

American University of Central Asia
Department of International and Comparative Politics

The Portrait of Kyrgyz Politics through the Prism of Opposition Activism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelors
of Arts in International and Comparative Politics at the American University of Central Asia

by

Elnura Sulaimanova

Thesis Supervisor: Emir Kulov

Assistant Professor, International and Comparative Politics Department, AUCA

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

May 2010

Table of Content:

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Section I: Introduction.....	5
Section II: Literature Review.....	9
2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework.....	9
2.2 Overview of opposition in Kyrgyzstan.....	22
Section III: Dynamics of Opposition Activism in Kyrgyzstan.....	29
3.1 Dynamics between 1989-1994.....	33
3.2 Major trends between 1995-2003.....	45
3.3 The Rise between 2004-2007.....	48
Section IV: Causes of Opposition Activism in Kyrgyzstan.....	54
4.1 Cause factors	54
4.2 Interplay/Discussion.....	59
Section V: Conclusion.....	68
Bibliography.....	70

Acknowledgements:

I would like to express special gratitude to my supervisor Emir Kulov for his valuable advices, encouragement and constant support in managing the thesis. I appreciate his patience and time while helping me to write this work.

I heartily thank Medet Tiulegenov, Alexander Pugachev, Shairbek Juraev, Munara Omuralieva, Dr. Otto Pohl and Dr. Lance Tillman for useful remarks during the course of Honors Seminar.

Special thanks are for my friends and family that are always with me and for their endless love and support ☺.

Abstract

This paper focuses on the explanation of factors that drive political opposition in authoritarian states. It looks deeper in the activism of the opposition in Kyrgyzstan during the critical events – shift from communism to democratic government in 1989-1994 and Tulip Revolution in 2005. The activism is explained through the Political Opportunity Structure (as an external factor) and Resource Mobilization (internal dynamics). Both theories help to explain the emergence, dynamics, and decline of oppositional activism in Kyrgyzstan. Such factors as availability of resources (money, staff, ideology) and favorable political conditions (loosening repression, state's concessions) played key roles in defining oppositional activism. Besides, the research also captures certain peculiarities of the Kyrgyz political opposition, where political opportunities play decisive role for the opposition's activities due to the weak partisanship system.

Introduction

Kyrgyzstan represents an interesting case for scholarly investigation because of the changing dynamics of the political scene. While becoming an independent state after the fall of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan became a ground for political discourses and tensions. From the early years of independence political opposition of Kyrgyzstan quickly challenged the ruling circles taking lessons from experienced states. The Soviet authoritarian regime and devastated economy left little mass support for communist ideology. Therefore, the emerging opposition exploited new democratic ideology and economic development to offer alternative solutions to the existing problems.

The potential for the presence of democratic features' in Kyrgyzstan was high. International community laid big hopes on Kyrgyzstan as the pioneer Central Asian country embracing democracy. Political developments in Kyrgyzstan, being hailed popularly as an "Island of democracy" and "Switzerland of Central Asia", reflected these perspectives. Oppositional activism of democrats and later communists has been on the peak during these turbulent years, and was on decline only after the communist opposition lost the power with the dissolution of the parliament in 1994. The democratic trend has been quickly reversed by the president Askar Akaev, who has been slowly concentrating all the power in his hands. Only in 2005 the oppositional activism reached unprecedented scale, ousting Akaev out of the power. It demonstrated that even under authoritarian regimes opposition can successfully organize activities to challenge the existing regime.

Despite the dynamics of the Kyrgyz oppositional activism has been different than that of the democratic states, Kyrgyzstan offers great example for the analysis of the democratization process. Oppositional activism under authoritarian regime has been complicated by diminishing political opportunities. However, opposition managed to launch strong campaigns and challenge or even seize power from the government. Therefore, the activism of Kyrgyz political opposition

and factors that trigger are important for understanding not only Kyrgyz politics, but democratization process as such.

The research proposes that *the role of external incentives (opportunities) and availability of resource are vital for opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan*. The study concentrates on the two periods of 1989-1994 and 2004-2007, which cover two critical points that dramatically changed domestic politics. These periods demand a deeper view inside to understand the general features and potential of political opposition in Kyrgyzstan. What is the dynamics of political opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan? What are the decisive factors that drive political opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan? These are the major guiding questions this work will address.

Thus, this paper pursues several goals. First, it observes opposition dynamics to understand the how opposition organized its activities and which factors contributed to the rise and fall of the activism. Second, the work explores the reasons for particular opposition actions or inactions. And, finally, the study designs dependency chain of opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan from “turning factors” which are deeply analyzed in a later corresponding section.

The paper is divided into five sections. The second section of this paper touches upon existing literature, which provides the conceptual and theoretical framework for further analysis, assists in understanding the potential causes of the growth of political activism of opposition forces and reviews the scholarly materials covering the topic of political opposition in Kyrgyzstan. The following section analyzes the dynamics of political opposition activism in the country. As an analysis of the causes of opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan are covered in the fourth section, the analysis of major theoretical aspects of political opposition in existing literature, followed by examination of those variables in specific case of Kyrgyzstan, will allow this paper to shed some light on portrait of Kyrgyz politics through the prism of political opposition activism.

1.1. Framework of analysis

The problem of the research will be discussed in the framework of Political Opportunity Structure Theory and Resource Mobilization Theories. By examining both external (POST) and internal (Resource Mobilization Theory) factors, these theories conduce to better understanding the causes of political opposition activism and conditions under which political opposition activism increases or slows down.

1.2 Significance

Romana Careja points out to the problem of studying opposition in non-democracies. According to her, there is a widespread belief among scholars that “almost inexistent political opposition in non-democratic regimes is not worthy of an academic effort.”¹ However, it becomes obvious that by doing so scholarship leaves many areas of politics unexplored and changes, noted in various regions and countries of the world not investigated. This means that the explanatory power of surveys on opposition in democratic regimes will neither be fully applicable in explaining political phenomena in non-democratic (authoritarian) countries, nor will assist international community in evaluating the performance of democratic institutions in those states in transition. Thus, there appears a high necessity to fill the gap by conducting numerous detailed researches on opposition in non-democratic countries.

Kyrgyzstan has experienced high turbulence in the form of tremendous activism of political opposition and silent periods of inactiveness. The conditions sustaining the “rise and fall scenario” of political opposition activism and causes of the rise and decline of activism in Kyrgyzstan is of a big importance both to the scholarly world and an ordinary person who wants to understand the politics of Kyrgyzstan, where:

“an internal and external opposition exists and while pursuing their goals actors resort to a wide variety of power resources from violence to negotiation and from recognition to denial of legitimacy.”²

The study of the rise of opposition activism covered in this research can be viewed as a valuable contribution to understanding Kyrgyz politics, defining factors influencing political

¹ Romana Careja, “Foreword,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 10.

² Ibid.

activism of opposition forces in Kyrgyzstan, exploring factors undermining activism of political opposition in Kyrgyzstan and defining reasons behind devolution of political opposition in Kyrgyzstan, understanding opposition in non-democratic regimes (countries in transition), and developing more concise theoretical bases for the analysis of opposition in non-democratic states.

1.3 Hypothesis and Variables

The “power struggle” and opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan have to be perceived as dynamic processes of continuous ups and downs depending on the interplay of various factors shaped by different phenomena. The hypothesis of the present paper admits that the dynamics of political opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan depends on the interplay of political opportunities and mobilization of available resources. The dynamics of political opposition activism is a dependent variable. The first independent variable is “opportunities” which refers to any changes, which lead to the emergence of favorable environment for opposition activism. Resources are the necessary means (finances, charismatic leaders, members, supporters, ideology, etc.) to mobilize opposition itself and organize opposition activities.

Section II: Conceptual and theoretical framework

2.1 Conceptualization of political opposition

“The process of government must be studied with regard to those who oppose the aims of it, or whose interests and resistance have to be conciliated before those in power can act.”³ Thus, opposition has been extensively studied to understand internal political processes and policy outcomes within any country.

The act of opposing the government (policies), according to Robert Dahl, was defined as a natural right belonging to each individual. Here, “the freedom to oppose the government, form political organization, express oneself in political matter without fear”⁴ constitutes the basis for elaborating on the concept of political opposition in “polyarchies”, the term invented by Dahl, which refers to ideal form of democracy.⁵ Hence, making conclusion from the Dahl’s works, democracy cannot be fully established in the absence of the right of people to oppose.

According to Dahl, “if B opposes to the conduct of government A, then here is the opposition.” Alexander Markarov and Romana Careja provide a similar definition, emphasizing that “an actor is considered to be in opposition if it does not share in broad sense the tactics, strategy and/or values of the actor who is responsible for making binding decisions”.⁶ Opposition is defined by Schapiro as “an organized political group, or groups, of which the aim is to oust the government in power and to replace it by one of its own choosing.”⁷ As Elvira Mamytova, researcher at Eurasian Research Center described, the “notion of opposition” took its

³ Leonard Schapiro, “Foreword,” *Government and Opposition* 1, no.1, (1966), 2.

⁴ Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 20.

⁵ Nathalie Brack and Sharon Weinblum, “What do we mean by “political opposition”: a theoretical perspective,” (paper presented at Potsdam ECPR General Conference, Potsdam, September 9-12 2009. http://www.sciencespo.site.ulb.ac.be/dossiers_membres/brack-nathalie/fichiers/brack-nathalie-publication16.pdf.

⁶ Alexander Markarov and Romana Careja, “Political Opposition within Hybrid regimes: Concept and Actors,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 40.

⁷ Leonard Schapiro, “Foreword,” *Government and Opposition* 1, no.1, (1967), 2.

conceptual roots from the definition given by Lord Bolingbrook, who described opposition in terms of “activities of parties which lost elections.”⁸

Opposition can be represented by political parties, interest groups and even individuals.⁹ The above mentioned definitions encompass all these players. At the same time a comparison of the relevant strength of each indicates that “a structured organization” weighs heavier than an individual alone, and therefore, it has more opportunities to promote its goals and wider scope of influence. Indeed, organization can have more structured way of attracting both human and financial resources. Moreover, by “mobilization of greater number of individuals, it can easily attract attention of the media.”¹⁰ Brack and Weinblum while talking about opposition actors, include in opposition “any organized actor – the parliament; represented political parties; non-represented political forces; trade unions; social movements.”¹¹ Vladimir Gelman mentions “parties, politicians, cliques and clans”¹² as opposition actors. Therefore, individuals can exist as opposition actors, but it is more likely that they try to achieve the pursued goals by joining/creating a political party/organization or interest groups. These created groups are usually centered around this individual, and can discontinue their existence once individual leaves the group.

Oppositional actors can be differentiated in terms of those goals they pursue and means they employ. The means of opposition activities include “regular critique of the government and control over it’s consistency with the Constitution and fulfillment of its promises made during elections, and proposal of alternative solution of problems.”¹³ As it was discussed by Nathalie

⁸ Elvira Mamytova, “Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Analysis of Political Opposition,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 19.

⁹ Alexander Markarov and Romana Careja, “Political Opposition within Hybrid regimes: Concept and Actors,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 40.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 42 &

Nathalie Brack and Sharon Weinblum, “What do we mean by “political opposition”: a theoretical perspective,” (paper presented at Potsdam ECPR General Conference, Potsdam, September 9-12 2009). http://www.sciencespo.site.ulb.ac.be/dossiers_membres/brack-nathalie/fichiers/brack-nathalie-publication16.pdf.

¹² Vladimir Gelman, “The Extinction of Political Opposition in Russia European,” *University at St Petersburg* (November, 2004): 1-7. http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/pm_0340.pdf (accessed December 6, 2009).

¹³ Elvira Mamytova, “Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Analysis of Political Opposition,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 19.

Brack and Sharon Weinblum, these types of definitions restricted “political opposition to one arena in the classical literature: to one specific actor - the minority parties within a parliament with single goal to take over power.”¹⁴ Thus, because of the view that “it is not sufficient to study opposition only based on the opposition within the parliament, several authors like Blondel have encouraged researchers to look at the extra-parliamentary dimension of political opposition.”¹⁵ The work of Nathalie Brack and Sharon Weinblum devoted to the analysis of the opposition functions serves as a significant contribution to the topic of political opposition (see Table below).

Features	Description
Expression of its stance	“in the government; in the parliament; in the media; in the street, during elections, etc.
Functions	permanently or punctually checks, informs and criticizes the current state of affairs
Means and instruments.	through different non-violent modalities – elections, legislative processes; parliamentary questions, press releases; mobilization of the media; public protests, demonstrations, etc.
The targets of its critiques	government and/or its policies and/or the political elite and/or the political regime as a whole.”

Source: Nathalie Brack and Sharon Weinblum, p. 12

There are many other methods of classification of opposition, but most of the scholars concentrate on two main criteria. The opposition can be classified based on whether it opposes policies of the government or the way government executes these policies. Besides, opposition types can be defined based on the methods opposition employed to achieve its goals (elections, revolution, civil war, etc.). The first type of opposition derives when one answers the question “what does it oppose and what are the aims and goals”, whereas the second is related to the strategies and tactics employed by opposition actors basing on the question of “how they pursue

¹⁴ Nathalie Brack and Sharon Weinblum, “What do we mean by “political opposition”: a theoretical perspective,” (*paper presented at Potsdam ECPR General Conference, Potsdam, September 9-12 2009.* http://www.sciencespo.site.ulb.ac.be/dossiers_membres/brack-nathalie/fichiers/brack-nathalie-publication16.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid.

their goals”¹⁶ According to Elvira Mamytova, this can also be called as “degree of consistency of their objectives” and “program lines.”¹⁷ Vladimir Gelman simply names them “the ends and means” of opposition.¹⁸ For Gelman, “the ends of opposition” seem as a spectrum with two extreme ends - one that represents “actors aiming to join the government without any significant changes in major policies” and regarded as a “semi-opposition.”¹⁹ According to Linz, “semi-opposition is represented by groups without dominating powers or represented in the governing group, but want to participate in power without fundamentally challenging the regime.”²⁰

Another extreme of the spectrum, according to Gelman, is “the principal opposition,” with “political actors who seek radical change of a political regime and its policies.”²¹ According to Kirchheimer, “principal opposition” requires “full-fledged power” in carrying out its policies.²² The concept of “extra-system opposition/irresponsible,” offered by Sartori, is also relevant to the concept of “principal opposition” in a sense that it encompasses “radical left and right-wing parties and groupings, rejecting the existing system of values and aiming to discredit functioning institutions and undermine their legitimacy.”²³ Political system approach implies that “presidential and presidential-parliamentary states are more likely to produce a principal opposition, unlike parliamentary systems.”²⁴

The second differentiating factor is the strategies employed by opposition actors in achieving their goals. Both Kirchheimer and Gelman offer “loyal”, “semi-loyal” and “non-loyal”

¹⁶ Edward Thomas Aspinall, “Political Opposition and the Transition from Authoritarian Rule: The Case of Indonesia,” *Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies of the Australian National University*, 2000, <http://thesis.anu.edu.au/public/adt-ANU20010702.113537/index.html>.

¹⁷ Elvira Mamytova, “Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Analysis of Political Opposition,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 21.

¹⁸ Vladimir Gelman, “The Extinction of Political Opposition in Russia European,” *University at St Petersburg* (November, 2004): 1-7. http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/pm_0340.pdf (accessed December 6, 2010).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Linz, Juan. “An Authoritarian Regime: Spain” in *Mass Politics*, edited by Erik Allardt and Stein Rokkan, New York: the Free Press, 1970, pp. 251-283.

²¹ Vladimir Gelman, “The Extinction of Political Opposition in Russia European,” *University at St Petersburg* (November, 2004): 1-7. http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/pm_0340.pdf (accessed December 6, 2010).

²² Elvira Mamytova, “Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Analysis of Political Opposition,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 21.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Vladimir Gelman, “The Extinction of Political Opposition in Russia European,” *University at St Petersburg* (November, 2004): 1-7. http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/pm_0340.pdf (accessed December 6, 2010).

opposition. Loyal opposition has the strategy of achieving its aims through legitimate means, such as obtaining/securing power through elections, whereas non-loyal opposition is more inclined to retain power through “illegal means and violent actions.”²⁵

To encompass the specific features of Kyrgyz politics and peculiarities of the peaks of opposition activism, opposition in this paper is defined as follows: official and unofficial parties, coalitions of different parties, parliamentary groups or fractions, social movement, or other organized group of individuals, or individuals alone with an ultimate goal take a control of power from government (even if initial goal is different - single policy or decision). The opposition can successfully achieve its goals (1990 democratic movement, 2005 revolution) or can be crashed (communist opposition in 1990s, Akayev’s parliament in 2007), as long as it actively promotes its activities and poses challenge to the government. Oppositional activism refers to organization of loyal (parliamentary, electoral) or non-loyal collective action (street politics- from simple meetings to revolution and civil war), active attraction of members, votes and supporters to achieve their goals.

The following sub-section explores of the conditions under which these opposition forces become active.

2.2 Theories of opposition activism

With the concepts mentioned above, two major theoretical approaches will be applied in examining political opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan. These are the Political Opportunity Structure Theory and Resource Mobilization Theory. By discussing these theories the research will identify the key variables causing the “rise and fall” of political opposition activeness in Kyrgyzstan.

Political Opportunity Structure Theory has been widely used in explaining “organizational formation, strategies and tactics, movement emergence, cycles of protest and

²⁵ Elvira Mamytova, “Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Analysis of Political Opposition,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 22.

mobilization outcomes.”²⁶ It states that “by providing incentives for people to engage in collective action, certain dimensions of the political environment”²⁷ indicate “the degree to which groups are more likely to be able to gain access to power and manipulate the political system.”²⁸

Charles Tilly and Jack Goldstone differentiated two factors, which explain the Political Opportunity Structure Theory. These are the “state capacity” and strength of the “popular groups seeking change.”²⁹ They argue that the political opportunity increases “whether by external or internal factors that weaken the state, or by changing social conditions that increases the confidence of challengers, or some combination of both.”³⁰ Thus, as suggested by McAdam (1996), McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (1996), there is a positive relationship between the political opportunity and actions (in our case, activism of political opposition), where “as opportunities expand, actions mount, as opportunities contract, action recedes.”³¹

While examining the works of Goldstone (1994), Opp, Voss and Gern (1995), Pfaff (1996), Goldstone and Tilly drew several assumptions about the “rationality of actions”: actions take place when the expected outcome is a “net gain,” which was explained through the following formula:

Following this logic, we can also draw the following formula $G > (V \times O) - C$, which can be referred to the situation when the

$G = (V \times O) - C,$ <p>where “G refers to expected gains, V-results from success, O- the probability of success or opportunity, C- costs incurred from the actions (protests).”³²</p>
--

²⁶ Maryjane Osa and Kurt Schock. “A Long Hard Slog: Political Opportunities, Social Networks and the Mobilization of Dissent in Non-Democracies,” *Conflicts and Change* 27 (2007): 126.

²⁷ Ibid, 125.

²⁸ Doug McAdam, "Political Opportunities: Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, edited by Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 46.

²⁹ Charles Tilly and Jack A. Goldstone, “Threats (and Opportunity): Popular Actions and State Response in the Dynamics of Contentious Action,” in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, edited by Doug McAdam, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 180.

³⁰ Ibid, 180.

³¹ Ibid, 180.

³² Ibid, 184.

expected gains are higher than the costs of the action. This also points out to the assumption that when political opportunities are low (ex. high repressions) actions or activism recedes.

Different cases of increasing protests and activism in Western democracies were described by such scholars as Sidney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam and Jack Goldstone to demonstrate the causal relationship between political opportunities and oppositional activism. The works of Olson (1965), Lichbach (1987, 1995), and Smelser (1962), Osa Maryjane and Kurt Schock (2007) indicated “a negative relationship, whereby increasing repression decreases demand.”³³ However, as indicated by the studies done by Olivier on “Black protest in South Africa (1990), Khwaja on Palestinian protest in the West Bank (1993), Raesler on “Iranian protests”, Francisco on protests in Germany (1996),”³⁴ as well as the studies done by Brocket (1993), de Nardo (1985), Snyder and Tilly (1972).³⁵ This hypothesis fails to explain the relationship between the rising repressions and rising protests and activism of opposition forces. Thus, they pointed out to the positive relationship between “whereby repression increases dissent.”³⁶ As a response to rising criticism of Political Opportunity Structure Theory, which did not provide explanation to “repressions causing significant increase in collective action,” Goldstone and Tilly developed another model that is called the Theory of Political Opportunities and Threats.³⁷ The following formula explains the model:

³³ Maryjane Osa and Kurt Schock. “A Long Hard Slog: Political Opportunities, Social Networks and the Mobilization of Dissent in Non-Democracies,” *Conflicts and Change* 27 (2007): 133.

³⁴ Charles Tilly and Jack A. Goldstone, “Threats (and Opportunity): Popular Actions and State Response in the Dynamics of Contentious Action,” in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, edited by Doug McAdam, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 181.

³⁵ Maryjane Osa and Kurt Schock. “A Long Hard Slog: Political Opportunities, Social Networks and the Mobilization of Dissent in Non-Democracies,” *Conflicts and Change* 27 (2007): 133.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 133.

³⁷ Charles Tilly and Jack A. Goldstone, “Threats (and Opportunity): Popular Actions and State Response in the Dynamics of Contentious Action,” in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, edited by Doug McAdam, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 181.

Thus, analyzing both formulas of $G = (V \times O) - C$ (political opportunity) and $G = [O \times (A + Tc)] - Tr$ (political opportunity and threat), one might argue that it will not be

$G = [O \times (A + Tc)] - Tr,$ <p>where A refers to “new advantages”, “Tc – Current threat, Tr – repressive threat” and “O = k1 (state weakness) + k2 (popular support) + k3 (strength of non-state allies and opponents of the regime).”³⁸</p>

accurate if these relationships will be examined through quantitative measures. However, for this work, there can be derived several useful relationships:

Formula	Meaning
$G = (V \times O) - C:$	The higher are the expected results from success (V) and the probability of success – O (one also might refer to opportunities), or the lower are the expected costs “incurred from the actions” (C) or both, the higher is the possibility that activism will boost.
$G = [O \times (A + Tc)] - Tr:$	The higher are the current threats - Tc (which also refers to low government concessions), new advantages (A), state weakness (k1), popular support (k2), strength of non-state allies, and the lower is the repressive threat – Tr (“the cost of repression if action is undertaken”) or all together, the more likely that activism will rise.

Moreover, while defining the factors causing political opposition activism, it is important to examine the role of the state leadership. According to Goldstone and Tilly, any state performs two functions: repressions and concessions, where democratic states are more inclined towards providing more concessions and using lesser repressions.³⁹ Four types of repression are identified by Osa Maryjane and Kurt Schock:

“negative sanctions (“curtailing political and civil freedoms”), force (“physical violence against individuals”), coercion (“intimidation or the threatened use of violence”) and violence by proxy, which refers to “implementation of violence and coercion of challengers by third parties encouraged by the regime.”⁴⁰

Following the logic, it can be inferred that in non-democratic states leadership puts higher levels of repression. The state is capable of controlling both Tr - current repressive threat (concession are made to decrease Tr) and the repressive threat (repression in case the action is

³⁸ Charles Tilly and Jack A. Goldstone, “Threats (and Opportunity): Popular Actions and State Response in the Dynamics of Contentious Action,” in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, edited by Doug McAdam, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 185.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Maryjane Osa and Kurt Schock. “A Long Hard Slog: Political Opportunities, Social Networks and the Mobilization of Dissent in Non-Democracies,” *Conflicts and Change* 27 (2007): 133.

made).⁴¹ For example, the state can increase “the prospective harm, by increasing taxes, increasing violence against the population or specific groups, taking away the rights or property, etc.”⁴² or vice versa, it is able to “make concessions, and change policies to improve conditions for popular and/or elite groups.”⁴³

Rising opportunities are often associated by the scholarly world with rising protests (political opposition activism). However, it is not rare when the protests increase (political opposition activism grows) as a result of increase in repressions. Therefore, the role of repressions and concessions has to be taken into account while making an analysis of causes of political opposition activism.

Another assumption from which the theory derives its roots is that in non-democratic states political opportunities increase when “the regime’s coercive mechanisms malfunction”⁴⁴. As Maryjane Osa and Kurt Schock explain, it is connected to the rationale behind collective action: since the stakes are higher in non-democratic regimes, “political opportunities that lower the costs are necessary for it to occur.”⁴⁵ Several variables that might cause “weakening” of the state, according to them, are elite divisions, powerful allies, access to media, repressions, and social networks,⁴⁶ or “suddenly imposed grievances.”⁴⁷ The form of each varies depending on the political regime established in the country.

In consolidated democracies, where institutions and the “rules of political game” are established, elite division may often occur because of ideological differences; disagreements

⁴¹ Charles Tilly and Jack A. Goldstone, “Threats (and Opportunity): Popular Actions and State Response in the Dynamics of Contentious Action,” in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, edited by Doug McAdam, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 185.

⁴² *Ibid*, 185.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 185.

⁴⁴ Maryjane Osa and Kurt Schock. “A Long Hard Slog: Political Opportunities, Social Networks and the Mobilization of Dissent in Non-Democracies,” *Conflicts and Change* 27 (2007): 126.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 128.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 126.

⁴⁷ Doug McAdam, “Political Opportunities: Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions,” in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, edited by Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 26.

about political; economic and cultural policies and issues.⁴⁸ The elite division in non-democratic regimes mostly takes place due to the issues regarding “the institutional basis of politics, the methods of succession, or the formula of rule.”⁴⁹

The role of influential allies plays dramatic role for POS in non-democracies, where opposition, or challengers are “often too vulnerable to risk engaging in overt oppositional activities without influential allies.”⁵⁰ Allies can usually be represented both by domestic and international actors. As pointed out by Osa Maryjane and Kurt Schock, international support is “particularly important in non-democracies, where the availability of resources and the influence of domestic actors on the government may be severely limited.”⁵¹

If media in democratic countries is free, where objective information is delivered to the general public and various alternative sources of information are available, in non-democratic states media works under the control of the government.⁵² This control can be based on censorship of media via “closing down alternative publications, restricting access to communication technologies, and centralizing the media under the control of state,”⁵³ and post-censorship through “impositions of economic sanctions, the revocation of publishing licenses, and the harassment, imprisonment, torture, or assassination of journalists.”⁵⁴ However, according to Osa Maryjane and Kurt Schock, “even the most repressive regimes cannot wholly prevent the development of underground press of samizdat publications.”⁵⁵

In comparison to democratic state, social networks play a greater role in non-democratic states, and can provide “opportunities for mobilization in the most repressive circumstances”⁵⁶ in

⁴⁸ Maryjane Osa and Kurt Schock. “A Long Hard Slog: Political Opportunities, Social Networks and the Mobilization of Dissent in Non-Democracies,” *Conflicts and Change* 27 (2007): 130.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 131.

⁵¹ Ibid, 130.

⁵² Ibid, 132.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 131.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 133.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

several areas. They can greatly serve in several dimension of mobilization: “communication, resource generation and coalition formation.”⁵⁷

Resource Mobilization Theory

Charles Tilly identifies mobilization as a “process by which a group goes from being a passive collection of individuals to an active participant in public life.”⁵⁸ Resource Mobilization Theory is widely employed by scholars (e.g. McCarthy & Zald 1973, 1977; Gamson 1975; Jenkins 1985; Burnstein 1981, Oberschall 1973; Tarrow 1982; Tilly 1978, Temirkulov 2008, etc.) while discussing active participation in collective action ranging from simple meetings to revolutions, from conventional (electoral) political participation to unconventional (non-electoral) participation.

The theory suggests that in order for collective action to take place and achieve its aims a group has to engage in process of “securing collective control over the resources needed for collective action.”⁵⁹ Craig Jenkins’ definition of mobilization provides a comprehensive understanding of this process, where

“the major issues are the resources controlled by the group prior to mobilization efforts, the processes by which the group pools resources and directs these towards social change, and the extent to which outsiders⁶⁰ increase the pool of resources.”⁶¹

Scholarly world does not have a universal idea of which resources are important for mobilization. For some scholars, resources are associated with such economic factors as capital, labor and land.⁶² Jenkins argues that there is a necessity to take into account the “intrinsic value of resources.”⁶³ Amitai Etzioni classified resources into “coercive (weapons, armed forces, etc.),

⁵⁷ Osa, Maryjane and Kurt Schock. “A Long Hard Slog: Political Opportunities, Social Networks and the Mobilization of Dissent in Non-Democracies.” *Conflicts and Change* 27

⁵⁸ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1976), 69.

⁵⁹ Craig Jenkins, “Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 9, (1983), 527-553.

⁶⁰ The term “outsiders” refers to domestic and international actors, which are not members of that particular group or movement.

⁶¹ Craig Jenkins, “Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 9, (1983): 533.

⁶² Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1976), 69.

⁶³ Craig Jenkins, “Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 9, (1983): 533.

utilitarian (money, goods, information services) and normative (loyalties).”⁶⁴ Freeman’s distinguishes tangible (e.g. money) and non-tangible resources (e.g. experience of members of opposition).⁶⁵ Basing on analysis of “frequently mobilized resources”, scholars identified such assets as financial resources (money), facilities, ideology, program or plan of actions, organizing skills of members, information services, loyalties and “unspecialized labor of supporters”.⁶⁶

For this paper, it is also vital to bear in mind Amitai Etzioni’s analysis of mobilization theory:

“a mere increase in the assets of members or even of the unit itself does not mean that mobilization has occurred, though it increases the mobilization potential. The change in the capacity to control and to use assets is what is significant.”

Following this logic, one has to look not only on availability of resources, but also examine how these resources are mobilized and controlled (if they are) by opposition. One of the assumptions of Resource Mobilization Theory indicates that:

“Individuals will not contribute to securing collective goods because of the superior rationality of collective action. Therefore, mobilizers see people (prospective members and supporters) as rational actors, who can be mobilized only when selective divisible benefits are offered. It claims that “movement entrepreneurs” (leaders), motivated by (career) opportunities, offer selective incentives to members for their contribution, creating further mobilization.”⁶⁷

Thus, one of the methods of mobilizing popular support is by providing incentives (e.g. economic) for people to join opposition. An example of such mobilization of popular support by giving cash benefits to people was observed in case of National Welfare Rights Organization in 1990s. However, with elimination of cash benefits the “organization virtually collapsed.”⁶⁸

Another group of scholars criticize this “by-product assumption” of resource mobilization offered by Mancur Olson (1968), and claim that “moralistic principles are clearly uppermost” rather than “rational calculations.”⁶⁹ They claim that mobilizations are more effective and last

⁶⁴ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1976), 69.

⁶⁵ Craig Jenkins, “Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 9, (1983): 536.

⁶⁶ McCarthy, and Zald, Tilly, Freeman, Jenkins, etc.

⁶⁷ Craig Jenkins, “Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 9, (1983): 536.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 537.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 536.

longer when they are driven by people's "moralistic concerns"⁷⁰. In this case, the mobilization strategy would be against the use of "collective evils."

Charles Tilly offered three ways of mobilization:

"defensive (is a bottom-up mobilization of resources to fight common enemy), offensive mobilization (top-down mobilization where groups pool resources in response to opportunities to realize its interests), preparatory mobilization (top-down mobilization pools resources in anticipation of future opportunities and threats, forego present satisfactions in favor of uncertain future benefits)."⁷¹

As Peter J. Leahy and Allan Mazur formulated, "effectiveness of the leaders and their ability to "sell" their movement to a society" is an important factor making collective action successful⁷². Therefore, the more resources political opposition is able to obtain, the higher its chances are to remain active in pursuing its goals.

Political Opportunity Structure Theory and Resource Mobilization Theory complement each other, and therefore can provide a better picture of the causes of political opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan. The combination of these two theories can be decisive for the political activism. Ideally, the presence of both political opportunities and mobilization of available resources influence high opposition activism. However, oppositional activism can be still high even if one of the variable is virtually absent (ex. when repression is low, execution of controversial government policy might not require extensive resources to organize massive protests). Therefore, different combinations of opportunities and resources provides different dynamics and outcome of activism. Keeping this in mind, the work examines conditions (POS and resources) under which activism (motivated by incentives and implemented through mobilization) of political opposition (collective action) increases.

2.2 Political opposition in Kyrgyzstan

Political context

⁷⁰ Craig Jenkins, "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 9, (1983): 536.

⁷¹ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1976), 69.

⁷² Peter Leahy and Allan Mazur. "The Rise and Fall of Public Opposition in Specific Social Movements," *Social Studies of Science* 10, no. 3 (August, 1980): 259-284, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/284581>. (accessed December 25, 2009).

Kyrgyzstan was one of the fifteen Soviet Republics. USSR was classified as totalitarian regime (absolute absence of freedom, total control of state and strong support based on Communist ideology), especially under Stalin.⁷³ However, initiation of a series of reforms in attempt to improve impoverished economy, undermined by arms race, corruption and mismanagement took place under Gorbachev. His policies of *glasnost* and *perestorika* allowed people to speak openly about the defects of the communist system. In this way totalitarian regimes was weakened drastically, by providing limited freedoms and “loosening of controls.” It gave a fertile soil to opposition force’s ability to promote their activities.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union Kyrgyzstan became an independent state. Askar Akaev who was elected by Supreme Soviet as a President of Kyrgyz SSR in 1990 automatically became a leader of the newly emerged country. International community laid hopes that Akaev would establish western-type democracy in Kyrgyzstan, since in the early year of independence he launched democratic reforms and expressed commitment to democratic values and principles.

As ICG report mentions, “independent media, multi-party democracy, NGO and civil society were largely allowed to develop freely”.⁷⁴ During these years, marked by emergence of “vibrant realm of social organization” the country was perceived by the world as “an island of democracy”⁷⁵ and a “bulwark of democracy in the region.”⁷⁶

However, in mid-1990s democratic trends was reversed by consolidation of powers by Akaev.⁷⁷ Some of them included adoption of the Constitution granting more powers to the President at the expense of other branches of government, most notably the parliament, the

⁷³ Usen Chotonov, *Noveishaya istoria Kyrgyzstana: 1985-1998*. (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan Publishing House 1999), 177.

⁷⁴ *Kyrgyzstan at ten: Troubles in the island of democracy*. ICG, August 28, 2001. 5

⁷⁵ John Anderson, Creating a Framework for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan. *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Jan., 2000), pp. 77-93 Taylor & Francis, Ltd. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/153752>

⁷⁶ Paul Kubicek, Authoritarianism in Central Asia: Curse or Cure? *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Mar., 1998), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3993112>, 36.

⁷⁷ John Ishiyama, “Political Party Development and Party Gravity in semi-authoritarian regimes,” *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 4, no.1 (2008): 36, <http://www.tfd.org.tw/docs/dj0401/033-054-John%20Ishiyama.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2010).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

dissolution of Parliament in 1994, referendums to extend his term of Presidency, etc., thus undermining democratic principles upon which the country was guiding itself.⁷⁸

One of the most popular terms employed by the scholarly world in describing Kyrgyzstan from mid-1990s and onwards is “semi-authoritarianism,” which refers to countries in transition, that are “neither dictatorial, nor clearly headed toward democracy, but rather entered a grey zone”⁷⁹. As discussed by John Ishiyama, Levitsky and Way, Howard and Roessler, the type of semi-authoritarianism applicable in discussing Kyrgyz Republic is competitive authoritarianism. Marc Howard and Philip Roessler, point out to elections being accepted both by those who govern and those who oppose as the major way of getting and keeping under control political power.⁸⁰ As described by Ishiyama, in competitive authoritarian regimes “formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising authority.”⁸¹ However, what differentiates them from democracies is that those laws and regulations are very often breached by the incumbent, which leads to “the regime’s failure to meet minimum democratic standards.”⁸²

According to Timothy Frye, since political power can be both formal and informal, it becomes especially difficult to measure the powers of the president in “transition countries”, where informal powers are “strong and not encoded in formal rules.”⁸³ However, one has to keep in mind that in the same cases of “states in transition,” informal powers of the president can perfectly re-emerge as formal powers. The incumbent leaders of Central Asian states of

⁷⁸ Paul Kubicek, *Authoritarianism in Central Asia: Curse or Cure?* Third World Quarterly, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Mar., 1998), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3993112>, 38.

⁷⁹ Thomas Carothers, “The end of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no 1, (2002): 5-21.

⁸⁰ Howard, Marc Morjé and Philip G. Roessler. “Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes.” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no 2 (2006): 368.

⁸¹ John Ishiyama, “Political Party Development and Party Gravity in semi-authoritarian regimes,” *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 4, no.1 (2008): 36, <http://www.tfd.org.tw/docs/dj0401/033-054-John%20Ishiyama.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2010).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Timothy Frye, “A Politics of Institutional Choice Post-communist Presidencies.” *Comparative Political Studies* 30, no 5 (1997): 523-552.

Kazakhstan, Tadjikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as Frye says, “used the constitutions to enshrine their powers, suggesting the importance of formal rules.”⁸⁴

Thus, there emerges another feature that differentiates the regime, and a popular term “superpresidentialism” is used to explain the relevant characteristics of it. Steven Fish employed the term to express:

“An apparatus of executive power that dwarfs all other agencies in terms of size and the resources it consumes; a president who enjoys decree powers; a president who de jure or de facto controls most of the powers of the purse; a relatively toothless legislature that cannot repeal presidential decrees and that enjoys scant authority and/or resources to monitor the chief executive; provisions that render impeachment of the president virtually impossible; and a court system that is controlled wholly or mainly by the chief executive and that cannot in practice check presidential prerogatives or even abuse of power. Superpresidentialism is a regime. It may be contrasted with autocracy, insofar as the chief executive does not enjoy total power and is subject to periodic challenge in national elections.”⁸⁵

Steven Fish, Ryan Kennedy and John Ishiyama touch upon four examples of “superpresidential model” during their studies: Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Armenia and Ukraine. As one of the findings suggests, in these countries “superpresidentialism holds down the incentives for important political and economic actors to invest in politics.”⁸⁶ This influences the way opposition forces in these countries function.

In contrast to political opposition in states with democratic type of ruling, where it is regarded as a powerful actor playing an important role in political arena, opposition forces in non-democratic political context face greater challenges, which make them more vulnerable to actions of authoritarian leadership. Most of the literature on Kyrgyz political opposition clearly indicate this relationship.

Kyrgyz opposition

Political parties and individual politicians have been the major focus of the literature on Kyrgyz political opposition. Most of the discussions around of the topic were within the framework of parliamentary and presidential elections, although the recent studies shifted their

⁸⁴ Timothy Frye, “A Politics of Institutional Choice Post-communist Presidencies.” *Comparative Political Studies* 30, no 5 (1997): 523-552.

⁸⁵ Steven M. Fish, “The Executive Deception: Superpresidentialism and the Degradation of Russian Politics,” in *Building the Russian State: Institutional Crisis and the Quest for Democratic Governance*, edited by Valerie Sperling (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001), 179.

⁸⁶ Tamerlan Ibraimov, “O Vlasti i Oppozitcii.” *BPC*. 27 October 2009. <http://www.bpc.kg/perspective/145-27-10-09>.

concerns toward discussing the role of political opposition in “street politics” referring to demonstrations, protests and mass mobilization. The most recent works shed some light on peculiarities of political opposition such as its high volatility and low opposition cooperation. Power-opposition interactions have been another major emerging focus of study in the scholarly world.

According to Zairash Galieva, opposition in the West is a “full member” of the political system, and presence of opposition along with government is equally important in running the country.⁸⁷ As discussed by Robert Dahl, opposition in consolidated democracies is mainly represented by strong political parties and interest groups concerned with political issues. It is a leading force with an alternative vision of country’s future, defined ideological stand and a concise plan of actions regarding policy implementation on different levels.⁸⁸

Kyrgyz opposition in many regards differs from the classical opposition described by Dahl and is subject to heavy criticism in Kyrgyzstan.⁸⁹ According to Joomart Ormonbekov, a political scientist, opposition in Kyrgyzstan in the face of political parties “has not become a leading political force incorporated into institutionalized political parties of the Western type.”⁹⁰ As discussed by Muratbek Imanaliev, party system in Kyrgyzstan is “forming so slowly, sluggishly, and not so much qualitatively.”⁹¹ So despite the fact that there have always been about hundred political parties making it a multi-party system⁹², the political scene of Kyrgyzstan “lacks parties with clear programs and concrete goals that can represent the interests

⁸⁷ Zairash Galieva, *Politicheskaya transformaciya suverenogo Kyrgyzstana: Dinamika i osobennosti* (Bishkek: KNU, 2007) 94.

⁸⁸ Robert Dahl, “Some explanations,” in *Political Opposition in Western Democracies*, edited by Robert Dahl. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press:

⁸⁹ Muratbek Imanaliev, Joomart Ormonbekov, Valentine Bogatyryev, Bakyt Beshimov, Tamerlan Ibraimov, etc.

⁹⁰ Joomart Ormonbekov, “Mythology of Political Parties in Kyrgyzstan.” *Institute for Public Policy*, <http://www.ipp.kg/ru/analysis/513/>.

⁹¹ Muratbek Imanaliev, “Party-building in Kyrgyzstan.” *Institute for Public Policy*, <http://www.ipp.kg/ru/publications/>.

⁹² Evolution of multi-party system in Kyrgyzstan is discussed by Alibek Akunov, Usen Chotonov, Ulugbek Chynaliev.

of the general public.”⁹³ Bakyt Beshimov brings as exception of the Communist Party, which still desires to bring the Soviet order back.⁹⁴ While discussing the issues faced by opposition, Imanaliev identified three major problems undermining successful formation and further development of political parties in Kyrgyzstan:

1. Misperception of the role of political parties in Kyrgyzstan (“political psychology” inherited from the Soviet Union),
2. Insufficient experience of politicians and “traditionalism”⁹⁵ in building political opposition,
3. Lack of state’s support for political parties, state’s attempts to prevent emergence of viable opposition.

Alisher Khamidov underlines the concentration of major opposition activities around a few individual politicians and charismatic leaders rather than organizations or political parties with a defined stand in ideological spectrum.⁹⁶ Many scholars studying political processes in Kyrgyzstan support this statement.⁹⁷ They see it as an impediment to the development of strong political opposition in Kyrgyzstan, which in turn makes opposition entities short-living ineffective political organisms and undermines the proper functioning of opposition in Kyrgyzstan.

According to Joseph Lapalombara and Jeffrey Anderson, Western political opposition in the face of political parties has a variety of functions ranging from leadership recruitment to mass mobilization.⁹⁸ However, the major function of opposition is formation of government through elections. In countries of Western Europe opposition forces successfully create blocs, coalitions, and later, fractions to be able to remain viable entities to pursue their goals (esp. incentives are higher in multi-party systems).

Cooperation with other opposition forces (creating blocs, coalitions, electoral tandems or any other kind of allies) provides more opportunities for opposition to come to power or balance

⁹³ Joomart, Ormonbekov. “Mythology of Political Parties in Kyrgyzstan.” *Institute for Public Policy*, <http://www.ipp.kg/ru/analysis/513/>.

⁹⁴ Bakyt Beshimov, “Authority-Opposition Tandem.” *Analytical Centre Prudent Solutions*. 5 March 2007. <http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20070305121803412>.

⁹⁵ “Traditionalism” in party building, according to Imanaliev occurs when members of the party are usually leaders’ relatives, friends or “some category of people who work for money,” rather than “ideological comrades.”

⁹⁶ Alisher Khamidov, “Stanovlenie Kyrgyzskoi oppozitsii.” *Free Asia*, <http://freeas.org/?nid=497>.

⁹⁷ Tamerlan Ibraimov, Valentin Bogatyrev, Joomart Ormonbekov, Muratbek Imanaliev, Elvira Mamytova, etc.

⁹⁸ Joseph Lapalombara and Anderson, Jeffrey. “Political Parties.” *Electoral Politics Reader* ICP 332, AUCA (2008): 393-409.

the government. Regardless of this, opposition cooperation in Kyrgyzstan remains very low.⁹⁹ In their research “Why Don’t Opposition Elites Cooperate with Each Other in the Post-Communist World?” Huskey and Iskakova identified such factors as the strategies of the leadership to divide opposition, opposition members’ personal ambitions, financial issues faced by opposition, members’ values and loyalties, as well as the “level of trust between them” which negatively influence opposition cooperation in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly to note that loyalties of representatives of opposition forces was the least important factor causing non-cooperation of opposition elite. “The low level of trust between opposition members” and “their personal values” (referring to “personalist” prevailing “ideological values”) help to draw the picture of political opposition in Kyrgyzstan in a better manner.¹⁰¹

Methodology: To make an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon, the research employs qualitative analysis. The study uses both secondary (newspapers; books on Kyrgyz politics, contentious politics and opposition; scholarly publications and journal articles) and primary (memoirs of people relevant to the research, interviews with experts) sources.

Interviews contribute to better understanding the topic of the research and analyzing the possible outcomes of the work. Snowball sampling was chosen in identifying respondents. Below is the list of respondents who contributed to findings of the research. Due to sensitivity of the issue, several respondents wished to remain anonymous.

Akunov, Alibek. (expert in Kyrgyz politics, professor, Kyrgyz National University), March 2010

Baisalov, Edil (activist, opposition member, expert in Kyrgyz politics), April 2010

Dukenbaev, Askat (political scientist, analyst, expert in Kyrgyz politics), March 2010

Huskey, Eugene. (Political scientist, expert in Kyrgyz politics, professor)

Mukanbetov, Sabyr (political observer, journalist, Alibi newspaper), March 2010.

⁹⁹ Eugene Huskey and Gulnara Iskakova, “Why don’t Opposition Elites Cooperate with each other in the Post-Communist World? Interview Evidence from Kyrgyzstan,” *The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*, (2009): 1-34, (accessed November 12, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Tekebaev, Omurbek (activist, member of opposition, leader of “Ata-Meken” party), March 2010.

Tilulegenov, Medet (AUCA/ICP instructor, political scientist, expert in Kyrgyz politics), March 2010.

AUCA/ICP Instructor, expert in Kyrgyz politics, analyst, who wished to remain anonymous, March 2010.

Expert in Kyrgyz politics, activist, member of “Ak-Shumkar” party, who wished to remain anonymous, March 2010.

Expert in Kyrgyz politics, activist, member of “Social-Democratic Party,” who wished to remain anonymous, March 2010.

Section III: The “Rise and Fall” of political activism of Kyrgyz opposition

This section reviews the major political events in Kyrgyzstan during 1989-2007, demonstrating two periods of high opposition activism, exploring the role of opposition, and distinguishing trends and peculiarities of opposition activism of in Kyrgyzstan. It looks deeper in the events of continuous opposition activism, both in parliamentary and extra-parliamentary dimensions, during the periods of 1989-1994 and 2004-2007, being characterized as a “consolidation” of opposition forces. Consolidation has been determined by broad national-based support of population and formation of opposition blocs and coalitions that constitute a viable force with an ability to influence the decision-making processes. Besides, this section provides an analysis of political opposition performances during the period of 1995-2003 and examines the issue of decline of political opposition during above mentioned periods.

3.1 Trends and opportunities

The first period marked by high opposition activity captures five years of Kyrgyz political history (1989-1994) and covers the last years of existence of the USSR, which has also been called as a time of “loosening of controls.” As the Communist Party of Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) was not able to solve economic and political problems within the country, it gained a reputation of a weak state body.

Economic situation worsened significantly in the late 1980s. People suffered from deficit of goods, high inflation, severe unemployment, etc. Besides, the government was failing to address the issue of ethnic tensions in the country, causing the outbreak of violence. For example, the law as of September 1989 on “making Kyrgyz language an official language, and describing Russian as the “language of inter-ethnic communication”,¹⁰² further escalated existing tensions between extensive Russian minority and the titular nation. Besides, the Osh inter-

¹⁰² John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999, 19.

communal conflict of June 1990 (between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks) was a direct consequence of tensions because of socio-economic and political reasons. The government's failure to address the above-mentioned issues and prevent inter-ethnic clashes took lives of more than two hundred people and greatly undermined the reputation of Kyrgyz Communist leadership.

At the same time, Kyrgyz Communist leadership has earned a reputation of Conservatives.¹⁰³ As the center (Moscow-based government) was diligently promoting new policies of "openness and liberalization," the head of Kyrgyz SSR (Absamat Masaliev) discouraged new reforms. Instead, he directed all his efforts to stand against the perestroika and glasnost policies of Gorbachev. The shift towards centrist ideas of change promoted by the leadership of the Union was regarded by Absamat Masaliev's team as a harmful act, which did not reflect Communist ideology. Thus, various attempts were made to isolate the Kyrgyz SSR from ongoing reforms in the Soviet Union, including attempts to build strong ties with "Moscow's Conservatives". Yegor Ligachev's visit in autumn was an indicator of such attempts.¹⁰⁴ However, as argued by Eugene Huskey, Masaliev had to allow Ligachev and his team to interfere with "cadre questions" in the Republic in return for their support.¹⁰⁵

In effort to keep power in hands of the Kyrgyz Communist Party, Masaliev tried to control "the corridor to power." An analysis of the 1989 elections for the Congress of People's Deputies and the elections of 1990 for the Supreme Soviet of Kyrgyz SSR clearly indicate these efforts. As observed by Eugene Huskey, out of 41 new deputies elected in 1989 to the Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union (32 seats were given "on the basis ethnicity", 9 "on the basis of population" and 12 selected by the "national-level public"); only few individuals were

¹⁰³ Three major groups (including the group of Conservatives (Communists headed by Ligachev), radical democrats (led by Eltsin) and liberal-centrists (in the person of Gorbachev and his team) were competing in the highest echelon of power of USSR in 1989-1990. However, the Kyrgyz political scene was mainly divided into two major blocs: radical Communists and democrats.

¹⁰⁴ John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999, 18.

¹⁰⁵ Eugene Huskey, "The Rise of Contested Politics in Central Asia: Elections in Kyrgyzstan: 1989-1990," *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 5 (1995): 818.

not proponents of the Communist Party.¹⁰⁶ However, it can also be claimed that such outcome of elections did not represent the view of the general public. Arguments provided by Eugene Huskey indicate electoral rules favoring the Communist Party such as controlling the nomination processes, unequal media coverage and use of administrative resources as a cause of such outcome.¹⁰⁷

Repressions to ‘silence the critiques’ of the Communist Party and its leadership were heavily employed by the Communist leadership. The interviews with opposition activists demonstrated that repressions remained high up until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Askat Dukenbaev helps to clarify the situation:

“I was one of the founders of the Union of Kyrgyzstan’s Students, which was an informal part of the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan. In 1989 we wanted to form a new movement (Student’s) as a counterbalance to VLKSM (which was a union of young people of the Soviet Union with Communist ideology). If the State Committee for Emergency Situation (GKChP-associated with last efforts to “save” the Soviet Union) was successful we would all be in prison...they were “gunning for” us, had a dossier on everyone...”

Despite of these actions, the Kyrgyz leadership could not escape the challenges imposed by the Union’s leadership in Moscow and opposition groups within the Republic. When repressions and restrictions were not bringing expected outcomes (isolate the country and eliminate opposition), Masaliev started using “the mixture” of repressions and concessions as his last resort to keep power in his hands. As a response to rising criticism by the population and pressure coming from newly emerging democratic forces, elections for the Supreme Soviet of Kyrgyz SSR in March 1990 became more competitive and open. Despite the Communist party’s unwillingness to “open up” the system, these elections challenged the traditional method of gaining power and gave bigger opportunities to opposition to compete for power and reinforced hopes that democratic “victory is possible.”

Based on Robert Dahl’s description of democratic governance, this period can also be defined as a democratic breakthrough. Political and economic initiatives of USSR leadership in

¹⁰⁶ Eugene Huskey, “The Rise of Contested Politics in Central Asia: Elections in Kyrgyzstan: 1989-1990,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 5 (1995): 818.

¹⁰⁷ Chotonov Usen, *Noveishaya istoria Kyrgyzstana: 1985-1998*. (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan Publishing House 1999), 17.

the face of Gorbachev's reforms brought many changes, including pluralism of political actors and interests. Thus, elections for the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR in March 1989 and the establishment of Inter-regional deputy group during the first Congress of people's deputies (July 29, 1989), diversification of Supreme Council of Kyrgyz SSR (April 1990) and the emergence of unofficial opposition movements and organizations, indeed led to the weakening and later abolishment of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁸

Various reforms were designed to promote democratic principles and liberalization of economy. An introduction of the law "On Public Associations" (October, 1990) provided more space for emergence of various organizations representing different layers of the society and boosted opposition activism. Elections for the President of Kyrgyz SSR in October 1990 and coming to power of a "radical democrat" Askar Akaev¹⁰⁹ served as an indicator of those trends "loosening of controls" by Kyrgyz Communist Party – the general trend going on at that time in most of the parts of the Soviet Union.

Change in leadership

In October 1990 Askar Akaev was chosen by the Supreme Soviet to replace Absamat Masaliev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party.¹¹⁰ In contrast to all the other leaders of Central Asia, Askar Akaev's path to power was different, as he was not the first secretary of the Communist Party at the time the Soviet Union collapsed. About fifteen years of his life were spent in St. Petersburg studying.¹¹¹ Even when he became a member of the Communist party in 1981, Akaev continued working in the same area by being the vice-president and later the president of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences.¹¹² However, things started to change in 1989, and in May Akaev

¹⁰⁸ Eugene Huskey, "The Rise of Contested Politics in Central Asia: Elections in Kyrgyzstan: 1989-1990," *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 5 (1995).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia's Catapult to Independence," *Foreign Affairs* 71. no. 3 (1992): 113, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20045233>.

¹¹¹ *Regime Spector*. "The Transformation of Askar Akaev." *BPS*. 2004. http://iseees.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/u4/bps_/publications_/2004_02-spec.pdf

¹¹² Ibid.

was elected to the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow. This gave him a chance to get in touch with other politicians and build strong ties with Gorbachev, and later, Eltsin. It also became a good opportunity for a scientist to learn more about politics. As it was mentioned by Huskey, "if St. Petersburg introduced Akaev to serious science, Moscow gave him good schooling in politics."¹¹³

Why Askar Akaev?

His march to the presidency has often been regarded as an outcome of internal conflicts in the Communist party. No consensus was reached by Communists of Kyrgyz SSR in choosing their candidate for the post of the President, or in other words due to the split of the governing elite. Perception of Askar Akaev as an individual "without any prepared team and the support of any party or public organization"¹¹⁴ made him "a potentially controllable compromise candidate"¹¹⁵ for the participating parties.

However, while looking at Akaev's rise to power, it cannot be said that this is purely connected to luck, because he was there at the right time. Conversely, it has been argued by some that he was the right person who was there at the right time. While coming across this question, one can find out the correlation between the rising support for democratic ideas and movements and Akaev's personality. Akaev's individuality was far more different from others' representing Kyrgyzstan in the Congress of People's Deputies. As discussed above, the "communist elite viewed the disintegration of the Soviet Union as an undesirable and dangerous phenomenon"¹¹⁶ and did not support Gorbachev's and later Eltsin's policies of liberalization and democratization.

¹¹³ Regine Spector. "The Transformation of Askar Akaev." *BPS*. 2004. http://iseees.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/u4/bps_/publications_/2004_02-spec.pdf

¹¹⁴ Elvira Mamytova, "Formation of Opposition Mood in Pre-Soviet and Soviet Kyrgyzstan," in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 71.

¹¹⁵ Anderson, John. *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999, 24.

¹¹⁶ Igor P. Lipovsky, "Central Asia: In Search of a New Political Identity," *Middle East Journal* 50. no. 2 (1996): 211-223, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4328926>. (accessed February 2, 2010).

In contrast to them, Akaev, representing the minority group within the delegation, made it clear that he was supportive of political and market reforms.¹¹⁷ By doing so he was associated with changes in the regime and the hope of democrats and the population that the socio-economic and political crisis will soon end.

Another critical event that brought dramatic changes to the Kyrgyz politics has been there the collapse of the Soviet Union and emergence of independent Kyrgyz state. Kyrgyzstan declared its independence in August 31, 1991. Along with independence appeared many new concerns, such as state-building, institutional design, power relations and economic re-adjustment. The adoption of a new Constitution (May 5, 1993), national flag (March 3, 1992), anthem (December 18, 1992) and emblem (January 14, 1994), definition of the national ideology, as well as recognition by international community and membership in the international organizations were crucial to its sovereignty. Kyrgyzstan has also been engaged in economic re-adjustment programs. It adopted a law on privatization; set up state property commission (December, 1991); carried out numerous agricultural reforms, such as distribution of land and reorganized collective farms; achieved membership with the World Bank and IMF (1992-1993); and introduced a national currency (May 10, 1993).¹¹⁸

However, liberal democratic reforms were reversed by Akaev's efforts to consolidate authoritarianism in Kyrgyzstan. The first attempts to strengthen the powers of the President were made starting from the **mid 1990s** by changing "the rules of the political game" through referenda and amendments to the constitution. With the constitutional referendum in February 1996 "de jure presidential form of governance"¹¹⁹ was established, and president gained major. F President's power were further consolidated as different amendments to the Constitution were

¹¹⁷ Regine Spector. "The Transformation of Askar Akaev." *BPS*. 2004. http://iseees.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/u4/bps_/publications_/2004_02-spec.pdf

¹¹⁸ Lyudmila Baum, "Dynamics of Economic Reform in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia and Caucasus Press*, no.2 (2007): 1-9.

¹¹⁹ Elvira Mamytova, "Formation of Opposition Mood in Pre-Soviet and Soviet Kyrgyzstan," in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 76.

made. For example, the members of the parliament were appointed by the president after the prime minister's suggestion and approval of Jogorku Kenesh, according to the Constitution of 1993.¹²⁰ The President appointed members of the government only with consultations with the Prime Minister, according to Constitutions of 1996 and 1998.¹²¹ Due to emergence of two chambers in the Jogorku Kenesh after the referendum of 1994, to appoint the Prime Minister the president needed an approval of only one Chamber, the Assembly of People's Representatives.¹²² This was done according to Constitutions of 1996 and 2003.¹²³

If the referenda of 1996 and 1998 greatly strengthened the powers of the President, the referendum of 2003 created a super-presidential form of governance granting enormous powers to the president, including the right of "absolute veto on all parliamentary decisions," "full immunity of ex-President and members of his family," limitation of the powers of the parliament, as well as changes in the electoral rules and regulations.¹²⁴

In addition to changes in laws and legal procedures, which granted significant powers to the President at the expense of Jogorku Kenesh, different traps for members of political opposition were created to prevent them from gaining seats in the parliament or participating in presidential elections. Neither election for the president nor for the parliament met the criteria of free and fair elections. Electoral results in Kyrgyzstan were often considered illegitimate and criticized by political opposition and international community as failing to meet most of the criteria to organize free and fair elections. Government used different tactics, including votes falsification and buying votes, to undermine the relative power of opposition to win elections.

Using the term offered by Marc Morje Howard and Philip G. Roessler, one can categorize the country as a competitive authoritarian state, which holds competitive and

¹²⁰ Iskakova, Gulnara. *Vybory i Demokratiia v Kyrgyzstane: Konstitutsionnyi Dizain Prezidentsko-Parlamentskih Otnoshenii*. Bishkek: Biiktik, 2003.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Elvira Mamytova, "Formation of Opposition Mood in Pre-Soviet and Soviet Kyrgyzstan," in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 82.

contested elections where “opposition chooses to participate rather than to boycott”, but different techniques and maneuvers are employed by the incumbent leadership to keep power in their hands and secure their position.¹²⁵ These tactics vary from case to case and may range from electoral fraud, co-opting of major political opposition members to its side, usage of administrative resources to repressions, criminal procedures and other legal obstacles.

By 2004 it became clear that Kyrgyzstan turned into a “superpresidential state,” where “symbolic, procedural, appointive and political weight” of Akaev indicated his powerful position.¹²⁶ Giving an interview to ICG, a government official proclaimed that “we strengthened his authoritarianism and active interference on the part of the family began...”¹²⁷ Akaev’s family, close friends and relatives were also ruling the country together. This in turn affected the political scene of Kyrgyzstan, and political opposition in particular. Akaev’s family played an important role in decision-making with regards to important decisions, starting from the cadre questions for the highest posts in the country to distribution of economic resources. This had a direct influence on the importance of the issue of presidential succession in the country, as stakes of gaining power became enormously high. Thus, upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in 2005 were regarded by political opposition as an opportunity to overthrow Akaev’s regime.

The parliamentary elections of February 2005 caused a wave of criticism coming from domestic opposition forces and international community. OSCE has pointed out to the unequal and biased media coverage, manipulation of voter lists and employment of different techniques including “de-registration of candidates on minor grounds” to undermine the competitiveness of opposition forces during elections.¹²⁸ In the U.S. Ambassador Stephen Young’s statement while criticizing February 2005 parliamentary elections, the United States joined the position of the

¹²⁵ Marc Morjé Howard and Philip G. Roessler. “Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes.” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no 2 (2006): 365-381.

¹²⁶ John Ishiyama and Kennedy, Ryan. “Superpresidentialism and Political Party Development in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan,” *European-Asia Studies* 56, no. 8 (2001): 1185.

¹²⁷ Political Transition in Kyrgyzstan. Problems and Prospects, *ICG Report*, 11 August, 2004

¹²⁸ “The Tulip Revolution Chronicles.” *Radio Liberty/Free Europe*. <http://www.rferl.org>.

OSCE “that the poll did not meet international standards.”¹²⁹ Besides, domestic actors also strongly criticized the incumbent president Akaev for fraudulent elections. Despite Akaev’s earlier statements made “under the pressure from the West that he would respect the constitution and not stand for another presidential term,” he was accused of preparing his daughter, Bernmet Akaeva or son Aidar Akaev as power successors.¹³⁰

Elections, in which authoritarian leadership used different methods to keep opposition aside from power, became a factor fostering political opposition’s and population’s dissatisfaction and anger. According to Emir Kulov, “stolen elections” along with several other factors can be regarded as a variable with a “trigger effect”, contributing to further escalation of conflict and under certain “political and social context” lead to revolutions.¹³¹ Indeed, the dissatisfaction of different political forces with the authoritarian changes and manipulations of elections were expressed in political protests and mass demonstrations. For instance, blocking major roads in the country became a popular method of protesting electoral fraud. Thus, after the long struggle with non-democratic government, political opposition in the country was successfully consolidated by March 24, 2005.

So called “Tulip Revolution” used to refer to “the popular mobilization in March 24 and the downfall of the incumbent Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev,”¹³² became another critical juncture in the political history of Kyrgyzstan. Kurmanbek Bakiev, a former prime-minister who was forced to resign as an outcome of Aksy tensions between supporters of southern MP Azimbek Beknazarov and militia in 2002, became presidential candidate supported by the majority of opposition forces in 2005. While characterized as “a revolutionary shift towards democracy, an open society and legitimate state,”¹³³ the Tulip Revolution failed to maintain this

¹²⁹ “The Tulip Revolution Chronicles.” *Radio Liberty/Free Europe*. <http://www.rferl.org>.

¹³⁰ Eugene Huskey and William R. Kenan. “Postcommunist Kyrgyzstan,” 12.

¹³¹ Emir Kulov. “March 2005: parliamentary elections as a catalyst of protest,” *Central Asian Survey* 27, no. 3-4, (September-December 2008), 337.

¹³² Emir Kulov, “March 2005: parliamentary elections as a catalyst of protest,” *Central Asian Survey* 27, no. 3-4, (September-December 2008), 337.

¹³³ Erica Marat, *After the Tulip Revolution*. (Washington: The Jamestown Foundation, 2006), 7.

view among scholars, because its “accomplishments were undermined by the new government’s inefficient and corrupt politics, civil unrest and political assassinations.”¹³⁴ Against the view of proponents of democratization, the Tulip Revolution was later characterized as a “transfer of power”¹³⁵ rather than an event bringing revolutionary changes. Thus, an occurrence of the visible shift towards democracy under Bakiev’s presidency as a result of “free expression of popular will” is not the case in differentiating post-revolutionary period of Kyrgyzstan’s history.

Groups of people who were former Bakiev’s comrades but were excluded from power soon united against his rule. This was done through various political blocs and coalitions. Despite their efforts the new president has been employing innovative strategies to establish authoritarian regime and successfully weaken the opposition forces. Thus, with new leadership coming to power after the “Tulip Revolution” in the face of the former prime-minister Kurmanbek Bakiev, the country experienced “the most difficult period since gaining independence.”¹³⁶

Similar to his predecessor, Bakiev initiated numerous policies to consolidate his power. The formation of a pro-presidential party Ak-Jol in 2007 was one of the most significant steps in that direction. Despite the large amount of political parties in Kyrgyzstan, not many have had an access to power. Their inability to become institutionalized forces in the country have several reasons, including lack of resources to contest elections, unclear goals of parties themselves, absence of alternative policies, ideological basis, etc. In contrast, Ak- Jol party became a ruling party in a short period of time after its establishment, constituting majority in Jogorku Kenesh (Kyrgyz Parliament). This highly effected the political situation in the country, resulting in “monopolization of politics” in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, by 2008 Bakiev consolidated his powers through securing de facto and de jure authority in the Government and the Parliament. He took

¹³⁴ Erica Marat, *After the Tulip Revolution*. (Washington: The Jamestown Foundation, 2006), 7.

¹³⁵ Scott Radnitz, “What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?” *Journal of Democracy*, 17, no. 2 (2006), 132-146.

¹³⁶ Erica Marat, *After the Tulip Revolution*. (Washington: The Jamestown Foundation, 2006), 7.

an absolute control of the state bodies and used even more radical methods to eliminate opposition in the country.

Dynamics of opposition activism

Political opposition activism during 1989-1990

The situation, when no one could go against the will of the party leadership (Masaliev), changed in 1989. This was connected to the split of the governing elite (Communists) and emergence of new viable forces, democrats.

Within the deputy corpus there could be observed a plurality of opinions regarding different issues in the republic. As the “first sign of disobedience”, Absamat Masaliev’s leadership was questioned by some of the deputies, and despite being elected by 293 deputies without any alternative opponent, for the first time, he faced opposition in the face of other 46 deputies within the Supreme Soviet of Kyrgyz SSR.¹³⁷ Later more Communist deputies changed sides and in October of 1990, 114 Supreme Soviet deputies created a parliamentary bloc “For Democratic Renewal, Civil Accord in Kirgizia.”¹³⁸ Parliamentary opposition went so far in 1990 to create the “post of the President of the Kyrgyz SSR.”

Another opposition bloc was represented by several groups united in the face of the so called democrats, who demonstrated a different view about the path for the republic to take. While emergence of democrats the higher level (level of the Union) in around 1987 was associated with groups “artificially created” by Gorbachev (such people as Eltsin were “moved” by him to opposition), few years later, they changed their status of “pocket opposition” and continued functioning independently.¹³⁹

The strengthening of democrats in Kyrgyzstan started from 1989. First, this was associated with change in formal rules and regulations (going along with perestroika and glasnost policies of Gorbachev) providing more space for opposition existence and activism (e.g.

¹³⁷ Elvira Mamytova, “Formation of Opposition Mood in Pre-Soviet and Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 68.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 68.

¹³⁹ Chotonov Usen, *Noveishaya istoria Kyrgyzstana: 1985-1998*. (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan Publishing House 1999), 17.

the law “On Public Associations” providing more space for emergence of various organizations, electoral rules and regulations allowing opposition to gain seats in the Parliament, etc.). Secondly, the “bottom-up” scenario (growing socio-economic hardships, ethnic tensions were the driving forces contributing to rising opposition moods in the country). As a result of these problems people’s dissatisfaction with the Communist leadership rose dramatically. This gave incentives for young people to unify in order to press on government and push for new policies regarding socio-economic changes. One of the first informal organizations to emerge in June 1989 was *Ashar*, the origin of which is connected to the claims of young people in Bishkek for land as a response to the lack of governmental policies regarding the issue of housing. According to Chingiz Aitmatov, it was an informal Kyrgyz youth organization, which turned into a popular front.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, as a spill-over effect, many more new associations such as Edinstvo zastroishikov, Kok-Jar, Asaba, Atuulduk Demilge, Osh Aimagy, Memorial club, and others emerged expressing different demands from the government.

Overall, the position of these forces was expressed through protests, demonstrations and even some illegal actions, such as unauthorized seizure of land plots in Bishkek and Osh in 1989. For example, the mass protests in January 25-26, 1990 and February 5, 1990 were large in their scope and popularly supported by the majority of population.¹⁴¹ Protests against the mass arrival of refugees from Armenia who suffered an earthquake¹⁴² were just one of the reasons for the mobilization of protestors. The major trends observed included the nationalist pattern of their activities, indicated in their concerns about the destiny of Kyrgyz people with regards to economic and social well-being, as well as political dominance.

Thus, on May 1990, in total 34 democratic organizations united under the name of the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan. Based on the review of its Action Program, it was

¹⁴⁰ Eugene Huskey, “The Rise of Contested Politics in Central Asia: Elections in Kyrgyzstan: 1989-1990,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 5 (1995): 824.

¹⁴¹ Ulugbek Chynaliev, *Politicheskii partii Kyrgyzstana*. (Moscow: NIK, 1999), 38.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

presumably called “radical democratic and opposing to any kind of totalitarianism.”¹⁴³ As observed by Ulugbek Chynaliev, a political scientist, anti-communist attitude of the DMK was fundamental to forming its position and plan of actions from its very emergence.¹⁴⁴ The transformation of Kyrgyz SSR into an independent sovereign state, providing freedoms and opportunities to all nationalities was one of the orientations of the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan. However, securing economic, political and social rights and interests of Kyrgyz population was its top priority.¹⁴⁵ In this, the opposition was highly supported by the population and according to a public opinion poll, the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan was supported by 57.2% of Kyrgyzstan’s adult population in 1990.¹⁴⁶

For the first time during the Soviet era, Kyrgyzstan witnessed the corporatism of opposition entities constituting a viable opposition to the Communist party.¹⁴⁷ Most of the opposition activities emerged to protect economic and social interests of the population, but soon shifted their concerns to political questions. This was connected to their belief that changes in the political spectrum in particular were possible solutions to all the other problems and with the Communist party being blamed for all the problems in the country, the most popular view among people on the possible solutions to these issues was replacement of the leadership. It went further with the political opposition’s demand to engage in democratic reforms and restructuring of the whole political system. In this, the opposition was highly supported by the population.¹⁴⁸ Political opposition’s tremendous activism and diligent efforts to change the whole political regime brought its results and led to changes in leadership and establishment of a new course for the country.

Political opposition activism from October 1990 to 1994

¹⁴³ “Kyrgyzstan: Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Era”, (INS Resource Information Center. 1993), 7.

¹⁴⁴ Chynaliev, Ulugbek. *Politicheskii partii Kyrgyzstana*. (Moscow: NIK, 1999), 38.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 39.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 40.

¹⁴⁷ Elvira Mamytova, “Formation of Opposition Mood in Pre-Soviet and Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 67.

and

Chotonov Usen, *Noveishaya istoria Kyrgyzstana: 1985-1998*. (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan Publishing House 1999), 34-35.

¹⁴⁸ Chynaliev, Ulugbek. *Politicheskii partii Kyrgyzstana*. (Moscow: NIK, 1999), 40.

As it was discussed above, political opposition before Akaev's rise to power was predominantly represented by democratic movements, organizations and a parliamentary minority. Achievement of independence and implementation of economic and political reforms was one of the major ideas behind the emergence and existence of organizations and movements which constituted principal opposition to the Communist Party. Their plan of actions started coming to force by country's democratic top leadership through radical reforms to change the system. The democratic entities faced several challenges as Kyrgyzstan gained independence. This pushed many members of the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan to join Askar Akaev's team in the government as they shared his vision of the future.

The second trend which was observed is the shift from corporatism of political opposition into pluralism of opposition actors. Due to the "crisis of identity" within the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, several groups cut themselves off from it and started their own political parties.¹⁴⁹ Thus, nearly thirty political parties were registered by the Ministry of Justice, including the major ones such as "Erkin Kyrgyzstan", "Asaba", "Ata Meken" and "Democratic movement of Kyrgyzstan Party."¹⁵⁰

These forces continued criticizing different actions of the government but overall they had no major claims against the whole system or the direction Kyrgyzstan was taking path toward. As the majority of opposition was not represented in the parliament, the most traditional way of pursuing their goals was extra-parliamentary (street politics). These political parties, according to Ulugbek Chynaliev, a political scientist, including "Erkin Kyrgyzstan" were claiming for dissolution of the parliament and organization of new Presidential elections, as they perceived Parliament as an illegitimate body. Its elections were held according to rules and laws of the "totalitarian regime," and the President was not elected through popular vote.¹⁵¹ Among other important activities were protests, demonstrations and meetings with the population to

¹⁴⁹ Ulugbek Chynaliev, *Politicheskii partii Kyrgyzstana*. (Moscow: NIK, 1999), 39.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 41.

¹⁵¹ Ulugbek Chynaliev, *Politicheskii partii Kyrgyzstana*. (Moscow: NIK, 1999), 40.

express their position on major political events such as the “parliamentary crisis”, organization of referenda, new bicameral parliament, etc.¹⁵² Thus, in the atmosphere of newly arrived liberty and euphoria, the issue of institutional design of the country and power relations became the major source of activism for this group of political opposition.

After the elections of October 1990, its composition changed dramatically. Some forces emerged during this period, others faced certain modifications. Not surprisingly, communists became the biggest group forming political opposition to Akaev. As the parliamentary dimension of opposition activism strengthened, extra-parliamentary activism of political opposition also continued to remain high. This continuous struggle could be observed in ebb and flow of political events in Kyrgyzstan.

Special attention has to be paid to the role of the Communist bloc in discussing political opposition activism during this period, as it constituted a viable opposition force to the new government led by Akaev. It was engaged in the extra-parliamentary dimension of active involvement in political life of the country by participating in mass protests. However, its activities were mainly associated with parliamentary processes, as they mostly “expressed their stance” in the parliament and it was mainly due to the activism of the Communist bloc that this convocation of parliament was rewarded the name of the “legendary parliament”.

Communists constituted the majority in the “legendary parliament”. Their ideology and vision of Kyrgyzstan’s future radically differed from the ones possessed by the Akaev. In their attempt to keep power in their hands despite the country’s path toward democracy and economic liberalization undertaken by the government, they employed different tools. This led to several open clashes between the Communist bloc and the President.

The best representative of ongoing tensions was “the gold(en) scandal” of 1993 when a special committee under Jogorku Kenesh (at that time, unicameral legislative body including 105

¹⁵² Ulugbek Chynaliev, *Politicheskii partii Kyrgyzstana*. (Moscow: NIK, 1999), 41.

members) blamed the executive for “abuse of power and several other violations.”¹⁵³ As a result, the cabinet with the prime-minister Chyngyshev at the head was sacked due to this action of distrust by parliament¹⁵⁴. As mentioned by Gulnara Iskakova, a political scientist, while leaving his position, Chyngyshev said that “Red (Communists) are coming”, to which a journalist of a local newspaper commented “Red are not coming, they simply did never leave. And Jogorku Kenesh... was always of the red color of a pioneer tie”¹⁵⁵. This clearly indicates the importance of the Communist Party, an ongoing clash of interests between the Communists in the Parliament and the President.

The conflict between Communists and Democrats intensified the division of Parliament into two blocs. In September 1994, 143 out of 350 deputies of Jogorku Kenesh refused to participate in the work of the legislative branch as a result of the conflict between deputies supporting the President and Communists.¹⁵⁶ According to John Anderson, a researcher, during this period majority of parliamentarians made an attempt “to transform the Parliament into a counter-power to the President and his Cabinet.”¹⁵⁷ Thus, opposition in the Parliament showed itself is a viable and active force during this period, however, it was dissolved as a result of internal division.

It is interesting to note the creation of a large political movement “For protection of Constitution, Democracy and Freedom” in the face of the united opposition group of “democratic and communist organizations”¹⁵⁸ in 1994 as a response to the “Declaration 105” in which “Jogorku Kenesh was accused of attempts to overthrow the popularly elected

¹⁵³ A.Kynyev, “Kyrgyzstan do i posle tyulpanovoi revolyucii,” *Mejdunarodnyi Institut Politicheskoi Ekspertizy*, 2005, <http://www.stratagama.org/polittechnology.php?nws=gq14p1781632563>. (accessed December 10, 2009)

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Gulnara Iskakova, *Vybory i demokratia v Kyrgyzstane: Kostitucionnyi Design presidentsko-parlamentskih omosheniy*. (Bishkek: Biyiktik, 2003), 303.

¹⁵⁶ A.Kynyev, “Kyrgyzstan do i posle tyulpanovoi revolyucii,” *Mejdunarodnyi Institut Politicheskoi Ekspertizy*, 2005, <http://www.stratagama.org/polittechnology.php?nws=gq14p1781632563>. (accessed December 10, 2009)

¹⁵⁷ Anderson, John. *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999, 79.

¹⁵⁸ Elvira Mamytova, “Formation of Opposition Mood in Pre-Soviet and Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 77.

President”¹⁵⁹. According to Sydykova, this was the first case of formation of a union by two sides greatly opposing each other.¹⁶⁰ Despite these efforts, government started consolidating its powers. And the first Constitutional referendum, strengthening the institute of Presidency was a clear example of this.

Political opposition remained active both within and outside of the Parliament. Parliamentary opposition was more relevant to the group of Communists. Most of the forces representing political opposition were taking an active part in extra-parliamentary politics also referred to “street politics.” Instead of division of the political scene into just a few blocs, plurality of actors and interests was boosted. This period also captured the first attempts of all the opposition forces including the democratic and Communist blocs to unite in the face of “For protection of the Constitution, Democracy and Freedom” movement to resist the consolidation of Akaev’s power.

Activism of political opposition from 1995-2003 did not carry a continuous character as it was observed during the previous period. Both in the Parliament and “in the street” activism was not as large as it was observed in 1989-1994. Mass protests and demonstrations rarely carried a national character, political blocs were not of a large scale as they were prevented from creating influential broad coalitions to counter-balance the government. Neither did deputies in the Parliament have powerful permanent fractions to carry out their plans in a more effective way. However, even with declining activism of political opposition, the view that opposition was “almost inexistent” in the atmosphere of rising activism is not applicable to the case of Kyrgyzstan. Thus, to the lesser extent but political opposition existed during 1995-2003, and continued playing its role through conventional and unconventional means.

The demonstrations which were held during this period had a local character. One of the biggest protests against the President Akaev and “his corrupt regime” was a demonstration of

¹⁵⁹ Elvira Mamytova, “Formation of Opposition Mood in Pre-Soviet and Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 76.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

“socially vulnerable layers of the population”¹⁶¹ which took place in Bishkek in 1996 gathering about five thousand people.¹⁶² The party of “Bei-becharalar” headed by Zh.Amanbaev and “ErK” led by T.Turgunaliyev demanded the state to provide people jobs, increase pensions, eliminate corruption through courts as well as resignation of Akaev.¹⁶³

Activism of political opposition during this period was mostly associated with elections and referenda.¹⁶⁴ Politically important events including the referenda of 1996, 1998 and 2003, presidential elections of 1995, 2000 and Parliamentary elections of 1995 and 2000 witnessed the relative activism of political opposition first of all because of the “rationality of resource mobilization” connected to rising opportunities for opposition to come to power. As shared by Medet Tiulegenov, “The question of resources is vital to political opposition and it has to choose appropriate moments for mobilization of resources. Especially, this is true in case of Kyrgyz opposition which has never possessed resources to remain active on a constant/regular basis.”¹⁶⁵

Certain attempts were made by political parties to create blocs and coalitions to secure their access to power in the Parliamentary elections of 1995 and 2000 in Kyrgyzstan. Several blocs contested elections in 1995: 1. Kurmanjan Datka (political movements “Turk Atany Baldary,” “Ruh” and political party “ErK”, union of students, political club “Strely Azii,” Union of ethnic Turks of Kyrgyzstan “Turk-Ata”, etc.); 2. Za Edinstvo Kyrgyzstana (Republican People’s Party, the Congress of Women of Kyrgyzstan, the Agrarian Party, Partiya Edinstva Kyrgyzstana and eleven other socio-political organizations); 3. The Congress of Democratic forces (political party “ErK,” Partiya Kooperativov and six other politico-social organizations); 4. Bloc of Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, “Ata Meken,”

¹⁶¹ Mamytova, “Formation of Opposition Mood in Pre-Soviet and Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 79.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 79.

¹⁶⁴ Askat Dukenabev, Medet Tiulegenov, Anonymous AUCA Instructor.

¹⁶⁵ Medet Tilulegenov (political scientist) in discussion with the author, March 2010.

Association “Ar-Namys and Progress.”¹⁶⁶ These blocs did not play an important role in elections of 1995, and this is mainly connected to the issue of institutionalization of political parties in Kyrgyzstan electoral formula used.¹⁶⁷

The tendency of creation of different blocs could also be observed during the Parliamentary elections of 2000. For instance, Ar-Namys Party headed by Felix Kulov made an attempt to join the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan Party with Jypar Jeksheev as a leader of the party. However, this powerful political opposition bloc was not allowed to take part in elections due to the electoral rules, according to which a party could not form a coalition with a party which was not allowed to run in elections (Ar-Namys).¹⁶⁸ The same destiny was faced by “Bei-becharalar party” where many independent deputies of Jogorku Kenesh came from, and many other potentially strong opposition forces such as Congress of Democratic Forces, “which could have included even the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan” failed due to internal disagreements and external pressure from the government.¹⁶⁹ The only political bloc which was “allowed” to take part in elections was the pro-presidential bloc “Union of Democratic Forces”, represented by such parties as Adilet, Edinstvo and Party of Economic Revival.¹⁷⁰ Now let us proceed to the parliamentary dimension of political opposition activism.

Members of opposition parties were able to gain seats in the Parliament. This was reflected in the criticism of Akaev’s regime by certain members of the Parliament. The most active among them were prominent political figures such as Omurbek Tekebaev, Azimbek Beknazarov and Ismail Isakov. However, one of such criticisms had a significant influence on the ebb and flow of political events at that time. Beknazarov’s statement criticizing Akaev’s

¹⁶⁶ Alibek Akunov, *Mnogopartiynost’ I Demokratiya v Kyrgyzskoi Respublike: Istoriko-politologicheskii analiz*. (Bishkek, 1999), 3.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Elvira Mamytova, “Power and opposition in Kyrgyzstan,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 87.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

decision to “transfer 125 hectares of Kyrgyz territory to China”¹⁷¹ caused accusation of Beknazarov in criminal wrongdoings dated back to the position he had seven years ago and his arrest on January, 2002.¹⁷² As the leadership ignored the demand of the Parliament to end criminal charges against Beknazarov, mass strikes were started by his supporters, most of whom were his fellow-villagers from Aksy.¹⁷³ This became the reason behind Aksy events, where supporters of Beknazarov clashed with the police, as a result of which six people were killed.¹⁷⁴

Thus, mass demonstrations followed by the movement “For Resignation of Akaev and Reforms for the People” led by members of Legislative Assembly of Jogorku Kenesh¹⁷⁵, had a demand to bring numerous changes to the Constitution, mostly to the part concerning power-sharing. During an interview, Omurbek Tekebaev, an active opposition leader and former MP said that in 2002 “we achieved the real results with regards to Constitutional reforms”¹⁷⁶. However, very soon these changes were abolished by the government through the referendum of 2003.

Political opposition activism in 2004-2007

Activism of political opposition boosted during the period of 2004-2007. Both Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary dimensions of opposition activism were observed and took a form of opposition blocs and coalitions, political movements, demonstrations and protests.

People’s Movement of Kyrgyzstan was one of the biggest blocs headed by Kurmanbek Bakiev which included in itself political parties Asaba, Communist Party, Kairan El, Republican Party, ErK, Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, Novyi Kyrgyzstan and Erkindik.¹⁷⁷ Their allies were Ata-Jurt Movement (led by Roza Otunbaeva), the bloc “For fair elections”, Jany

¹⁷¹ Elvira Mamytova, “Power and opposition in Kyrgyzstan,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 80.

¹⁷² Ibid, 87.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 81.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Elvira Mamytova, “Formation of Opposition Mood in Pre-Soviet and Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, (Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004), 81.

¹⁷⁶ Omurbek Tekebaev (leader of “Ata-Meken” party, member of opposition) in discussion with the author, March 5, 2010.

¹⁷⁷ A.Kynyev, “Kyrgyzstan do i posle tyulpanovoi revolyucii,” *Mejdunarodnyi Institut Politicheskoi Ekspertizy*, 2005, <http://www.stratagama.org/polittechnology.php?nws=gq14p1781632563>. (accessed December 10, 2009).

Bagyt (headed by Muratbek Imanaliev), the National Movement of Kyrgyzstan, and the National Congress of Kyrgyzstan (led by Almaz Atambaev).¹⁷⁸ Melis Eshimkanov, Ismail Isakov, Dooronbek Sadyrbaev, Bektur Asanaliev, Duishon Chotonov, Bayaman Erkinbaev, Usen Sydykov, Topchubek Turgunaliyev and many other prominent political figures were represented in these blocs.¹⁷⁹ In December 2004 these blocs created a “Forum of Political Forces of Kyrgyzstan” and signed the “Memorandum of agreement, mutual understanding, cooperation and coordinated actions on holding of fair, free and just elections.” As mentioned above, with Akaev’s declaration not to stand for another Presidential term, and high stakes in politics, many more members of Akaev’s team in the government changed their sides and joined the opposition Forum in late 2004.

Popular protests followed the Parliamentary elections, as many opposition leaders such as Kurmanbek Bakiev, Roza Otunbaeva, Ishenbai Kadyrbekov, Adahan Madumarov were not able to gain seats in the parliament. From local protests to cancel the results of fraud parliamentary elections it rose to the Tulip Revolution challenging Akaev’s regime. Interestingly to note the mobilization processes and the role of international actors in activism of opposition prior to and during the Tulip Revolution.

The mobilization of resources in 2004-March 2005 was quite complicated due to the interplay of formal and informal ways and channels of mobilization. According to the member of Ak-Shumkar party, “despite the formal organizations, such as political parties, played an important role in the Tulip revolution, mobilization of resources was mainly arranged through informal networks.”¹⁸⁰ As he discusses further, “these were mainly relatives, people from the same regions and localities who supported our opposition leaders.”¹⁸¹ Azamat Temirkulov takes a broader look at the role of informal actors and the ways of mobilization, and identifies the key role played by “patronage networks and informal institutions” such as

¹⁷⁸ Erica Marat, *After the Tulip Revolution*. (Washington: The Jamestown Foundation, 2006).

¹⁷⁹ Temir Sariyev, *Shah Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*. (Bishkek: Salam, 2008).

¹⁸⁰ Anonymous respondent (member of Ak-Shumkar party,) in interview with the author. March 2010.

¹⁸¹ Anonymous respondent (member of Ak-Shumkar party,) in interview with the author. March 2010.

Tuuganchylyk (traditional solidarity), aksakals (elderly), OBON (Ortyad Bab Osobogo Naznacheniya, Group of Women for Special Tasks) which are “promised material compensation in the mobilization process, demonstrations or other events,” etc.¹⁸²

Popular mobilization of march 2005, however, did not bring expected outcomes. Kurmanbek Bakiev’s unwillingness to start reforms for which all the opposition forces stood for during the Tulip Revolution and increasing “criminalization” of politics indicated in their open interference with political decisions raised a new wave of criticism of the new government. As Ryspek Akmatbaev, an alleged criminal leader, made an open statement about the “demands of the criminal world” on March 30, 2006, representatives of civil society and the leaders of political parties showed their concerns about the situation in the country in a peaceful procession of April 8, 2006.¹⁸³ According to Temir Sariev, an opposition leader, this peaceful procession put forward the idea of creation of the political bloc “For reforms,” which held its first meeting on April 12, 2006 with the population of Talas region.¹⁸⁴ Thus, the political opposition activism of 2005-2007 is mainly associated with activities held by the two major blocs “For Reforms” and the United Front.

Despite the volatility of membership in “For Reforms”, it constituted a powerful bloc including the major political parties “Ata-Meken,” “SDPK,” “Soyuz Demokraticheskikh Sil,” (Union of Democratic forces) “Ar-Namys,” “Partya zelenyh,” (Greens) “Ak-Shumkar,” (White) “Asaba,” “Zamandash”, a group of deputies of Jogorku Kenesh and prominent political figures. Twenty two members of “For Reforms” were the deputies of Jogorku Kenesh and such deputy groups as “Jibek Joly” were openly promoting the program of “For Reforms” in the Parliament, mainly addressing the issue of Constitutional reforms.¹⁸⁵

“Street politics,” which refers to opposition rally, demonstrations and meetings was another popular method of “expressing its stance” by “For Reforms” bloc. Its active involvement in promotion of numerous goals was supported by the population and gathered thousands and

¹⁸² Azamat Temirkulov, “Informal Actors and Institutions in mobilizing the periphery in the Tulip Revolution,” *Central Asian Survey* 27, no. 3-4, (September-December 2008): 317-335.

¹⁸³ Temir Sariev, *Shah Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*. (Bishkek: Salam, 2008). 46.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 47.

¹⁸⁵ Temir Sariev, *Shah Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*. (Bishkek: Salam, 2008). 97-129.

thousands of people on April 29 (2006), May 27 (2006), November 2-6, (2006) in the capital of the country.¹⁸⁶ Different regions throughout the country also witnessed mass demonstrations. The demonstrators in Talas and the Kurultai participants in Aksy, for instance, first showed their concerns about the economic and social issues (ex. Djerui deposit) and shifted to political questions (ex. Constitutional reforms, removing from their positions of the head of the President's Administration Usen Sydykov and the head of the State Committee for National Security Aitbaev).¹⁸⁷ According to Sariev, those demonstrations in Bishkek carried a national character and all the regions were represented. Constitutional reforms were the major topic of all three mass demonstrations, however, only on May 27, 2006 opposition declared their demand for resignation of Bakiev if the reforms will not be undertaken.¹⁸⁸ The third opposition rally was the biggest in its scope, lasted for 4 days and "achieved" its goal – under the pressure of demonstrators of about hundred thousand people, the President declared his readiness to adopt the new Constitution, however, with some changes to it. The second version of the Constitution was adopted by Parliament in December 2006.

Importantly to note opposition rally in April 2007, which was associated with breaking-up of the Bakiev-Kulov tandem. As the United Front was pushing the idea of resignation of Bakiev, some members of the "For Reforms" joined the rally and asked for Constitutional reforms. The April 2007 opposition rally showed the disintegration of political opposition in Kyrgyzstan, and division of "For Reforms" in particular. As majority of leaders of "For Reforms" did not support Felix Kulov, who refused to promote changes in the political scene of Kyrgyzstan, and Constitutional reforms in particular while being a prime-minister. According to Temir Sariev, one of the major reasons behind weakening of the powerful "For Reforms" bloc was the negative role played by the personality of Felix Kulov, who divided the opposition but was not even able to make even a constructive speech during mass demonstrations of April

¹⁸⁶ Temir Sariev, *Shah Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*. (Bishkek: Salam, 2008). 97-129.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 49-70.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 54.

2007.¹⁸⁹ Another relevant factor was Atambaev's decision to accept Bakiev's "offer" to replace Azim Isabekov and become the next prime-minister of Kyrgyz Republic.

A group of deputies of Jogorku Kenesh asked the Constitutional Court to cancel the Constitutional reforms of November and December 2006. Ironically, the group also included those "opposition figures" two deputies from opposition, Eshimkanov and Karabekov, who themselves were pushing for reforms in 2006.¹⁹⁰ As a result the President announced a new referendum where "Bakiev's version of the Constitution" was approved. It strengthened the institute of Presidency by granting even more powers to the President than it was in 2003. As an outcome of this, the Parliament was dissolved and new elections were held according to the new electoral formula, proportional representation.

Parliamentary elections brought to Jogorku Kenesh seventy one deputies from Ak-Jol party, with eleven people from SDPK and nine from the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan gaining the remaining seats in the Parliament.¹⁹¹ Despite activism of other political parties and blocs, including the electoral bloc of Ata-Meken and Ak-Shumkar the electoral rules and consequently outcomes were manipulated.¹⁹² In addition to "monopolization of the corridor to power," opposition parties themselves were not able to constitute a viable force to continue resisting and faced high split within each other.

Capturing the point of critical juncture, a turning point with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the Tulip Revolution in 2005, the periods of 1989-1994 and 2004-2007 have experienced the highest level of activism of political opposition indicated in their active involvement in political life of the country through institutional (conventional, parliamentary) and non-institutional (unconventional, extra-parliamentary) means, being characterized by "consolidation" of opposition forces. This is determined by broad national-based support of the

¹⁸⁹ Temir Sariev, *Shah Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*. (Bishkek: Salam, 2008).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ ICP database (non-published)

¹⁹² Omurbek Tekebaev (leader of "Ata-Meken" party, member of opposition) in discussion with the author, March 5, 2010.

population, formation of opposition blocs and coalitions, constituting a viable force with an ability to influence the decision-making processes. With this in mind, the next section will discuss in depth those factors which contribute to explaining political opposition activism during these periods.

Section IV: Causes of political opposition activism

Before getting into the analysis of the trends and developments of Kyrgyz opposition, it is important to divide the entire period of the country's independent existence in two critical events that changed the course of the history. The periods of 1989-1994 and 2004-2007 have big explanatory potential and require a more detailed analysis to understand the general features and dynamism of political opposition in Kyrgyzstan. These periods (1989-1994 and 2004-2007) can be further divided in two sub-periods each based on the oppositional forces that challenged the government and outcome of their activities (taking over government or weakening). Therefore, there are 4 important periods: 1989- October 1990 (democratic opposition), October 1990-1994 (communist opposition), 2004-March 2005 (coalition of individuals purged by Akayev), and March 2005-2007 (coalitions of Akayev supporters and Bakiyev's allies excluded from power).

Despite the popular notion of "passive" opposition in Kyrgyzstan hanging in air, political activism of opposition has been actively pursuing their goals and organizing large scale activities, showing its tremendous ups and rapid "dependable" downs. The Political Opportunity Structure Theory (POST) and Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) are helpful in analyzing invisible from the first look factors that are vital for activism of Kyrgyz opposition. Thus, the causes of the rise of political opposition activism and the peculiarities of political opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan will be examined through the application of five variables: new advantages, current threats, repressive threats, opportunities (external processes) and resource mobilization (internal processes), which represent branches on which the opposition activism structure is based.

Interplay of factors: Activism of political opposition in 1989-1994

POS and RM Theories

The Communist leadership of the Kyrgyz SSR used high repressive threats in **1989-1990** to eliminate the possible effects of rising opportunities pushed by Moscow-based leadership

(connected to the perestroika policy of Gorbachev) and to keep power in its hands. The government carried out extensive repressions to “show its muscles.” In order to decrease the level of dissatisfaction with the government (Osh inter-ethnic clashes, socio-economic hardships), the leadership made an attempt to decrease “the current threat” by giving out some concessions (e.g. an official permission to build houses in Bishkek to young people engaged in unauthorized seizure of land plots).¹⁹³ However, such move only increased the activism of young people.¹⁹⁴

The opportunities for opposition forces have been increasing: state has been weakened, split of the ruling elite was high, popular support for the state decreased dramatically, Gorbachev’s reform perestroika provided more freedoms for democrats through changing formal rules and regulations. Expectations of gains from eliminating the communist rule became high, while the repressive threats were getting harsher (as shared by Aksat Dukenbaev). In such situation Masaliev was not able to increase dramatically the repressive threats to undermine the activities of opposition forces or eradicate them completely; nor could he provide very high concessions to meet all the demands of the population and opposition.

Growing O, A, and Tc surpassed all the repressive threats of the communist rule in Kyrgyzstan and led to defensive mobilization of opposition, while extensive resources were pooled into the oppositional activities to “fight common enemy” - information (mass media-rare, word of mouth) and human resources (members and supporters). Later, rising concessions led to offensive mobilization, where opposition (e.g. Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan) pooled resources (ideological basis, clear plan of actions, good alternative policies of political freedom and liberal economy) to attract more members and supporters. Opposition groups in the face of democratic movements and entities perceived the situation as favorable for promoting their goals (external opportunities were available), thus engaged in mobilizing resources.

¹⁹³ A. Asankanov, *Kyrgyzy: Rost nacionalnogo samoznaniya*. (Bishkek, 1997), 31-32.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

It is important to note that the role of immediate economic incentives (discussed earlier within the by-product assumption of resource mobilization), such distribution of land plots and job, was very important for gaining popular support. Besides, the role of moralistic concerns was essential for mobilizing the mass during this period (e.g. new ideology, associated with freedom and prosperity, support of growing nationalist attitude, etc.). Thus, new ideology (democracy and liberalism), new plan for governance and development were key resources for opposition to attract more members and supporters.

October 1990-1994

With Akaev's rise to power in October 1990, repressive threats lowered significantly. Opportunities for opposition in comparison to 1989-1990 declined - popular support for the president was high; there was no significant international support for communists who were now in opposition. Communism was facing extinction in all the countries of the former USSR and communist leaders (Conservatives, such as Ligachev) faced political crisis. However, one of the factors which would still provide opportunities for opposition activism was "weak" state referring to weakly consolidated Akaev's powers and the lack of "his own team" in governing the country (split of the governing elite). Other factors were the dominant presence of communists in the Parliament and still high popular support for communists (mostly referring to economic well-being). The current threat for opposition was still high as they were afraid that communists, and consequently their ability to influence the political life of the country would disappear with the new president with democratic values and liberal ideas of change.

Analysis indicates the following picture: low repressions, opposition's high expectations from the change of the regime, high current threats and availability of some of the opportunities allowed it remain active. Communist's resources were intangible (included their ideology and values which was still popular in the country), and tangible (supporters, popular members, presence in the parliament). However, resource mobilization by communists has been weak. As majority of communists in the parliament were "fighting" with the president over different

policies, they simply failed to continue mobilizing resources that were available to them (supporters; popularity of some of the members, ideology, which could be adopted to current changes, etc.) instead of relying on a sense of nostalgia about the Communism among population. Communists did not use the simple formula of process feeding, when the constant work (e.g. with population, future strategies) is necessary to remain popular. They were further deprived of the tangible resources with the dissolution of the parliament in 1994, where communists lost many seats.

In 2004-2005 high repressive threats were employed by Akaev to eliminate the possible effects of rising opportunities for opposition: decreasing popular support for the government, connected to the socio-economic issues (corruption, ‘grabbing hands of Akaev’s family’), political issues (succession, elections), international pressure for government and influential allies for opposition). In order to decrease the level of dissatisfaction among people and the “current threat” faced by opposition, Akaev made some concessions (declared that he will not try to remain in office for the next term). However, his actions did not follow his promises (signature being collected in different regions to “ask Akaev to remain in power”, etc.), which made the current threats for opposition even higher by making an attempt to monopolize the “power corridor” (many of his relatives were running in 2005 parliamentary elections and most of them supported by administrative resources). Thus, expectations of gains from eliminating Akaev’s rule became very high for opposition.

The opportunities for opposition forces grew: split of the ruling elite was high (many left Akaev to contest forthcoming elections), popular support for the state decreased dramatically (following the transfer of land in 2004, Aksy events in 2002 and most importantly due to the “dirty tactics” of the government and family rule, increasing corruption, signs of support coming from the West. However, repressions by Akaev were not high to the extent as to silence the opposition fully, and concessions were not as high as to satisfy the opposition or the people.

In this case high opportunities, estimations by opposition of new advantages, and high level of current threat exceeded the high repressive threats of Akaev's regime and sustained political opposition activism. All three ways of mobilization discussed by Tilly were present: defensive mobilization (building a picture of a "common enemy" (Akaev and his family) who used all the state resources and nation's wealth to enrich only a certain group of people, formation of opposition blocs and coalitions), offensive mobilization (occurred as a response to opportunities opened up before opposition as discussed above), and preparatory mobilization (by those who changed the camps and moved from Akaev's camp not long before elections as they saw new advantages higher than those advantages they had under Akaev). Both immediate economic incentives (buying off people) and moralistic principles ("demonization" of incumbent President and his family) were used to attain mass support. Money (financial resources), facilities and information services (coming both from domestic actors as wealthy businessmen and international organizations, such as Freedom House assisting on printing of opposition newspapers, etc.), popular members of opposition (representing different regions), organizing skills of members, loyalties and "unspecialized labor of supporters (who joined because of immediate economic incentives, moralistic values, etc.) were the resources successfully mobilized by opposition forces.

March 2005 –2007

High repressive threats were applied by Bakiev starting from the very beginning of his rule. However, opportunities still remained high for opposition: up until 2007 Bakiev's power was not consolidated (split of the governing elite-Bakiev-Kulov tandem. Atambaev becoming the prime-minister, making "street politics a regular phenomenon "taking place in spring and fall" ¹⁹⁵ and "solid experience of opposition leaders."¹⁹⁶ The legislative branch was not "fully under his control" (as it became the case with Ak-Jol—power party—dominating in the

¹⁹⁵ AUCA/ICP Instructor, in discussion with the author. March 2010.

¹⁹⁶ Omurbek Tekebaev (leader of "Ata-Meken" party, member of opposition) in discussion with the author, March 5, 2010.

parliament), but was rather anti-presidential, as deputies were elected during Akaev and under 'his supervision,' and shift in political culture of people.). The new advantages were mainly associated with Constitutional reforms and later shifted to changes in leadership. Perception of current threats was high, as with postponing of Constitutional reforms opposition would face the same situation associated with Akaev's attempts to "monopolize the power corridor." For opposition it would eliminate their chances for accessing power.

Financial resources) facilities and information services (coming mainly from domestic actors such as wealthy businessmen), popular members of opposition (representing different regions), organizing skills of members, loyalties and "unspecialized labor of supporters (who joined because of immediate economic incentives, moralistic values, etc.) were used by opposition during this period to mobilize general public. Available political opportunities assisted opposition in mobilizing resources. However, internal conflicts within opposition, and "splitting tactics of the government"¹⁹⁷ prevented opposition from keeping those resources mobilized and consequently achieve their goals.

Discussion

Comparing these analyzed periods, one can see how the interplay of the four (POS) factors and resource mobilization influenced opposition activism at certain critical events in the history of Kyrgyzstan. Opposition dynamics depended on the state failure of not keeping promises, or its mistakes in decision-making (e.g. Kyrgyz government sells out Kyrgyz lands to foreign entrepreneurs), and constructing a loose dialogue with the people. This underlines the deep essence of the Kyrgyz opposition, which normally responds to state's downs rather than taking actions to gain popular support based on the alternative view or approach it can offer.

Opposition in Kyrgyzstan does not possess a concrete ideological stand; instead, it often times simply takes the other side of the decision made, especially when the decision is unpopular

¹⁹⁷ Eugene Huskey and Gulnara Iskakova, "Why don't Opposition Elites Cooperate with each other in the Post-Communist World? Interview Evidence from Kyrgyzstan," *The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*, (2009).

within the general public. In addition, pre-election and post-election periods create a ground for the opposition activism to mobilize and publicly act to show how dissatisfactory the state's actions are. Finally, presence of international allies with short- and long-term interests triggers the power interplay in the Kyrgyz government. Often unable to mobilize existing resources, the opposition activism is fueled by external players. Thus, unintentionally, the opposition in Kyrgyzstan creates a degree of dependency on both internal and sometimes external factors. The following analysis of the impact of each factor can be a valuable contribution to drawing a full picture of opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan.

New advantages. According to the research theory (POST) opposition may find their active engagement in politics advantageous, thus are motivated to act rather than remain inactive. The analysis of Kyrgyz opposition shows that new advantages would mostly come in the form of political and socio-economic benefits. Opposition's vision of the outcomes of their goals included the realization of the universal desires pertaining to political opposition, such as getting power and access to state resources.

Along with that, control of national ideology (can also be created), restructuring the system up to regime change, securing freedoms (like freedom of speech, movement, assembly, etc.) have been motivating and challenging Kyrgyz opposition. Each of the two focusing periods had own peculiarities, though comparative analysis demonstrates common features between them. Thus, 1989-1994 and 2004-2007 are characterized with opposition activism driven by a goal of the regime change, with the complete restructuring of the existing authoritarian system in both, and getting into power with the change of national ideology from communism into democratic governance (1989-1990) and vice versa (during 1991-1994) particularly in the first period. A closer look at activism of political opposition during these periods allows capturing political "exceptionalism" of each factor in case of Kyrgyzstan.

One of the major aims of political opposition provided by Schapiro “is to oust the government in power and to replace it by one of its own choosing.”¹⁹⁸ Gaining power by acquiring a governmental position is perceived as a universal goal characteristic to political opposition. However, it has its own peculiarities in case of Kyrgyzstan connected to the “mentality” of people and cultural differences. First, it depends on methods used in struggle for power. As argued by Eugene Huskey, political competition in Kyrgyzstan is characterized by “a battle between personalities rather than between policies or group interests” or ideological values.¹⁹⁹ Second, the mentality of people in Kyrgyzstan reflects the “social values” they have, which in turn reflects the form of “political game” in Kyrgyzstan. For example, “status and not political power, or economic rewards, has been the ultimate goal of politicians.”²⁰⁰

Testing these hypothetical statements, one can find that in 1989-1994 ideological differences and policies played an important role in “the power battle” facilitating oppositional activism. Activism in 2004-2007 can not be characterized as an ideological struggle, but rather was a revolt of those who were “offended because they were previously in power and then were removed.”²⁰¹ So, despite the statement that accessing power by itself should not be qualified as a main reaching point of the opposition activism, the second critical period (2004-2007) shows the pure version of power succession with the fulfilling aim of taking control over the resources state power prescribes. Thus, presidential overthrow during the Tulip revolution of March 2005 could be an exclusive at some point, becoming standard on the other hand when Akaev’s regime was popularly overtaken by Bakiev team, who followed solely rational power gaining targets.

Examining the relative importance of status, political power and economic rewards it is important consider that in such transitional countries as Kyrgyzstan stakes of politics are high and status means more than just a governmental position (with a set amount of salary), but rather

¹⁹⁸ Leonard Schapiro. Foreword *Government and Opposition* 1, No.1, (1967), 2.

¹⁹⁹ Eugene Huskey and Gulnara Iskakova, “Why don’t Opposition Elites Cooperate with each other in the Post-Communist World? Interview Evidence from Kyrgyzstan,” *The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*, (2009), 16.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 17.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

an access to sometimes enormous political power and economic resources. However, being asked whether this can be perceived as a zero-sum game between those who govern and those who oppose as it is characteristic to non-democratic states, a political scientist Medet Tiulegenov said that “this rather has to be regarded as a pie, where everybody tries to get as much as possible”²⁰² and status (governmental position) provides more opportunities for getting a bigger “piece of the pie.”

Shrinking freedoms often played a key role for the Kyrgyz opposition in accomplishing access to elections, organizing campaigns and finding mass support. Often posing itself into a big danger, Kyrgyz opposition tried to re-establish rights and freedoms. Thus, being able to exercise and secure political rights and freedoms was another “prospective advantage” for opposition forces under both periods as they faced (to a greater extent during the second period) the issue of “limited opportunities”, and even serious barriers (e.g. repressions) by doing so.

Political opposition in 1989-1994 and 2004-2007 saw many advantages of getting into power in the form of their ambitions to obtain status and power, access economic resources, secure political rights (in both) and promote ideological values (1989-1994). Taking into consideration the statement that “new advantages” motivate political opposition to act, the two periods had their own peculiarities; however, expectations of new advantages were high in both periods.

Current threats refer to current or future dangers which arise/might arise if opposition **does not take** any actions.²⁰³ This second variable is present in both periods. There could be at least two scenarios developed.

A. monopolization of power (which could easily take off the oxygen for the opposition breathing) in the hands of the single leader (which was usually the case in certain aspects of the

²⁰² Medet Tilulegenov (AUCA/ICP instructor, political scientist) in discussion with the author, March 2010.

²⁰³ Tilly, Charles and Jack A. Goldstone. “Threats (and Opportunity): Popular Actions and State Response in the Dynamics of Contentious Action.” In *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, edited by Doug McAdam, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 183-187.

critical juncture periods) – mostly president and his family or clan, or the ruling elite (e.g. ruling Communist Party in 1989-1990, Akaev’s family in 2004-2005).

B. The image of weak and disappearing political opposition would undermine its reputation within the public or el (Kyrgyz word for “people”), as well as among prospective allies, and the destiny of the Kyrgyz opposition and its activism would become a questionable notion during pre-election periods and mobilization times.

To avoid such scenario, the opposition activism should have gone through stages of seeking and promoting mass support. A good example could be illustrated from the pages of Tulip revolution experience in the history of independent Kyrgyzstan, when opposition leaders found mass support from the politically active and pro-opposition population of Kyrgyzstan, who took to the streets with a set goal of overthrowing the existing government and letting the opposition rule and bring positive changes. Thus, using the social atmosphere of trust into itself, resources available and motivated by “present dangers”, such as the issue of presidential succession and “monopolization of politics” through the parliamentary elections of February-March 2005, the Kyrgyz opposition was able to rapidly reverse the current threats towards the existing government.

Repressive threats. The government also followed own tactic according to the Political Opportunity Structure Theory – it could harshly wipe out (given the monopolization of state resources) Kyrgyz opposition if the latter showed strong activism during or before the pre-election and post-election timeframes. These repressive would include negative sanctions, coercion, violence by proxy, and force.²⁰⁴

Another finding of the research suggests that the use of repressions by Kyrgyz leaders experienced certain modifications. Repressions were high during the “pre-critical juncture years” (1989-1990 and 2004-2005) as the leadership was making the “last attempts” to keep power in

²⁰⁴ Omurbek Tekebaev (leader of “Ata-Meken” party, member of opposition) in discussion with the author, March 5, 2010.

its hands. When it comes to the “post-critical juncture years” (1991-1994 and 2005-2007), associated with coming to power of Akaev and later Bakiev, the Akaev rule was known as the least repressive period, whereas Bakiev rule was the most repressive one in this timeframe of 1989-2007. One of the respondents, Omurbek Tekebaev, (opposition activist since early 90s) mentioned that repressions under Bakiev carried the “heaviest character” from the beginning as all the types of repressions mentioned above were used in the most excessive forms. Tekebaev noted that the popular view claiming that opposition in Kyrgyzstan has been a weak actor is not true at all:

“this is the matter of the leadership violating the “rules of the game” rather than opposition’s fault... Any other opposition parties abroad whom we often praise would not be able to survive and exist under those conditions faced by Kyrgyz opposition. Conditions when all the state institutions (ironically, including even the Ministry of architecture claiming that buildings belonging to “Ata Meken’s” members were not built in the right place) and the criminal world “always assisting the leadership”... when they can beat you, and they can kill you... No, Kyrgyz opposition is not inactive... it just has to work as an underground organization.”²⁰⁵

Following this logic it is important to differentiate between the levels of repressions in these two “post-critical juncture periods”. One of the first and foremost reasons explaining this would be the personality of the leader coming to power. According to McFaul, in countries in transition “individuals trump institutions” and “personalities make democracies or dictatorships.”²⁰⁶ This is due to the state of institutions and the rule of law in countries in transition such as Kyrgyzstan being weak and yet not completely established. In such countries leaders are given more power to design the whole system, in contrast to the established regimes where the institutions balancing each other are already there and the rule of law and order are present in all spheres of the state.

²⁰⁵ Omurbek Tekebaev (leader of “Ata-Meken” party, member of opposition) in discussion with the author, March 5, 2010.

²⁰⁶ Michael McFaul, “The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship Non-cooperative Transition in the Postcommunist World.” *World Politics* 54, (2002): 212-244.

According to one of the respondents, propensity to repress was indirectly affected by an international assistance, as the state had more resources to use in repressing the opposition forces.²⁰⁷ Sabyr Mukanbetov explained this by the following statement:

“Being an investment pool for multiple foreign philanthropists, states and international organizations, Kyrgyzstani people could have economically (most tangible) benefited from presence of such resource flows in. However, the state would often build “an image of maintaining good leadership” to meet the widely known notion of requesting minimum standards (as, for instance, democratic values to be followed) by international community. In reality, these resources were directed toward strengthening of rulers.”²⁰⁸

Thus, the opposition activism was not able to accomplish the stage when the track of aid flow could be regulated or balanced. Instead, even such “innocent acts” of foreign states/organizations support used to turn against the opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan.

Opportunities – another factor for analyzing opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan, referring to increasing opportunities for mobilization, could be measured multi-dimensionally, including opportunities for opposition groups to gain the support of domestic and international allies, split of governing elite, popular support for opposition, declining support for state and network support.

Kyrgyz political activism has many peculiarities. While discussing those features, one of the respondents has touched upon the lack of ideological values, which would differentiate political actors from one another and high volatility of elite alignments:²⁰⁹

“We can see that our political leaders often “run back and forward” meaning that yesterday’s opposition leader is a member of the government today, if they leave (had to leave) the government today they are back within opposition tomorrow. The same leaders might change their parties every other year despite the distant ideologies of parties. Parties are just a formality, and the “political palette” in Kyrgyzstan is very poor. Elites align not on the basis of their political and ideological values... for them you are either in government, if could not, then in opposition.”²¹⁰

Askat Dukenbaev has also added that “Kyrgyz opposition is “opposition” only because it is not in power. Strong opposition always has a defined position and good alternative projects. This is not the case with Kyrgyz opposition...”²¹¹ Hypothetically, such opposition forces would not be able to obtain a popular support. However, there was indeed the “window of

²⁰⁷ Sabyr Mukanbetov. (political observer, Alibi newspaper) in discussion with the author, March 2010.

²⁰⁸ Sabyr Mukanbetov. (political observer, Alibi newspaper) in discussion with the author, March 2010.

²⁰⁹ AUCA Instructor, in discussion with the author, March 2010.

²¹⁰ AUCA Instructor, in discussion with the author, March 2010.

²¹¹ Askat Dukenbaev (political scientist) in discussion with the author, March 2010

opportunities” opening up before the opposition as popular support for opposition in Kyrgyzstan increased in periods of 1989-1994 and 2004-2007.

Regarding the means opposition attracts popular support, the analysis of contemporary political history indicates that the following factors help to attain such support: unpopular policies of the state (by offering the opposite), mobilization of popular support by clan politics, localism, tribalism and “buying off the people”.

Despite the fact that “governments enjoy natural advantages over opposition,”²¹² both have to deal with scarcity of resources. According to Mr. Tiulegenov, elections still remain one of the most popular strategies of gaining power by the political opposition in competitive authoritarian regimes. Thus, motivates opposition to save its resources and use them only when there are opportunities (through elections) are available. Even though there is a criticism of gaining popular support by ‘buying it off’, “the government does not have enough resources to make everyone happy, opposition lacks resources to come to power.”²¹³ Thus, social grievances and dissatisfaction by the government are the “the mother’s milk”²¹⁴ of opposition in Kyrgyzstan. These dissatisfactions may arise from “a single event or continuous unpopular decisions by the state”, which is relevant to what has been called by Eugene Huskey as “accumulated frustrations with a style of rule” (electoral fraud, increased tariffs, selling of state properties or transferring of land to foreign states, etc.).²¹⁵ Thus, the “development of these grievances” gives an opportunity for “resource-mobilizers” to “obtain more human resources” in the face of those rejecting the line of programs of the governing. In 1989-1990 it appeared in the form of declining support for the communist leadership because of its inability to resolve socio-economic hardships (Osh events were a clear example of this); in 2004-2005 with “an

²¹² Eugene Huskey and Gulnara Iskakova, “Why don’t Opposition Elites Cooperate with each other in the Post-Communist World? Interview Evidence from Kyrgyzstan,” *The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*, (2009), 1.

²¹³ Medet Tilulegenov (AUCA/ICP instructor, political scientist) in discussion with the author, March 2010.

²¹⁴ Eugene Huskey and Gulnara Iskakova, “Why don’t Opposition Elites Cooperate with each other in the Post-Communist World? Interview Evidence from Kyrgyzstan,” *The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*, (2009), 12.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 12.

accumulated frustration with Akaev's style of rule."²¹⁶ Even during the times of rigid censorship, when the media was highly controlled by the state and opposition could rarely appear on TV or newspapers, the word of mouth has been an important factor or a tool in escalating "social grievances" and gaining popular support in Kyrgyzstan (e.g. 2004-2005 with last years of Akaev's rule, especially in rural areas).

Indeed, informal politics in Kyrgyzstan has been playing an important role. A special attention has to be paid to localism and tribalism. In the wake of people's dissatisfaction with the government, opposition leaders have mostly relied on their "localities" or "regions", which tend to support "their people." This includes drawing attention to local issues with the rational goal in mind – gaining votes or support in practicing popular "street politics" (blocking of roads, strikes at work places, etc.).

²¹⁶ Eugene Huskey and Gulnara Iskakova, "Why don't Opposition Elites Cooperate with each other in the Post-Communist World? Interview Evidence from Kyrgyzstan," *The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*, (2009), 12.

Section V: Conclusion

The role of Political Opportunity Structure and Resource Mobilization Theories have been important for analyzing the effects that triggered opposition activism in the Kyrgyz Republic and explaining peculiarities of Kyrgyz opposition. (Include periods- short conclusions for each one, based on RM and POS before coming into KG peculiarities)

POST demonstrated external factors that facilitated the mobilization of opposition (repressions, concessions, new opportunities) while the RMT showed the internal factors (e.g. supporters, members) that helped to conduct mobilization. Interplay of these factors explained why at certain points of Kyrgyzstan's history the opposition has acted as it did.

One interesting observation has been made. External factors (POS) can facilitate oppositional activities in democracies. However, since political opportunities are already available to opposition in consolidated democracies, opposition forces mainly need RM to mobilize population. In contrast to established democracies, political opportunities in non-democracies are often hardly available, thus rising POS might be decisive to activism even with minimal RM input (e.g. low repression, unpopular decisions, etc.). Or putting it differently, in non-democracies RM with low POS might be ineffective.

Thus, testing hypothesis – that dynamics of political opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan depend on interplay of opportunities and mobilization of resources – Kyrgyz opposition has showed itself as an event-driven, reactive “to ongoing situations” force, whose activism is often followed by changes in POS. The causes of political opposition activism in Kyrgyzstan scale from sparks as presidential and parliamentary elections, referenda to unpopular decisions made by the government. Depending on the context of a challenge, whether it manipulates rights of people or threatens opposition, activism of the political opposition in Kyrgyzstan rose if there was no other way to prevent the government hegemony over the resources and political power. However, one should not underestimate the role of resource mobilization in non-democracies.

Kyrgyz case illustrates that resource mobilization in non-democracies can take a different form than in democracies (e.g. informal politics, word of mouth, etc.) and sustain opposition activism even under highly repressive regimes.

To remain an active and viable force in the political spectrum, opposition has to strengthen its capacities and abilities to fully consider the complex math the opposition should always conduct. And, surely, the opposition should foresee the possible scenario of its activism: if it is in the game – ought to act, if miscalculations are present – needs to re-measure the ratio between means and ends. In order to become a viable force, actively promoting its goals, opposition has to decrease its dependency on POS (with regards to being reactive event-driven force). By developing strong ideological basis and changing mobilization strategies (making an emphasis on development of ideological values, attractive alternative programs (rather than short-term buying off people's support), building a good image throughout the country, rather than relying on certain localities) opposition can become a powerful “balancer” of the government.

Bibliography:

Books:

- Anderson, John. *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999.
- Akunov, Alibek. *Mnogopartiynost' I Demokratiya v Kyrgyzskoi Respublike: Istoriko-politologicheskiy analiz.* Bishkek, 1999.
- Asankanov, A. *Kyrgyzy: Rost nacionalnogo samosoznaniya.* Bishkek: 1997.
- Careja, Romana. "Foreword." In *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, 9-17. Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004.
- Chotonov, Usen, *Noveishaya istoria Kyrgyzstana: 1985-1998.* Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan Publishing House, 1999.
- Chotonov, Usenaly. *Kyrgyzstan po Puti Suvereniteta.* Bishkek: Altyn Tamga, 2007.
- Chynaliev, Ulugbek. *Politicheskii partii Kyrgyzstana.* Moscow: NIK, 1999.
- Dahl, Robert. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971.
- Dahl, Robert. "Some explanations." In *Political Opposition in Western Democracies*, edited by Robert Dahl. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Dzhumanaliev, Akylbek. *Politicheskaiia Istoriia Kyrgyzstana.* Bishkek: Times, 2005.
- Fish, Steven M. "The Executive Deception: Superpresidentialism and the Degradation of Russian Politics." In *Building the Russian State: Institutional Crisis and the Quest for Democratic Governance*, edited by Valerie Sperling. Boulder: Westview, 2001.
- Galieva, Zairash. *Politicheskaya transformaciya suverennogo Kyrgyzstana: Dinamika i osobennosti.* Bishkek: KNU, 2007.
- Iskakova, Gulnara. *Vybory i Demokratiia v Kyrgyzstane: Konstitutsionnyi Dizain Prezidentsko-Parlamentskih Otnoshenii.* Bishkek: Biiktik, 2003.
- Kniazev, Aleksandr. *Gosudarstvennyi Perevorot 24 Marta 2005 g. v Kirgizii.* Almaty: Institute of National Strategy, 2005.
- Linz, Juan. "An Authoritarian Regime: Spain" in *Mass Politics.*" edited by Erik Allardt and Stein Rokkan, 251-283. New York: the Free Press, 1970
- Marat, Erica. *After the Tulip Revolution.* Washington: The Jamestown Foundation, 2006.
- Mamytova, Elvira. "Formation of Opposition Mood in Pre-Soviet and Soviet Kyrgyzstan," in *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, 57-69. Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004.
- Mamytova, Elvira. "Power and opposition in Kyrgyzstan." In *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja. 70-105. Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004.

- Mamytova, Elvira. "Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Analysis of Political Opposition." In *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja. 19-39. Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004.
- Markarov, Alexander and Romana Careja. "Political Opposition within Hybrid regimes: Concept and Actors." In *Stumbling but Struggling*, edited by Romana Careja, 39-55. Moscow: Strategy Publishing House, 2004.
- McAdam, Doug. "Political Opportunities: Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions." In *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, edited by Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Nazareteian, Akop. *Psikhologia Stikhiinogo Massovogo Povedeniia: Tolpa, Slukhi, Politicheskie i Reklamnye kampanii*. Moscow: Academia, 2005.
- Sariev, Temir. *Shah Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*. Bishkek: Salam.
- Tilly, Charles. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1976.
- Tilly, Charles and Jack A. Goldstone. "Threats (and Opportunity): Popular Actions and State Response in the Dynamics of Contentious Action." In *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, edited by Doug McAdam, 179-194. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Tilly, Charles. *The Politics of Collective Violence*. Cambridge: Press Syndicate, 2003.
- Tilly, Charles. *Social Movements, 1768-2004*. Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2004.
- Usubaliev, Turdakun. *Vozrozhdenie i Tragediia Moei Strany*. Bishkek: Uchkun, 2008.

Journal Articles:

- Baum, Lyudmila. "Dynamics of Economic Reform in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan." *Central Asia and Caucasus Press*. no.2 (2007): 1-9.
- Carothers, Thomas. "The end of the Transition Paradigm." *Journal of Democracy* 13, no 1 (2002): 5-21.
- Frye, Timothy. "A Politics of Institutional Choice Post-communist Presidencies." *Comparative Political Studies* 30, no 5 (1997): 523-552.
- Howard, Marc Morjé and Philip G. Roessler. "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes." *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no 2 (2006): 365-381.
- Huskey, Eugene. "The Rise of Contested Politics in Central Asia: Elections in Kyrgyzstan: 1989-1990." *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 5 (1995): 813-833.
- Huskey, Eugene and Gulnara Iskakova, "Why don't Opposition Elites Cooperate with each other in the Post-Communist World? Interview Evidence from Kyrgyzstan," *The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*, (2009): 1-34, (accessed November 12, 2009)

- Ishiyama, John. "Political Party Development and Party Gravity in semi-authoritarian regimes," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 4, no.1 (2008): 1-180. <http://www.tfd.org.tw/docs/dj0401/033-054-John%20Ishiyama.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2010).
- Ishiyama, John. and Ryan Kennedy. "Superpresidentialism and Political Party Development in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan," *European-Asia Studies* 56, no. 8 (2001): 1177-1191.
- Jenkins, Craig. "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 9, (1983): 527-553.
- Kulov, Emir. "March 2005: parliamentary elections as a catalyst of protest." *Central Asian Survey* 27, no. 3-4, (September-December 2008): 337-248.
- Lapalombara, Joseph and Anderson, Jeffrey. "Political Parties." *Electoral Politics Reader* ICP 332, AUCA (2008): 393-409.
- Leahy, Peter and Allan Mazur. "The Rise and Fall of Public Opposition in Specific Social Movements." *Social Studies of Science* 10, no. 3 (August, 1980): 259-284. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/284581>. (accessed December 25, 2009).
- McFaul, Michael. "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship Noncooperative Transition in the Postcommunist World." *World Politics* 54, (2002): 212-244.
- Olcott, Martha Brill. "Central Asia's Catapult to Independence." *Foreign Affairs* 71. no. 3 (1992). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20045233>. (accessed December 25, 2009).
- Osa, Maryjane and Kurt Schock. "A Long Hard Slog: Political Opportunities, Social Networks and the Mobilization of Dissent in Non-Democracies." *Conflicts and Change* 27 (2007):123-153.
- Radnitz, Scott. "What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?" *Journal of Democracy*, 17, no. 2 (2006): 132-146.
- Schapiro, Leonard. "Foreword." *Government and Opposition* 1, no.1, (1966).

Web Pages:

- Aspinall, Edward Thomas. "Political Opposition and the Transition from Authoritarian Rule: The Case of Indonesia." *Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies of the Australian National University*. 2000. <http://thesis.anu.edu.au/public/adt-ANU20010702.113537/index.html> (accessed December 6, 2009).
- Beshimov, Bakyt. "Authority-Opposition Tandem." *Analytical Centre Prudent Solutions*. 5 March 2007. <http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20070305121803412>.
- Bogatyrev, Valentin."The Place and Role of Political Parties in Kyrgyzstan." *Institute for Public Policy*, <http://www.ipp.kg/ru/publications/>.
- Brack, Nathalie and Sharon Weinblum. "What do we mean by "political opposition": a theoretical perspective." Paper presented at Potsdam ECPR General Conference, Potsdam, September 9-12

2009. http://www.sciencespo.site.ulb.ac.be/dossiers_membres/brack-nathalie/fichiers/brack-nathalie-publication16.pdf.
- Gelman, Vladimir. "The Extinction of Political Opposition in Russia," *University at St Petersburg* (November, 2004): 1-7. http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/pm_0340.pdf (accessed December 6, 2009).
- Ibraimov, Tamerlan. "O Vlasti i Oppozitcii." *BPC*. 27 October 2009. <http://www.bpc.kg/perspective/145-27-10-09>,
- Imanaliev, Muratbek. "Party-building in Kyrgyzstan." *Institute for Public Policy*, <http://www.ipp.kg/ru/publications/>.
- "Kyrgyzstan: Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Era." INS Resource Information Center. 1993.
- Kynyev, A. "Kyrgyzstan do i posle tyulpanovoi revolyucii," *Mejdunarodnyi Institut Politicheskoi Ekspertizy*. 2005.
- <http://www.stratagema.org/polittechnology.php?nws=gq14p1781632563>. (accessed December 10, 2009).
- Ormonbekov, Joomart. "Mythology of Political Parties in Kyrgyzstan." *Institute for Public Policy*, <http://www.ipp.kg/ru/analysis/513/>.
- Political Transition in Kyrgyzstan. Problems and Prospects, *ICG Report*, 11 August, 2004. *Spector, Regine*. "The Transformation of Askar Akaev." *BPS*. 2004. http://iseees.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/u4/bps_/publications_/2004_02-spec.pdf

Personal Interviews:

- Akunov, Alibek. (expert in Kyrgyz politics, professor, Kyrgyz National University), April 2010
- Baisalov, Edil (activist, opposition member, expert in Kyrgyz politics), April 2010
- Dukenbaev, Askat (political scientist, analyst, expert in Kyrgyz politics), April 2010
- Huskey, Eugene. (Political scientist, expert in Kyrgyz politics) March 2010
- Mukanbetov, Sabyr (political observer, journalist, Alibi newspaper), April 2010.
- Tekebaev, Omurbek (activist, member of opposition, leader of "Ata-Meken" party), April 2010.
- Tilulegenov, Medet (AUCA/ICP instructor, political scientist, expert in Kyrgyz politics), April 2010.
- AUCA/ICP Instructor, expert in Kyrgyz politics, analyst, who wished to remain anonymous, April 2010.
- Expert in Kyrgyz politics, activist, member of "Ak-Shumkar" party, who wished to remain anonymous, April 2010.
- Expert in Kyrgyz politics, activist, member of "Social-Democratic Party," who wished to remain anonymous, March 2010.