control of the campaign and voting, if at all, were of restricted nature and produced limited desirable consequences.

In addition to the electoral result, there is another body of evidence which clearly shows that the republic authorities have been greatly reluctant to interfere with the electoral process. As already mentioned, the CEC had registered even those candidates who were involved in financial corruption. The same candidates also spent huge black money to win election. The Prosecutor General twice requested the CEC to allow the former to prosecute several candidates (former deputies and some directors of enterprises) suspected of financial corruption (CSCE, 1995:9). Prosecution of these candidates would have certainly affected the campaign and voting and perhaps the electoral outcome would have been quite different. In spite of the fact that the government could round up several candidates and remove them out of the electoral race, it did not pressurize the government-dominated CEC into accepting the government demand. The government appears to have tolerated participation of corrupt candidates in the election rather than provoke accusations of intimidation of opposition candidates and of interference with the electoral process. It appears that
the local officials especially the regional heads acted on their own, independent of the preferences of the Akayev government. The result was a parliament which Akayev had hardly wished and anticipated.

There is also evidence of serious government concern and effort to educate the people about and conduct a free and fair election. In this regard, the government broadcast public service announcements twice a day in Kyrgyz and Russian. A number of international agencies helped the Kyrgyz government prepare such announcements. In fact, parallel to the reports of irregularities, there were reports of lawful electoral practices in the campaign and voting. If few candidates were refused television airtime, there were hundreds of electoral contestants, including opposition candidates, who received their mandated airtime on government-controlled television and radio. In addition, independent as well as government-owned newspapers provided a considerable coverage to the campaign. They printed platforms of candidates as well as instructions on how to vote in the election (CSCE, 1995:9). If there were reports that at certain places election officials ignored or violated formal electoral rules, there were also reports that they enforced such rules. At many places, the election officials "staunchly refused to let people vote for others or to vote without proper documents" (CSCE, 1995:10). After mentioning the election commission officials' lapses in observing the badly drafted election law, one British journalist who witnessed the election (and has been critical of certain aspects of the election) concedes that "voting at many polling stations was nevertheless reasonably fair" (Pryde, 1995:115).
The above discussion highlights two important points. First, the Akayev government did not make a concerted effort to control the campaign and voting in order to produce a specific electoral outcome. The few irregularities which can arguably be imputed to it were of individual nature. Secondly, most irregularities which occurred in the campaign and voting were the handiwork of the regional heads and powerful individuals rather than the Akayev government. These elements took advantage of the inaction of the government and absence of any meaningful government interference in the electoral process rather than government interference in it. As a result, they were able to run the campaign the way they deemed fit.

Although the government inaction might be prejudicial to the interests of a handful of individual candidates in the short run and to democratic consolidation in the long run, it did provide considerable space and freedom to hundreds of candidates in the 1995 parliamentary election.

In April 1995, it became quite clear that the new parliament was far from being a rubber stamp or a more pliable body than the previous parliament. Taking the lead from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan where terms of the incumbents presidents were extended through Soviet-style national referenda, the Akayev loyalists inside as well outside the parliament launched a campaign to do the same in Kyrgyzstan. A signature campaign was organized for this purpose. However, the majority of the deputies voted down a resolution for such a referendum describing it as unconstitutional (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 43, 1995:21). In accordance with the parliamentary decision, Akayev organized and contested a multi-
candidate presidential election in December 1995. If the parliament could not get its way, nor could Akayev—a situation conducive for political liberalization. In other words, both could not dictate terms to each other. And this case amply demonstrates how a split elite structure in Kyrgyzstan promoted the cause of political liberalization. In fact, not only his own democratic outlook but also the refusal of the members of the parliament to assume a totally pliant role forced Akayev to contest a competitive presidential election in December 1995.

According to the election law, a presidential candidate needed 50,000 signatures, gathering a certain number from each of the six provinces of the country. Initially, the CEC registered six candidates including Akayev. Almost two weeks before the election, three opposition candidates were deregistered after local government officials successfully proved in the court irregularities in their lists of signatures required for registration of a presidential candidate. The disqualified candidates along with their assistants staged a huger strike but it was of no avail. After the disqualification of three candidates, Akayev had to compete with two more candidates, Absamat Masaliyev of the communist party and Medetkan Sherimkulov, the former speaker of the parliament and a former Central Committee Secretary.

Although the three of the five opposition candidates were disqualified during the last stage of the presidential campaign, all the five electoral opponents of Akayev were free to campaign. There were no reports, except an isolated incident, that they faced any serious hurdles from the government. All the five opposition candidates were free to subject his market-oriented reforms to serious criticism. The isolated
incident involving the government action against one of the opposition candidates occurred two days before the election. This incident involved the arrest of two campaign workers of Sherimkulov for distributing pamphlets which allegedly slandered the president. Likewise, except isolated instances of fraud reported on election day, the election was quite free and fair. Akayev was able to easily defeat his two electoral competitors who were weak candidates partly due to the fact that both relied on and divided up among themselves their communist supporters.

It is clear from the above discussion that Akayev avoided the use of coercive methods to close the electoral process to his critics and opponents (of course, with the questionable exception of two presidential candidates). However, he did not pursue the same open approach toward the opposition press and journalists in a consistent manner in the post-independence period. The next section will deal with the degree of freedom which was available to the opposition press in the post-independence period.

GOVERNMENT-PRESS RELATIONS: FROM HONEYMOON TO CONFRONTATION

The press and media policy Akayev and his team pursued in the post-independence period can be divided into two broad phases. The first phase began with the independence and ended in mid-1994. The Akayev administration pursued a considerably liberal press and media policy in the first phase. One can assert without any doubt that especially the independent press was far more free in Kyrgyzstan than in any other Central Asian republic during this period. The independent print media
had relatively greater freedom to take root, debate sensitive issues, and publish material even critical of the government and its policies in Kyrgyzstan.

The liberal phase ended in mid-1994 to usher in the second phase with a relatively restrictive press and media policy. The Akayev government curtailed the freedom of independent newspapers and journalists. A host of intimidating and punitive measures sullied the impressive record of political liberalization the republican leadership was able to build in part due to its previous considerably liberal policy toward the independent print media and its representatives. These punitive measures include the closure of various opposition newspapers and persecution of journalists for their criticism of the leading executive officials.

Although the honeymoon period for the independent press ended in 1994, the restrictive press and media policy Akayev and his team adopted in the second phase was still the least restrictive in the entire region. A detailed discussion of the two phases is attempted below in order to further clarify the above points and observations.

As already mentioned, after he was elected president in October 1990, Akayev pursued a benign press and media policy in line with an all-union law on the press and media. The all-union law which came into effect on August 1, 1990, guaranteed the press freedom. After independence, the all-union law continued to serve as the basic legal framework to deal with the press, and Akayev continued his pre-independence benign policy toward the national as well as international print media. In July 1992, the republican parliament passed a new mass media law, almost
a carbon copy of the above all-union law. The July 1992 law guarantees freedom of the mass media. It supports a journalist's right to obtain and publish information without prior approval or restraint. A journalist is also guaranteed the right to protect his sources of information. The law also requires that all institutions of mass media must register with the Ministry of Justice and await the official approval before engaging in any operation.

While basic guarantees for the press freedom are provided in the law, certain restrictions are also codified in order to supposedly prevent the abuse of the freedom of the mass media. These restrictions deal with state secrets, forcible overthrow of the existing constitutional order, calls for war, violence, and intolerance toward various social groups, and desecration of national values. The law also makes it impermissible for the press to encroach on the privacy and honor and dignity of individual citizens and to publish false information. A similar clause on the protection of honor of the president was considered but was dropped because Akayev was opposed to it (State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992 and 1993:821 and 943 respectively).

The July 1992 law, like above the all-union law, contained a number of provisions which could be stretched and exploited to restrict freedom of the press and media. For instance, the requirement that all media must seek and await official recognition before beginning to operate could be used to curb the rise of independent print media. However, Akayev and his team eschewed such tactics during the first phase. The Akayev government pursued a very liberal registration policy. There are
no reports to indicate that the government refused to register a publication for political reasons. As a result of a liberal registration policy, independent institutions of news media continued to rise in the republic.

In addition to the state-owned news media, fully independent mass media institutions such as newspapers, magazines, television networks, and radio stations have appeared in Kyrgyzstan in the post-independence period. These institutions of mass media have a host of founders, including political parties, social movements, professional groups, civil and cultural formations, and individual citizens. The parliament also had its own newspaper, Svobodnye gory, which played the role of opposition before it was shut down in August 1994.

It is outside the scope of this study to discuss in detail each and every independent newspaper which existed in the post-independence period. It will suffice for our purpose to identify notable independent media outlets and briefly discuss the freedom of expression they enjoyed in the post-independence period.

In addition to Svobodnye gory, other notable independent and opposition newspapers which have existed in the post-independence period include Vechernii Bishkek, Res Publica, Delo No, Politika, Erk, Asaba, and Femida. Vechernii Bishkek is an independent and the most professional newspaper with the largest circulation in the country. Res publica and Asaba are the most impeccable representatives of the opposition press. Politika was founded and edited by a woman until it, like Svobodnye gory, was closed down in August 1994. Politika was a supplement to Delo No, a
Bishkek-based moderately opposition-oriented newspaper. Erk is the mouthpiece of Erkin Kyrgyzstan, an ethnonationalist political party.

Like Erk which seeks to promote interests of ethnic Kyrgyz, newspapers representing interests of other ethnic groups have also cropped up in the country. As already mentioned, Soglasie and several other Slavic associations have founded their own mouthpiece, Soglasie. Although the Osh city features independent and small circulation Russian and Uzbek newspapers such as Mizon of Uzbeks and Devovoi Osh (Business Osh) of Russians, these newspapers have usually eschewed the role of opposition. Osh also features independent, private television stations such as Osh TV and Mizon TV. Mizon TV is an Uzbek-language station. Osh TV has wider audience. It has its own facilities. As of 1997, Osh TV was reportedly moving, though quite slowly and cautiously, in the direction of featuring political commentaries (CSCE, 1995:1-6; CSCE, 1998:16-26).

As already mentioned, Akayev generally respected the freedom of the press even before the July 1992 law was passed. In fact, he wanted to have a close and respectable relationship with the national as well as international press and media. It became quite obvious shortly after independence that unlike other Central Asian leaders, Akayev wanted more rather than less news coverage of the entire region of Central Asia. He took personal initiatives to court the news media in this regard. In March 1992, he organized a conference in Bishkek of news media executives from the leading newspapers of the CIS and the representatives of the press services of the Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan. In his address to the conference participants,
Akayev pressed upon them to provide the region more newspaper space. He lamented the information vacuum in Central Asian at a time when values and ideas were forming in the region. By way of assuring the press and media that he would tolerate even critical news coverage of his republic, Akayev asserted that he did not expect everyone to agree with his democratic ways and ideas or his ways of creating a law-governed society. He further noted that he needed not only allies in the press, but also opponents who could be just as useful as allies because opponents forced him to think better and act enthusiastically. However, he expected the opposition press to perform its duties in a professional and civilized way (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 12, 1992:34).

Whether the opposition print media lived up to his standards and expectations or not, Akayev generally remained faithful to his views at least until mid-1994. Although his government exercised influence over the state-owned media, the independent and government newspapers have been generally free to print material without prior government approval or restriction. The government press and media avoided direct criticism of the executive leadership and were susceptible to self-censorship. However, leaving aside self-censorship cases which are difficult to document, there were no reports to indicate that the government imposed prior restriction or censorship on the independent and state-owned news media.

Until mid-1994, journalists working for various newspapers across the country were free from government pressure, intimidation, and threats. In August 1993, the Ministry of Justice made an effort to curtail freedom of the press and its
representatives. The Ministry tried to initiate a screening process for press material in order to stop publication of classified information. The independent as well as government newspapers lashed out at the move as an effort to reinstitute censorship. In the absence of Akayev, the Vice President quickly issued an executive decree to reverse the initiative and to reaffirm the government's commitment to the freedom of the press.

In fact, during the first three years of independence, the press freely debated several unsavory issues in ways critical of the government and its policies. Inter- and intra-ethnic disputes, nature and failure of the transition policies, distribution of power, constitutional matters, official incompetence, mismanagement and corruption were some of these unsavory issues. Shortly after independence, press debates broke out on a number of politically sensitive and potentially divisive issues. Let alone the common heated debates on inter-ethnic issues, reports of intense intra-Kyrgyz disputes were regularly published in the press. For instance, in early February 1992, two popular newspapers raised a politically sensitive controversy over the preponderance of the northerners over their southern coethnics in the state power structures (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 10, 1992:5). It was not a one time episode, rather the press continued to cover it in the subsequent period (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 43, 1992:24-25).

The republican leadership not only tolerated such politically sensitive debates and other cases of adverse news coverage of the republic but it also defended authors of these critical debates and commentaries and tried to present its own case to the
press. For instance, in September 1993, in a statement of the government press
service, a local Russian journalist working for the Russian television network,
Ostankino, was accused of pejorative reporting about Kyrgyzstan. The statement
concluded that it was not lawful for a foreign journalist to insult the people of his
temporary abode.

In fact, the journalist was born in Bishkek, lived in the republic for the past 30
years and was a Kyrgyz citizen of Russian origin. The local Russian-language
newspapers lashed out at the government press service statement. The press service
was criticized for portraying the journalist as a foreigner and for its clumsy effort to
suppress accurate presentation of the negative side of the life in the country. Above
all, Akayev publicly defended the journalist and criticized the press service officials
for their clumsiness. Although the press service defended its version but assured the
news media that the episode has no bearing on the news media as a whole (State
Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1993:943). Likewise,
Akayev had a two-hour discussion with a Russian reporter of a Moscow-based
newspaper in order to successfully dispel his skepticism he expressed in an article on
the future of ethnic Russians in Kyrgyzstan (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no.
22, 1994:23). In line with our theoretical expectation, these episodes clearly
demonstrate that the readiness and willingness of the Russian-speaking population and
the local and foreign Russian-language press to defend their interests and the
sensitivity of the republic leadership to their concerns exert a positive impact on
political liberalization in the republic in the post-independence period.
In addition to ethnic issues, other questions were also freely and regularly debated in the press. The independent press continued to publish criticism of the government and a host of its policies in 1991 and 1992. Such criticism intensified in 1993. Political parties also sharpened their criticism of the government. For example, Asaba and Erkin Kyrgyzstan became more vocal in their attacks on the government. In a conference of democratic forces held at the initiative of Akayev in March 1993, Erkin Kyrgyzstan and Asaba presented an ultimatum and demanded the resignation of the prime minister, Tursunbek Chnigishev (Haghayeghi, 1995:118). Such attacks of political parties were regularly published in the independent and opposition newspapers. After all, Erkin Kyrgyzstan had its own newspaper, Erk, to publish its criticism of the government and its various actions.

The most acrimonious debate the national press covered since independence was focused on official corruption. The central authorities were most vulnerable and sensitive to accusations of corruption. Politics and details of such accusations have been discussed in the previous section. Here, we will confine our focus to the role of the press and government reaction.

In 1993, the opposition sharpened its criticism of the government for widespread official corruption. The independent and opposition newspapers like Res Publica, Politika, and Svobodnye gory played an active role in exposing and reporting cases of official corruption. The press and media were spared in the early responses Akayev adopted to deal with the mounting political crisis. However, as the 1993-94 political crisis worsened, he connived with the regional heads to successfully weaken
the parliament and included the press, too, on the list of problems to deal with. As part of his presidential responses to the political crisis, he reviewed his approach toward the independent and opposition press and ushered in a moderately restrictive phase of his press and media policy in the summer of 1994.

In the wake of the 1993-94 political crisis, Akayev began to use for the first time the July 1992 law on the mass media to hold the press and journalists accountable for what they wrote and published. In May 1994, in line with the law on protecting state secrets, the Akayev government restricted the subjects journalists could write about. In fact, the 1992 law was supplemented with other restrictive decrees, orders, and laws. For instance, the 1993 Constitution has been amended to make honor of the president inviolable.

In the wake of the 1993-94 crisis, Akayev also, for the first time, began to openly criticize the press for its continued irresponsible behavior. In fact, the press accounts implicating him personally in the widespread official corruption were prejudicial to his image as an upright, genuine democratic reformer. He was not willing to let the opposition press publicly call him corrupt under the cover of the press freedom. He reversed his earlier position and set up a committee for the defense of his honor (Huskey, 1997:257-8). The committee was assigned with the responsibility to ensure that no one used false information to sully the honor and reputation of the president.

As the executive-legislative confrontation intensified, the pro-Akayev deputies accused in July 1994 the parliament speaker and the parliament-owned newspaper,
Svobodnye gory, of hatching conspiracies to overthrow the president. In August 1994, Akayev himself lashed out at the newspaper for harboring communist sympathies, for publishing anti-Semitic information, and for printing material critical of other states, hence damaging Kyrgyzstan's relation with them. The last objection referred to the newspaper's criticism on other Central Asian leaders. Akayev initiated legal action against the newspaper and a Bishkek court shut down the newspaper in August 1994. The editor of Svobodnye gory offered, however, a different reason for the government action against the newspaper. According to her, the newspaper had received a report from the parliamentary investigative commission on official corruption and was preparing to publish it, but the central authorities wanted to stop it (CSCE, 1995:4-5).

On August 19, 1994, the same day the government impounded the parliament-owned newspaper, Akayev issued a presidential decree sanctioning the formation of a council on activities of the mass media. The council was sanctioned to "help journalists in their work and prevent the use of the media from causing political instability and upsetting interethnic accord and civic peace" (State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1994:866). In effect, the council sought to stop the publication of material critical of the authorities, especially the president. In addition to the council, the authorities used the security apparatus, the MNB, to contact the editors of the opposition newspapers and journalists and block news coverage critical of the government and its policies (CSCE 1998:22-24).
The closure of Svobodnye gory and formation of the presidential council on
the mass media preceded a series of anti-press actions in the subsequent period. A
number of other opposition newspapers were closed down, and opposition journalists
were intimidated, threatened, beaten, tried, fined, banned from practicing journalism,
and imprisoned on the charges of publishing false information and damaging the
honor and reputation of the president and other high ranking officials. In addition to
Svobodnye gory, Politika was closed down within less than a week after the closure
of the former for its criticism of the president. The central and regional high ranking
officials readily followed the footsteps of Akayev in their dealing with the opposition
press and journalists. For instance, the prime minister secured the closure of Kriminal
in March 1997, for falsely implicating him in financial corruption, and in September
1997, the Osh local authorities sued an Uzbek-language newspaper, Mizon, for
publishing a false article about excesses and corruption of the local police. The fate of
individual opposition journalists from opposition newspapers such as Res Publica and
Femida was no different. The editors and journalists from these newspapers were
beaten, fined, and imprisoned for slandering the president and other leading executive

The above discussion of anti-press measures the Akayev government adopted
since mid-1994 offers three important points. Firstly, it is quite clear that the press
and journalists received a heavy-handed treatment from the central and local
authorities since mid-1994. Secondly, at times the press made indiscriminate personal
accusations without proof and, as a result, rendered itself defenseless in law suits.

Thirdly, the opposition press and journalists proved resilient. In spite of their constant confrontation with the press since mid-1994, the central authorities have been unable to silence the independent press and journalists. The opposition press never ceased to publish reports critical of the president and government.

It is important to note that the press has been able to show resilience in large part due to the restraint the Akayev government exercised in its dealing with the press. Although Akayev and other leading executive officials have shown readiness to punish those who hurl personal accusations of corruption on them without proof, they refrained from suppressing and silencing all forms of criticism and difference of opinion expressed in the media outlets. They have also avoided flushing out all the independent newspapers. As of 1997, there were approximately 40 to 50 independent newspapers and magazines in Kyrgyzstan (State Department. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997:1154).

Since mid-1994, a number of independent opposition newspapers and journalists have printed reports critical of the local as well as central authorities and suffered no punitive government reactions. In 1994, local newspapers reported stories of local police excesses. The same year the Kyrgyz-Human Rights Bureau and an independent newspaper, Delo No, joined hands to champion the cause of the reported victims of police injustices (State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1994:865, 868). While the local authorities in Osh sued Mizon for its
report on police corruption, Delo No was able to write on the same subject without

In spite of the effort of the presidential council on the mass media to
discourage critical coverage of the president in the press, independent newspapers like
Res Publica, an impeccable representative of opposition newspapers, continued to
publish articles critical of the President, the Government, and government policy
Res Publica, Asaba, in spite of government warning, also continued to publish articles
critical of the republic leadership. In September 1997, one issue of Asaba featured
eight articles against Akayev. This fact serves as an ample proof that even impeccable
representative of the opposition newspapers like Asaba were free to publish material
without prior censorship.

In October 1997, Vechernii Bishkek defended Dooronbek Sadyrabaev, a
deputy from Osh, when he ran into troubles with the government over his remarks
about the possible secession of the southern regions due to unwise economic, political,
and cadre policies of the government. In his remarks, the deputy faulted the president,
too. The Prosecutor General warned the deputy that his remarks had "an
anti-constitutional character" because they threatened territorial integrity of the
country. The deputy maintained that he warned the government of possible secession,
rather than called for it. Vechernii Bishkek featured his defense on its front page,
concluding that his position sounded credible (CSCE, 1998:21). Even opposition
leaders partially confirm the above assertion regarding the freedom of the press. For

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instance, while they criticize Akayev and his policies during their meetings with the international visitors concerned with human rights situation and complain about the lack of a real independent television, many opposition parliamentarians concede that there are few newspapers which can voice criticism of the authorities. These things are "unthinkable in Uzbekistan" (CSCE, 1998:18).

CONCLUSION

The way the political liberalization process unfolded in Kyrgyzstan in the pre- and post-independence period makes it clear that political orientation, actions, and strategies of the leader in power are of important consequences for the transition process in relatively less developed former communist polities. However, it also becomes clear that although these factors may magnify or weaken the situational stimuli, structural factors continue to exercise an independent influence on political liberalization in such polities. This is true of both the Masaliyev and Akayev eras in Kyrgyzstan.

In spite of his anti-reformist views and efforts, Masaliyev was only partially successful in circumventing the implementation of glasnost in Kyrgyzstan because the pressure of central authorities, active political participation of Russian minority, and growing fragmentation among the republican communist elites increasingly neutralized such efforts and weakened his control of politics in the republic. Informal sociopolitical groups arose and opposed the communist party, certain republican newspapers and journalists engaged in independent and critical news coverage especially after the Osh conflict in June 1991, a number of independent candidates
were able to participate and defeat their communist competitors in national and republican parliamentary elections, and challenge the communist leadership during the Masaliyev era. This situation ultimately cost him power position, brought Akayev into power, and paved the way for greater political openness in the republic.

If Masaliyev sought to circumvent glasnost in line with his anti-reformist views, Akayev sought to expand and deepen it after he became president in October 1990. The latter’s reformist orientation supplemented the existing factors favorable to glasnost such as the central leadership’s support, active participation of ethnic groups such as Kyrgyz and Russian in the political process, and increasingly disintegrating communist elite structure. Before independence, only under Akayev opposition groups were for the first time able to function without fear of intimidation and repression. In alliance with democratically-oriented local forces and with the blessings of the central authorities, but contrary to the wishes of the republican communist leadership, Akayev was able to accelerate the political liberalization process in his republic through presidential initiatives. As a result of his efforts, legal foundations for political pluralism, and especially all the necessary parts of a multi-party political system, were put in place before independence.

Except the Soviet pressure for political reform, all other factors conducive for political liberalization in the pre-independence remained more or less intact in the post-independence period. In other words, Akayev’s reformist orientation, political participation of large, resourceful Russian minority, and fragmented elite structure saw no significant change. Consequently, Akayev continued his reform agenda in the
post-independence period. As a result of his relatively liberal policy, a host of independent political parties and social movements (ranging from ethnonationalist to liberal democratic ones) with diverse orientations have been able to freely form, operate, and participate in the political processes (including electoral process) in the country in the post-independence. In fact, freedom of independent political and social forces to organize themselves and pursue their expressed objectives is one of the areas in which Kyrgyzstan has recorded more or less sustained progress and other regional countries have so far been unable to emulate it. As a result of this freedom, a genuinely independent, although weak, multiparty system has appeared in Kyrgyzstan in the post-independence era. More or less similar degree of freedom was available to the independent mass media, at least in the immediate post-independence period.

The political liberalization process came under strains by mid-1994. It suffered reversals in certain areas, especially the press freedom, in the wake of the 1993-94 political crisis rooted in the executive-legislative branch confrontation on a number of issues, including the widespread official corruption. The sources of these reversals include Akayev's political strategies to deal with this confrontation and the irresponsible behavior of the mass media.

In spite of these reversals in the political liberalization process since mid-1994, Akayev exercised restraint in his dealing with his political opponents. The sources of this restraint included his own liberal views, his concern to prevent migration of ethnic Russians for economic as well as political reasons, and fragmented elite structure, especially the independent parliament and powerful individual political
actors affiliated with various clans and regions. As a result, even after the limited authoritarian offensive began in mid-1994, there were still vibrant independent mass media institutions, journalists, and political parties in Kyrgyzstan—a fact which sets that country apart from other Central Asian countries in terms of an overall progress in all aspects of political liberalization.

Is the present level of political liberalization likely to hold in the foreseeable future? Will it evolve into the next stage of democratization, which the recent regime transition literature expects to occur, on the road to consolidated democracy? Or will it evolve into another viable political alternative based on the rule of law? Or will it degenerate into an abject repressive regime such as in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan? It is hard to answer these questions with an element of certainty for various reasons, including the uncertain post-communist situation in Kyrgyzstan. However, a good deal of information is available to help us broadly speculate about the future prospects of political liberalization in that country.

Of course, the reformist leadership of Akayev is an important reason for the lead Kyrgyzstan achieved over Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in almost all areas of political liberalization in the post-independence period. There is no signs of imminent change in his political orientation and his political choices so far do not smack of latent authoritarian tendencies. Also, if his past record is any guide, socioeconomic crises of ordinary proportion are unlikely to lead him to impose a violent authoritarian order. Therefore, we can safely say that the political liberalization process is unlikely to degenerate into an abject repressive regime under his remaining presidential term.
which is coming to an end in 2000. The Supreme Court has allowed him to run for a third term because his 1991 election occurred prior to the adoption of the current constitution according to which an individual can become president for two terms only. A number of political forces are opposing this decision. If he runs for the another term and decides to stay in power beyond 2000, he is more likely to resort to political tactics rather than brutal force to deal with this opposition. In other words, the political liberalization process is unlikely to suffer a serious setback so far as Akayev remains content with the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the constitution and refrains from prolonging his rule beyond the third term.

If Akayev is replaced with a conservative leadership, the political liberalization process in the republic can suffer setbacks in certain areas. However, chances of the rise of an abject repressive regime are still minimal for two reasons. First, two important factors conducive for political liberalization, the resourceful Russian minority and powerful elites divided along ideological, ethnic, tribal, and regional lines are likely to hold good in the foreseeable future. The conservative leadership will find it extremely hard and risky to neutralize these two important favorable factors. The Russian minority is unlikely to support the imposition of a violent authoritarian order for several reasons, including the fear of provoking anti-Russian feelings among politically active groups in the republic. The resourcefulness of the Russian minority, including the support of Russian troops based on the Kyrgyz soil, will effectively protect it from excessive repression. Also, powerful elites are so sharply divided that it will be very hard for a conservative leadership to unify them.
on the need for an abject repressive regime. Second, in spite of representing a wide
variety of ideological orientations and interests, almost all organized political forces
advocate some variant of democracy. All such forces are likely to resist the
imposition of a violent authoritarian order, increasing the cost of rolling back
whatever political liberalization is available to them. And it will be hard for any
leadership to perpetuate such an order without the support of an organized political
force. Hence, Kyrgyzstan is unlikely to degenerate into an abject repressive regime in
the near future. In other words, its lead over Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in almost all
areas of political liberalization is likely to hold in the foreseeable future.

NOTES

1. The primary target of the authoritarian offensive that began in mid-1994 was the
opposition press and journalists and the parliament. Although it later engulfed a small
number of individual political activists, no political party was banned as has been the
case in Uzbekistan.

2. In 1996, the Russian minority made up only 15.6% of the population in
Kyrgyzstan (Heleniak 1997:371).

3. At the time of independence, approximately three times more Russian-speakers
were employed in industry than members of the titular ethnic group. The Russian-
speakers also outnumber the titular ethnic group in the makeup of the technological
elite. This is the reasons why some have described the flight of non-titular population
as "brain drain" (Olcott 1997:213; Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 17,
1993:12).

4. For instance, the Commission for the Support of Compatriots, set up by the
Russian government to look after the interests of the Russian minority in the former
Soviet space, provided newsprint and computers and other equipment to the Slavic
Fund and Concord (Soglasie), two leading Russian-oriented sociopolitical associations
in Kyrgyzstan (Huskey 1998:270). In addition, Russia helped in setting up a Kyrgyz-
Russian investment fund to convert enterprises in Kyrgyzstan that employ mainly
Russian-speakers into joint ventures (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 8,
5. Besides Shipitko, three more independent candidates succeeded in defeating their communist competitors in these elections in the capital city. These three independent candidates are Oleg Igumnov, a high school teacher, E. Akramov, a surgeon, and A. Komarov, the director of an environmental research institute (Huskey 1995:820).

6. The true value of this group became evident once the new parliament opened its first session on April 10, 1990. At the opening session of the new parliament, a number of reformist deputies voiced their opposition to the communist party and its practices. Above all, these deputies tried to put up their own candidate against Masaliyev in the election for the chairman of the new parliament. However, by a majority vote, the communist deputies refused the independent candidate a slot on the ballot.

7. The group also openly accused the party leadership and economic bureaucracy for making a sustained effort "to foil all grass-roots political initiatives in the development of democratic process." The fact that the new republican parliament was "becoming hostage to this practice" was lamented. The party leadership was criticized for continuing the past practice of deciding "everything...at the level of the Party committees, and not in completely objective and principled fashion" and for disregarding the sovereignty of the new, democratically elected republican parliament by keeping actual policy process out of its control. A special reference was made to the fact that the parliament was denied an opportunity to express its views on the Osh incident which literally rocked the whole republic (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 38, 1990:23).

8. Apas Jumagulov, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and D. Amanbayev, the first secretary of the party committee in the Issyk-Kul province, were the other two presidential candidates.

9. The impact of such defections was clearly felt on two occasions. First, on the eve of the August 1991 coup, the republican communist party leadership which supported the coup failed, despite its desire, to move against Akayev. Second, it failed to prevent him from initiating legal proceedings against its members for supporting the 1991 coup and from banning its activities in the republic in the post-independence period.

10. For instance, two out of three candidates who contested the December 1995 presidential elections were important communist leaders, Absamat Masaliyev, the First Secretary of the communist party, and Medetkan Sherimkulov, the former speaker of the parliament and a former Central Committee Secretary of the party.

11. A number of important political leaders represent these geographic regions. For instance, the longtime party boss Usbaliyev and president Akayev come from Naryn, and Masaliyev represents Talas (Olcott 1993:55).
12. Due to the shortcomings of the 1995 parliamentary elections, Akayev reportedly contemplated to annul the elections. However, the fear of potential hostile reaction of the resourceful southern candidates who succeeded in these elections reportedly prevented him from taking such a radical step (Pryde 1995:115-6).

13. In early 1992, the republic's press reported the protest of the southern political elites over the preponderance of the northern elites in the state power structures (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 10, 1992:5; no. 43, 1992:24-5).

14. Khazanov is of the view that the main problem Akayev is facing is his relations with the former communists because they still occupy the dominant positions in the government and administration and constitute the most serious political force in the parliament. He believes that they "are able to sabotage any serious attempt at reforms" (Khazanov 1995:148). It is true that the former communists are occupying dominant position in the government, but they can not (and did not) put up an open challenge to the political reform program.

15. In his speech on the introduction of presidential rule in the country, Akayev supported this reform measure but at the same time expressed his apprehension that excessive concentration of power in the president's hand could lead to an authoritarian regime. He demanded to formulate more precisely and more clearly constitutional guarantees that presidential power would not develop into authoritarian power (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 12, 1990:6).

16. According to Akayev, the people who carried out the coup and those who supported it were motivated by their "desire to preserve the state power and totalitarian regime that are slipping away from them" (Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 33, 1991:25).

17. The fact that, in spite of his liberal orientation, he banned the communist party in the post-independence period partly supports this assertion.

18. In spite of the fact that he suspected the commitment of the communist party, the most organized party in the republic, to democracy, he suggested to hold parliamentary elections on the basis of lists provided by political parties (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 42, 1992:7)—a measure bound to strengthen national political parties, including the communist party, rather than individual local political leaders.

19. Initially, Akayev was supporter of maximum freedom of the press. He was opposed to libel laws. Over time, as the opposition press began to put out information implicating him and other officials without evidence, he supported the idea of holding such people responsible for their actions. As a result, he supported libel laws to prosecute institutions of mass media for putting out false information.
20. Referring to the shortcomings of the 1995 parliamentary elections, Akayev remarked that the current law on elections does not fit either the specific features of Kyrgyzstan or the mentality of its people (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no. 9, 1995:15).

21. These common reasons include: a) Gorbachev’s view of Islam as a reactionary force which could undermine his reform initiatives (Olcott 1990:375); b) a massive anti corruption campaign in Central Asia; c) the Soviet authorities’ view of the Central Asian informal groups as accomplices of the corrupt officials and sources of growing anti-Soviet direction, ethnonational tensions, and violent conflicts in the region (Critchlow 1991:146-7) and d) overcautious population.

22. The list of corrupt party members who were purged after Masaliyev took power in 1985 included the second party secretary and two oblast secretaries, in addition to several hundred other party and state functionaries (Haghayeghi, 1995:50).

23. Although the Gorbachev reform program was essentially beyond his independent manipulation, Masaliyev sought to line up behind the anti-reformist forces active at the center under the leadership of Yegor Ligachev to block it (BBC, September 12, 1989; Huskey 1995:818). When Ligachev visited Kyrgyzstan in September 1989, he shared the concern with the republican communist leadership that certain mass media were biased in their negative coverage of the state of affairs in the republic (BBC, September 12, 1989). In addition, the First Deputy Chairman of the Kyrgyz Council of Ministers made an important revelation in August 1990 that the Kyrgyz leadership permitted Ligachev and his emissaries to dictate the cadre policy in its republic during this period (Huskey 1995:818).

24. As some representatives of the local press confided to their colleagues in the central newspapers, any serious material that debated important societal problems and criticized the republic communist leaders even at the district level for one reason or another was prevented from reaching the Kyrgyz masses. If a critical item ever escaped official censors, an immediate effort was made to convince the public that it was false (FBIS, July 29, 1988:61).

25. As these clubs sought to assume a more explicit and independent political profile over time, their activities were curtailed (Haghayeghi 1995:108; Current Digest of Soviet Press, no. 2, 1989:18; Huskey 1995:832; 1997:250).

26. The DMK played an important role during the Osh conflict. After the communist authorities failed to prevent the bloodshed, they enlisted the support of the DMK. The DMK leadership obliged the communist authorities but humbled them by organizing rallies in the capital city and by making wide ranging demands, including the independence of the republic with a right to secede from the center, adoption of a multi-party democratic political system, and resignation of the incumbent ruling elites (Haghayeghi 1995:109).
27. According to official statistics, which were conservative, 320 people were killed in these violent clashes (Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, no 1, 1993:6).

28. In Osh, people raised banners in Uzbek language with the following slogan: "There is no justice" (The Financial Times, July 20, 1990:2). The serious erosion of the communist leadership's standing in society also became obvious when Masaliyev failed, despite his repeated requests, but the opposition leader of the DMK, Tupchubek Turgunaliev, succeeded in dispersing a mass protest rally of ethnic Kyrgyz in front of the communist party headquarters in the capital city.

29. Let alone their electoral competitors, they had to face at the peak of the election campaign several mass demonstrations of ethnic Kyrgyz in support of their nationalist demands, including the demand for an immediate implementation of the new language law in the republic. In order to pacify the demonstrators and prevent a law and order situation, the communist authorities took a number of steps including open forums which were scenes of heated debates between senior party and government officials on the one hand and representatives of demonstrators and informal groups on the other (Huskey, 1995:822-6).

30. According to the official sources, the delay occurred due to the fact that a number of clauses in its initial charter referred to it as a paramilitary formation. According to the Cossack version, the authorities resisted registration on the pretext that the Cossacks had no historical ties to the country (State Dept, Country Reports On Human Rights Practices for 1993:944).

31. One of such arbitrary and unconstitutional measures was his decision to sanction the formation of a constitutional assembly to revise the constitution. Another questionable decision involved holding of a national referendum on constitutional amendments in October 1994.

32. The lower house is a permanent legislative body, whereas the upper house is designed to hold scheduled sessions rather than on permanent basis to approve the budget, presidential appointees and important laws.

33. For instance, the speaker of the former parliament questioned the need for and the wisdom behind a bi-cameral rather than a single chamber legislature in a unitary state like Kyrgyzstan (CSCE, 1995:5).

34. In one instance, a candidate contested and won his seat while hiding from the government (CSCE 1995:9).
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

CONCLUSIONS

After their independence in 1991, the Central Asian republics, experienced several common political outcomes such as the dominance of the executive, secularism, and a high degree of statism—seemingly legacies of their communist past. The fact that the post-communist Central Asian republics share several common socioeconomic, cultural, political, and historical features seems to have led students of Central Asia to focus on these and other common political outcomes, envision more or less similar trajectories of their political development, and overlook and/or deemphasize political variance among them in the post-communist era. However salient common political outcomes, they do not overshadow the fact that these countries experienced significant variation in the area of political liberalization.

This study is clearly the product of our concern with this gap and its adequate theoretical explanation. In this study we tried to show that three Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, significantly vary in political liberalization and provide an adequate theoretical explanation of this variation. The central question this study raised and tried to adequately answer was: Why these countries which share several common characteristics experienced significant variation in political liberalization within few years of their independence? We believe that this study has succeeded in this endeavor.
VARIANCE IN POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION

This study has clearly illustrated that our thesis about differential rates of political openness in Central Asia has merit. In other words, the three Central Asian countries can be located at different points on the political liberalization scale: Kyrgyzstan leads the group in all aspects of political liberalization, Kazakhstan follows with some important achievements, and Uzbekistan is far behind either of them with little or no progress in the post-communist political transition. Kyrgyzstan needs to institutionalize many liberalized practices and put an end to few aberrations in order to evolve into an enduring political alternative; Kazakhstan needs to institutionalize some liberalized practices and liberalize many authoritarian practices; and Uzbekistan is yet to introduce, let alone institutionalize, genuine political reforms in society.

The Central Asian republics began to experience varying rate of political openness in the wake of the Gorbachev reform program in the pre-independence period. The pre-independence variance in the rates of political openness among them became more pronounced in the post-independence period. Kyrgyzstan represents a case of relatively very high level of political liberalization in Central Asia. By mid-1994, the political liberalization process which was making steady progress began to falter and suffered setbacks down the road after Akayev launched a limited authoritarian offensive primarily against the opposition press and journalists. Still, this authoritarian offensive did not degenerate into an abject repressive regime like the one in Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan continues to surpass other republics in terms of an overall
progress in almost all areas of political liberalization. Barring few aberrations, autonomous sociopolitical forces are free to organize themselves, receive official recognition, disseminate their political views and visions through press conferences, newspapers, and mass rallies, and participate in national elections. Although the honeymoon period for the independent press ended in mid-1994 as some independent newspapers were shut down and journalists were persecuted thereafter on charges of sullying the honor of the president, it faces the least restrictive policy in comparison to the independent press in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Kazakhstan represents a moderate case which can be located approximately in the middle between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on the political liberalization scale. After independence, it witnessed an overall improvement in the pre-independence level of political liberalization and sizable independent political space became available to Kazakh society. The Kazakh opposition is largely spared of the kind of indiscriminate, brutal repression the Uzbek opposition is subjected to in the post-independence period. In Kazakhstan, autonomous sociopolitical formations appear and disappear for various reasons. Many pre-independence autonomous social groups evolved into explicitly political parties. Also, a number of new autonomous political formations and independent newspapers were allowed to arise and play the role of an active opposition in the post-independence period. However, at the same time they face serious restrictions, including denial of registration and suspension. Also, opposition forces are seldom allowed to hold rallies; opposition activists are in most cases subjected to disguised and undisguised punitive measures for their role in
unsanctioned rallies; and independent newspapers and journalists are at times persecuted for sullying the honor of the president and for endangering inter-ethnic peace and security of the Kazakh state. In addition, although Kazakh authorities allow limited independent individual and organized participation in the national political process but they effectively preclude a real electoral contest between opposition and government-backed candidates in the national elections. Although this record of political liberalization is modest in comparison to the one Kyrgyzstan achieved in the post-independence period, it is certainly superior to that of Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan represents a case of consciously arrested political liberalization—one of the worst cases of political liberalization in Central Asia. The basic pre-independence authoritarian orientation and character of the Uzbek regime remains unaltered in the post-independence period. Tactics aside, the Uzbek leadership, which never ceases to extol virtues of gradual reformism in the transition from communism to political pluralism, has so far made no genuine effort to liberalize its any authoritarian practices in the post-communist era. Since mid-1992, there has been no tolerated independent political space and activity in the republic. Uzbek leadership uses widespread repression as part of its determined effort to thoroughly emasculate and eliminate both individual and organized opposition voices in the republic and to establish one of most repressive and least reformed post-communist regimes in the region—a regime which has all the democratic trappings but no content.
RUSSIAN MINORITY AND POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION

The central reform measures, including the promotion of local cultures, aimed at socioeconomic and political revitalization of the country clearly politicized societal forces, including the ethnic Russian minority and many members of the republican communist parties, along ethnonational lines in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in the pre-independence period. This conducive condition persists in both the countries in the post-independence period. The members of the ethnic Russian minority who were active in sociopolitical groups before independence either joined different national political parties or formed their own sociopolitical groups exclusively committed to Russian causes in the post-independence period. The demands of the Russian-speaking population and titular nationalities in both the counties are often at variance with each other—a factor which complicates not only the satisfaction of such demands but also the use of indiscriminate repression of opposition forces in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

What further enhances the significance of the ethnic factor for political liberalization in both the countries is the fact that a number of former communists of Russian, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz origin support their respective ethnic communities in pursuit of their interests. The demonstrated Russian material and political support to the Russian minority in the two countries and the looming threat of the Russian military intervention to safeguard the interests of this minority potentially raises to a prohibitive level the cost of indiscriminate repression to thoroughly emasculate independent political forces, including the Russian minority, in them. Political
concessions, including the permission to form sociopolitical and cultural associations, the Kazakh and Kyrgyz authorities concede to the Russian minority for political and economic reasons could not be denied to their titular nationalities for fear of losing nationalist credentials and a national support base—a prospect which would undercut their manipulative tactics to deal with opposition forces, including the Russian minority. As the authorities in both the countries avoid the option of thorough repression of societal forces, including the Russian minority, and allow them to set up genuine independent sociopolitical formations, the fact that these formations would take independent positions on various matters, publicize their political views, and publicly criticize the authorities and their policies is a foregone conclusion. The safe option then Kyrgyz and Kazakh authorities face and pursue is not how to completely depoliticize opposition force but how to either convince them or coerce them through selective repression to tone down their criticism and minimize their involvement in undesirable political activities like protest rallies.

An indiscriminate policy of repression remains an ill-advised option for both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. However, the selective use of repression of certain activists of the Russian minority in Kazakhstan with no such parallels in Kyrgyzstan can be explained by the prevalence of secessionist tendencies and demands among some sections of this minority. Such tendencies and demands unnerve the Kazakh authorities and induce them to take limited risk of selective repression of certain unwanted elements among the Russian minority by using the pretext of maintaining
inter-ethnic harmony and protecting security and territorial integrity of the Kazakh state.

Uzbekistan, in contrast, inherited a proportionally small Russian minority—a factor which impedes its politicization and induces it to leave its welfare to the goodwill of Uzbek authorities. The Russian minority is among the least politically active ethnic group in Uzbekistan with no association of its own working to promote its interests. This fact works to the advantage of Uzbek authorities. They would have paid a greater price to suppress the most resourceful ethnic minority in the country if it had acted on its own to protect its interests in the post-independence period. Another factor which benefits Uzbek authorities is the absence of the official Russian support to the Russian minority not only because of its small size but also because of the close collaboration between Russia and Uzbekistan on certain important geopolitical issues, including the civil war in Tajikistan and the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. Thus, Uzbekistan remains devoid of an important conducive condition for political liberalization in the post-independence period.

Thus, one of the important findings of this study is that the ethnic diversity, which most scholars consider a negative influence in the post-communist transition process, exerts a positive influence on political liberalization if one resourceful ethnic group has a powerful state behind it and if such a group articulates its demands in democratic terms and refrains from threatening the survival of the country in which it lives. Another important finding of this study is that a powerful country with little or no commitment to democratic promotion around the world can facilitate it for its own
tactical reasons. Two important practical implications derive from these findings. First, a number of actors, including local political groups, international institutions, and countries, interested in democratic promotion in Central Asia need to enlist support of the Russian government for their cause. Second, the democratic cause and, hence, the political and civil rights of the Russian minority in Central Asia will be served better if Russian authorities publicly and seriously adopt such cause and cease to support the incumbent authoritarian rulers even if they promise to act as a bulwark against the so-called Islamic and nationalist threats.

ELITE STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION

The pressure of the central reform measures, including the anti-corruption drive and promotion of local cultures, caused multiple division among republican communist party elites in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in the pre-independence period. This division persists in both the countries in the post-independence period and continues to keep the authoritarian impulses of their leaders in check and prevent them from backsliding into abject repressive regimes. This division dispersed political resources in society, eroded a cohesive organized support base for political elites in power and for their repressive policies, strengthened political society in these countries as numerous influential old communists joined various opposition formations and, hence constituted a powerful constraint against abject repression in both the countries in the post-independence period.

The republican communist parties as cohesive political groups lost their direct control of the state in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in the post-independence. However,
the old communists in their individual capacity still command formidable financial and political resources with their continued access to key positions in the public sector and their personal, regional, and tribal sources of support and, thus, remain an important political force thereafter, complicating the option of indiscriminate repression of opposition forces in these countries. What makes them a formidable constraint against indiscriminate repression is not only their continued access to internal resources but also their ability to enlist external, especially Russian, support in their domestic political struggle. This is another important finding of this study. Unlike most other cases of political liberalization where reform-oriented elites of a ruling coalition relied on their internal sources of support in their bid to push for political reform, old communist elites, both reformist and non-reformist, who remain outside the ruling coalitions in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, make an effective use of their external sources of support to become a formidable political force, preventing the incumbent regimes in these countries from lapsing into abject repressive regimes.

It is true that due to the constraints produced by the relatively large Russian minority and fragmented elite structure both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan did not lapse into abject repressive regimes along the lines in Uzbekistan. However, they considerably differ in the level of political liberalization. Thus, the fact that both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have a relatively large ethnic Russian minority and fragmented elite structure but display considerable variation in the level of political liberalization warrants an explanation. The presence and demands of secessionist forces of Russian origin provides part of the explanation. As already mentioned, such
forces unnerve Kazakh authorities and induce them to use selective repression against
certain unwanted elements under the pretext of maintaining inter-ethnic harmony and
neutralizing threats to the security and territorial integrity of the republic. However,
part of the explanation lies in the views of political leadership about political
liberalization and is discussed further below under the section on political leadership.

As compared to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan which both inherited dispersed elites structures, Uzbekistan inherited a remarkable elite unity which developed and solidified during the Soviet period and was clearly demonstrated in the wake of the center-sponsored anti-corruption drive. Barring few instances of small splits and defections from the former republican communist party, including the short-lived appearance of a crack which was partly responsible for a short-lived period of limited political openness in the immediate post-independence period, the elite structure in Uzbekistan remains intact. The intact elite structure preserved the organized support base for the regime in power and its policies and prevented the dispersion of political resources in society, enabling the ruling elites to thoroughly emasculate its political opponents without paying a high cost in the post-communist period.

It is true that the large Russian minority and fragmented elite structure act as powerful constraints on the authoritarian impulses in the Central Asian republics, but they have their own limitations. They account for the broad variance in the general direction of the political liberalization process in these countries, but they cannot adequately explain many specific puzzles, including aberrations in the political liberalization process in a republic when the two structural explanatory variables
remain constant and considerable variance in the levels of political liberalization between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan when both have a proportionally large Russian minority and dispersed elite structures. The political orientations, strategic behavior, and actions of the Central Asian provide answer to these questions.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION

The incorporation of the political leadership variable in our theoretical model is guided by both theoretical assumption and empirical evidence. In other words, the decision to focus on political leadership is based on the theoretical assumption that political leaders are not simply forced by impersonal influences into a pre-determined direction but rather retain some degree of autonomy and mediate the impact of such influences on the political process. Therefore, political orientations of political leaders, the decisions and choices they make, and the preferences and strategies they adopt for one reason or another are relevant to the study of the political liberalization process. Our detailed case studies provide empirical support to this theoretical assertion.

In this study, we found that views of the Central Asian political leaders about political liberalization mediate the gross impact of the structural constraints and influence the political liberalization process in one way or another. In addition, we found that their certain concrete actions (even though such actions do not correspond to their general political orientation) produce a cumulative effect of one sort or another on political liberalization in their countries.
All the three countries experience a continuity in the political leaderships and in their political orientations in the post-independence period. In addition, they also witness a continuity in the impact of certain pre-independence decisions on political liberalization. In other words, not only the views and actions of the Central Asian political leaders in the post-independence era but also those of the pre-independence period influence the variance in political openness in the post-independence period. In addition to directly influencing political liberalization, the respective political leadership of these countries mediate the impact of the Russian minority and elite structure on political liberalization in the post-independence period.

In Kyrgyzstan, Akayev remains committed to political reforms and unlike the Kazakh and Uzbek leaders does not use cultural traditions as a pretext to justify his anti-democratic practices. He rather speaks of his determination to transform his republic into a Central Asian Switzerland, voicing optimism about its future political and economic development. The limited authoritarian offensive he launched in mid-1994 especially against the press and journalists was justified as an appropriate response to false personal accusations rather than a response dictated by cultural traditions and/or political stability. The informal alliance he forged with the democratically-oriented forces before independence continued in one form or another in the post-independence period. Although he did not join any autonomous political formation in the post-independence period, he continues to draw support from many to face challenges, including the communist challenge. His ban on the communist party in the immediate post-independence period, although an anti-democratic action
in nature, proved beneficial for political liberalization in the post-independence period for two reasons. First, this situation split the party and provided non-communist autonomous political forces an opportunity to improve their position in society. Second, it continued to underscore Akayev's continued need of their support for his reform program and to counter the looming communist and other political challenges.

In Kazakhstan, the pre-independence skepticism of the Kazakh leadership about the impact of political liberalization on Kazakh society continues in the post-independence period. It is rather reinforced in the post-independence period due to sharp division of Kazakh society along ethnonational lines and the presence and demands of secessionist forces in the republic. The moderately negative view of Kazakh political leadership about political liberalization and the pretext of secessionist forces it used to selectively repress opposition activists explains the mixed record of Kazakhstan in political liberalization and considerable variation in the levels of political liberalization between Kyrgyzstan and that country.

Although Nazarbayev did not ban the communist party along the lines in Kyrgyzstan, he took certain steps which produced more or less similar beneficial consequences for political liberalization. In the wake of the August 1991 coup, he quit the republican communist party, issued a presidential decree banning the presence of all political parties in state structures and forbidding people with formal party affiliation to hold senior positions in the government, and publicly promised not to join any political party himself. All these steps further eroded the position and unity of the republican communist party, diminished its usefulness as an effective tool of
political control in the republic, and induced former communists to join and organize other sociopolitical formations.

Once Nazarbayev lost attraction in the communist party, he had little incentive to use state power to try to rebuild a divided political organization as a strong base at the cost of other emerging autonomous political formations. An outright drive to crush all opposition forces along the Uzbek lines involves a prohibitive cost and a risk to undermine his own support base. Such drive requires repression of individual political leaders of international repute and formations with considerable political clout whose support he needs and receives on many critical issues, including the presidential elections. And repression of Kazakh nationalist formations and the absence of their demands which are often at variance with demands of the Russian minority could potentially deprive him of the pretext he uses to convince the Russian minority in the republic and the Russian authorities in Moscow that as compared to other potential alternative nationalist leadership he is best suited to serve their interests. The presence of moderate Kazakh and nationalist formations provides him with a leeway to repress his hardened political opponents among Kazakhs and extremist and secessionist elements among Russians, while pointing to the existence of moderate groups as a manifestation his tolerance of autonomous nationalist groups. Thus, the freedom of action for moderate political forces to organize themselves and to engage in a number of independent political activities and repression of the hardened and radical political opponents of Kazakh authorities constitute two distinct elements of their political strategy in the post-independence period.
In Uzbekistan, in the absence of two conducive conditions, the large size of the Russian minority in proportion to the titular nationality and the fragmented elite structure, the importance of the political orientations, decisions, and preferences of the Uzbek leadership for political reform increases in the post-independence period. Before independence, the Uzbek leadership was anything but reformist. Tactics aside, after independence the leadership makes no secret of its anti-reform orientation, its negative view of the impact of glasnost and political liberalization, and its determination to insulate Uzbek society from such an impact until appropriate conditions are created for a smooth transition to democracy. Because the anti-reform orientation of the Uzbek leadership remains intact, Uzbek society continues to be a victim of indiscriminate repression in the post-independence period and the Uzbek leadership continues to justify such repression on various pretexts, including the Uzbek cultural traditions, raising serious doubts about the likelihood of introducing genuine political reforms in the near future.

FUTURE OF POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

This brings us to the question of the future of political liberalization in these countries. Of course, it is hard to predict with certainty the future of political liberalization in countries which are in the transition phase and lack most propitious socioeconomic conditions conducive to political democracy. However, on the basis of our preceding analysis and a good deal of information available on certain evident objective conditions in these republics, we can make broad, educated speculations about the future of political liberalization in them.
As our analysis suggests, ethnic diversity can be of positive influence on political liberalization under certain conditions. Thus, compatibility of high level of political liberalization and multinational society is reassuring for all the three countries. However, according to our analysis, only Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan appear to fulfill the requirement under which this compatibility holds. In other words, the continued presence of a large Russian minority in proportion to the titular nationalities and the availability of Russian support to it in these two countries will prevent their backsliding into abject repressive regimes. Hence, we expect these countries to continue to experience some sort of political liberalization in the foreseeable future. What further improves the prospect of the political liberalization process stay the course in these two countries is little or no chance of consensus building among most elites on the need to roll back whatever political liberalization exists in them.

The serious threat to the existing level of political liberalization in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan arises from the breakout of armed hostilities, including civil wars, due to intensification of ethnic, tribal, and regional rivalries supported by political elites, or in response to the continued, however limited, repression especially in Kazakhstan. The armed resistance by the Russian minority in support of their demands, including the secessionist demand, can potentially lead to a complete breakdown of the ongoing political liberalization process in Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan is spared of this eventuality but is susceptible to inter-ethnic, regional, and tribal armed conflict. However, the threat of a civil war will continue to discourage the leaders of
these republics from imposing a violent authoritarian order along the lines in Uzbekistan. In other words, they are more likely to continue to provide their societies with some independent political space within definite limits.

In Kyrgyzstan, the reformist leadership is, to a great extent, the most important reason for its consistent impressive lead over other Central Asian republics in almost all areas of political liberalization. Of course, we have no reason to expect a sudden change in Akayev’s pro-reform orientation. Given his past record, we can safely say that the political liberalization process can suffer some setbacks, but is unlikely to degenerate into a despotic state like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan due to socioeconomic and political crises of ordinary proportion under his rule. Broad, though still fragile, foundations of a democratic order are in place in the republic; however, there may be some ups and downs in the protracted process of consolidation of such foundations.

The deepening of political liberalization in Kazakhstan is another matter. The Kazakh leadership has postponed it on various pretexts which all suggest that it is a distant prospect there. There is a more important reason to reach this conclusion. In fact, there is no indication that the incumbent leadership has made any preparation to deepen political reforms in the near future. Nazarbayev is rather in no mood to decentralize the centralized power structure he has built around him. He can be tempted to misuse it again to prolong his rule. If he does so, the chances of full scale democratization of Kazakh society will be further reduced. In fact, the full scale democratization process is more likely to begin in the republic under three most
propitious conditions, in addition to the ones discussed above. First, the coming of a reform-oriented leadership into power in Kazakhstan. Second, a democratically oriented Russian government committed to promoting democratic rights of the Russian population in the former Soviet space. Third, a broad consensus among political elites of different colors and ethnic origins on the need to build effective pressure from below on Kazakh authorities to deepen political reforms.

The Uzbek leadership has postponed political liberalization on various pretexts, too. There is no indication that the incumbent leadership has developed any blueprints to initiate the political liberalization process. In fact, Karimov has consolidated personal power and is unlikely to dismantle the power structure and political machine he took lot of pains to build around himself. Because the incumbent leadership appears ready to unleash excessive repression in the absence of constraints entailing from a large Russian minority and fragmented elite structure, adequate pressure for political liberalization is unlikely to develop from below in the foreseeable future. If the political liberalization process is to begin under the incumbent leadership, the most favorable condition for such a prospect would be the rise of a powerful challenger to it from within the ruling alliance accompanied by a split in the hitherto cohesive elite structure along regional and tribal lines. If this happens, Karimov will face the following two likely options: a) to initiate political liberalization, enlist support of the excluded and marginalized societal forces in order to improve his position vis-a-vis the splintered groups, and to accommodate the latter in the newly created independent political space; or b) to use excessive repression to neutralize the
challenge and risk a civil war along regional and tribal lines. Such a challenge is by no means on the horizon; however, it is more likely to develop if the incumbent president decides to perpetuate his rule with no end in sight for ambitious political, regional and clan leaders. More likely but less dramatic scenario is the leadership change. In other words, a genuine movement toward political liberalization will have to await the departure of the incumbent leadership. The best hope is that after the incumbent leadership leaves office, the political machine built around it is likely to weaken and certain reformist elements in the power structure (or tribal and regional groups within the ruling alliance) may demand more independent political space for themselves and hence prove catalyst for the relaxation of excessive political control in the country.
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APPENDIX

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1 Location of Central Asian Countries on Political Liberalization Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Dependent Variable (Political Liberalization)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Composition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Russian Minority</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Russian Minority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Coherence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Fragmentation</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Reform</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cautious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Reform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The explanation of the mixed record of Kazakhstan lies in the cautious attitude of Kazakh leadership toward liberalization and its impact on Kazakh state and society. A fuller explanation of this phenomenon is provided in chapter 2 and 4.
Table 1  Russian population in the Soviet republics, by 1989 (in thousands of persons)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republic</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Russians</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>3305.0</td>
<td>520.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaidjan</td>
<td>7021.0</td>
<td>392.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belorussia</td>
<td>10152.0</td>
<td>1342.0</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>1565.0</td>
<td>475.0</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>5401.0</td>
<td>341.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>16463.0</td>
<td>6228.0</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirgizia</td>
<td>4258.0</td>
<td>917.0</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>2667.0</td>
<td>906.0</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>3675.0</td>
<td>344.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldavia</td>
<td>4335.0</td>
<td>562.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>147000.0</td>
<td>119865.0</td>
<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Tadjikistan</td>
<td>5093.0</td>
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<td>3523.0</td>
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<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>51452.0</td>
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<td>22.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>19810.0</td>
<td>1652.0</td>
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</table>

### Table 2  
Change in Russian and Titular Nationalities in Central Asia 1989-1996 (Percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Russians</th>
<th>Kazakhs</th>
<th>Kyrgyz</th>
<th>Tajiks</th>
<th>Turkmen</th>
<th>Uzbeks</th>
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<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change %</td>
<td>-9.8</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change %</td>
<td>-22.8</td>
<td>22.0</td>
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<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>62.1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Change %</td>
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<td>26.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
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<td>76.6</td>
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<td>Change %</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>24.5</td>
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### Table 3  Percentage of ethnic groups in the capitals of the Central Asian states (in percent)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Tashkent</th>
<th>Alma-Ata (Almaty)</th>
<th>Frunze (Bishkek)</th>
<th>Dushanbe</th>
<th>Ashgabat</th>
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<td>44.2</td>
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<td>Kazakhs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tadjiks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tatars</td>
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<td>Armenians</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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Table 4  **Structure of Gross Domestic Product and Work Force**  
(in percent)

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uzbekistan</strong></td>
<td>Share of GDP</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>34.8</td>
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<td>36.2</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>26.1</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>24.0</td>
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<td>Construction</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>38.3</td>
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<td>44.3</td>
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<td>Share of work force</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
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<td>44.6</td>
<td>44.3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>13.1</td>
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<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Services</td>
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<td>34.9</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>36.3</td>
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<td>Share of GDP</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>23.4</td>
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<td>12.8</td>
<td>12.6</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Industry</td>
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<td>28.2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Construction</td>
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<td>10.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Services</td>
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<td>45.2</td>
<td>45.4</td>
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<td>Share of work force</td>
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<td>25.4</td>
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<td>Construction</td>
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<td>10.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
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<td><strong>Kyrgystan</strong></td>
<td>Share of GDP</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>33.0</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>28.8</td>
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<td>32.2</td>
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<td>42.0</td>
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<td>16.1</td>
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<td>4.7</td>
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<td>38.6</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>34.9</td>
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Table 5  Indebtedness of Central Asian States to Russia for Interstate Credits (billions of dollars)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>At the end of 1994</th>
<th>At the end of 1997</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>1402</td>
<td>1684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2401</td>
<td>2873</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>GNP</th>
<th>GNP per capita</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Urban Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>millions</td>
<td>$ billions</td>
<td>$ billions</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>1350.0</td>
<td>98.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyz Republic</td>
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<td>25.0</td>
<td>550.0</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<td>99.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
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<td>100.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>23.0</td>
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<td>5.2</td>
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<td>7.0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7.0</td>
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Scale:

- Free
- Party Free
- Not Free

1 - 7
1 - 2.5
3 - 5.5
5.5 - 7

Table 8  Freedom House Rating of CIS Countries on Political and Civil Rights Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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Scale:  
Free: 1 - 7  
Party Free: 1 - 2.5  
Not Free: 3 - 5.5  
Free: 5.5 - 7

Table 9  Freedom House Rating of East European Countries on Political and Civil Rights Index

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Scale: Free Party Free Not Free
1 - 7 1 - 2.5 3 - 5.5 5.5 - 7

Table 10  Public Opinion on Best Political System of Kazakhstan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Islamic state</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalism</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialism</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communism</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything that brings order</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11  Public Opinion on Best Political System of Uzbekistan

VITA

Muhammad Islam was born on April 13, 1955, in Balwal, a small village in the Chakwal district, Pakistan. He was the fourth child of his parents, Hafiz Lal Khan and Sat Bharai who raised his three brothers and three sisters. Islam grew up in a rural environment and attended village schools before his eldest brother, Muhammad Altaf, who was then a captain in the Pakistan army, shifted him to the Jhelum city for education purposes in 1969. After his university education, he served in various research and teaching institutions in Islamabad. In August-September 1985, he also visited the United States as a student tourist. In July 1989, he married Farhat S. Raja. His first daughter, Izza, was born on May 9, 1990. Inaash, the second daughter, was born on May 13, 1991. In January 1993, Islam travelled to the United States for his Ph.D. program. His wife and two daughters later joined him in August 1994. His third daughter, Haneen, was born in Baton Rouge, on November 27, 1996. Islam and his family left the United States in July 1999 to live in Islamabad where he took up a teaching position.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Muhammad Islam

Major Field: Political Science

Title of Dissertation: Political Liberalization in Post-Communist Central Asia: A Comparative Study

Approved:

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination:

June 7, 1999

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