

Helpdesk Research Report

Political economy of conflicts in Kyrgyzstan since the 2000s

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Question

Please identify literature on the political economy of conflicts in Kyrgyzstan. Focus on the March 2005 and April 2010 conflicts and their implications for the way the country is governed today. Specifically, identify literature on the following questions:

- 1. What were the causes of the conflicts in 2005 and 2010? If possible, distinguish between root causes, proximate causes, and triggers.*
- 2. What main socioeconomic factors have been identified as actual or potential triggers of major conflict before, during, and after the 2005 and 2010 conflicts? Where possible, identify comparisons or trends on indicators identified as relevant.*
- 3. Who were the main political players – particularly key individuals – during each conflict, among both power-holders, and instigators or supporters of the 2005 and 2010 conflicts? Where are they now?*
- 4. Who were the most notable ‘losers’ and ‘winners’ in the 2005 and 2010 conflicts, in terms of political personalities, parties, and ethnic groups?*
- 5. What did the state do after 2005 and 2010 to regain legitimacy and reconnect with the people?*
- 6. Since 2010, who have been the main players contesting Kyrgyzstan’s political economy, through violent or non-violent challenges to the existing situation? Are they the same ones as in the past, or new actors? In addition, which players does recent literature identify as likely to generate significant conflict in the future?*
- 7. Did major foreign governments have any involvement (overt or covert) for or against the 2005 and 2010 conflicts?*
- 8. What position and response did key international actors adopt in reaction to the 2005 and 2010 conflicts? Look at the UN, US, EU, and UK, and consider other States*

as relevant (e.g. Turkey). Provide a high-level overview on each actor's engagement, themes of intervention, and major funding if any (e.g. aid).

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1. Overview

In March 2005 and April 2010, the presidents ruling over Kyrgyzstan had to abdicate power in the face of strong protests by large parts of the population and elites. These “revolutions” share a number of visible commonalities, but also involved significant differences in the factors, actors, dynamics and effects involved (see e.g. Temirkulov 2010).¹ What does academic and grey literature show about the political economy of these conflicts, and their legacy for the way Kyrgyzstan is currently governed? In particular, why did each mobilisation occur, and who were the domestic and foreign players involved on either side of the conflict? This rapid review of the literature draws on the substantial rigorous knowledge available to shed light on these questions.

A fundamental finding, widely shared among authors, is that it is **not only the national level that matters, but also regional and local ones**, in violent and non-violent conflicts. In recent and older history, local conflicts sometime develop into national ones (e.g. McGlinchey 2011). Other findings are as follows.

The **root causes** of both conflicts are largely similar and form a structural system of “institutionalized instability” in politics, economy and society, which generates both popular and elite discontent (Gullette 2010). The major factors producing root causes of conflicts are:

- **Low levels of economic and social development.** This includes high levels of inequality, poverty and unemployment, which are associated with the phenomena and effects of: a significant worsening of agricultural livelihoods, considerable internal migration, and an increase in territorial inequalities in wealth. It also involves poor – and worsening – public services, as well as energy shortfalls. Lastly, the state budget is constrained by Kyrgyzstan’s dependency on trade, aid, and outward migration.
- **Neo-patrimonial rule and competition by elites.** This pits ruling elites’ efforts to maintain the political and economic status quo against efforts by elites in the opposition to challenge the ruling elites’ influence. It also involves a history of centralisation and authoritarianism at the hands of ruling elites and, eventually, the ruling family. All this is accompanied by widespread small- and large-scale corruption in the state, and strong ties between ruling families and the illicit economy.

¹ The March 2005 and April 2010 conflicts are typically referred to as ‘revolutions’ in the literature and domestically in Kyrgyzstan. However, since the events and their outcomes do not meet the usual definitions of revolution in social sciences, they will be referred to as ‘conflicts’, ‘mobilisations’ or ‘uprisings’ in this report. In the remainder of this report, “the 2005 conflict” refers to March 2005, and “the 2010 conflict” to April 2010. In addition, in June 2010, major violence was also committed in the south; this is referred to by month and, where needed, year and location.

- **Repression and violence by rulers** against opposing parties, media, NGOs, and protesters.

Some of the **proximate causes** of both conflicts are also similar for 2005 and 2010 and centre on the growing involvement of the presidents' families in politics and economy, to the detriment of ordinary citizens and even of former allies. This dynamic entailed a growing centralisation and exclusivity of political power, and of public and private resources, including in the illicit economy. In addition, the economic context was one of poor performance in growth and employment due to downturns. Lastly, repression exacerbated an elite and popular response of discontent and mobilisation.

Additional indications on the **proximate causes of the April 2010 conflict** include economic policies that were particularly poor and made worse by economic crisis in Kyrgyzstan, Russia and globally. In particular, rising prices for food, water, gas, electricity, heating and telecommunications are often identified as important factors in discontent. Further, under Bakiyev, the nexus of state and non-state coercion serving the regime grew particularly strong. Other relevant factors include: infighting within the ruling family; fragmentation and division in state security forces; and the use of information and communication technologies in mobilised segments of the population.

The **trigger** for the 2005 mobilisation was the rigging of parliamentary elections and the accompanying repression of opposition. For April 2010, it was the shooting to death of ordinary people in Bishkek by the police. **Further triggers** directly or indirectly connected to socio-economic conditions include:

- **Socio-economic triggers.** Some of these relate directly to general conditions (e.g. unemployment levels). Others are connected with specific socio-economic elements, such as: licit and illicit cash crops; mining; fuel supplies to the Manas air base; and hydroelectric crisis in the energy sector.
- **Political triggers.** One is the perpetuation of what are largely the same competing, fragmented elites in and out of power. Another is the readiness of civil society to mobilise for liberal or illiberal ends. The use of violence by State or society has also generated conflicts. Many authors emphasise the high risks of violent destabilisation currently associated with the political mobilisation of geographic or ethnic identities, especially Kyrgyz nationalism. The literature identifies this as carrying greater risks than radicalisation based on Islamism.
- **Environmental triggers,** specifically access to and use of water and arable lands. These are fundamentally about problems in national, regional or local governance.

The literature also warns that ethnicity, Islam, or political Islam, are not triggers of conflict as such.

The **main political players** in the 2005 conflict were on the one hand the Akayev regime, and on the other hand a set of opposition actors: candidates and leaders from political parties out of power; civic groups; NGOs; and media. The opposition drew primarily from elites and relatively better-off socio-economic groups, and later worked with patronage networks and traditional institutions to broaden mobilisation. In contrast, the formal opposition played only a limited role mobilising protestors in April 2010: the uprisings were much more popular, spontaneous and self-organised.

The literature identifies many of the same personalities alternatively as **'losers'** and **'winners'** in the 2005 and 2010 conflicts, as elites come in and out of power depending on their capture of state power and patronage networks and on their willingness to ally with the current power-holders. Clear losers among notables are individuals who have gone into exile or who were killed by a hostile regime. Both the literature and experts emphasise that, in Kyrgyzstan, political parties are largely a vehicle for the personal ambitions of their leader, so the status of party leaders determines the status of their party in power relations. The literature is more definitive in identifying how the Uzbeks minority's position has changed.

In broad terms, Uzbek elites generally had some access to power and resources under Akayev, but were marginalised under Bakiyev, and have been further disadvantaged since the June 2010 riots. Conversely, all authors note the rise of a domineering Kyrgyz nationalism, which some Kyrgyz elites stir up and the Kyrgyz public increasingly supports.

After the 2005 and 2010 uprisings, the **State actually took only limited action to regain legitimacy** and reconnect with the people. Ruling elites have paid more attention to this after 2010 than after 2005, but even so the record is mixed on both State efforts and success. The literature instead identifies significant changes in how popular legitimisation works in Kyrgyzstan. Among others, there is profound disillusionment of the population towards politics, alongside a general feeling that street protests appoint and remove government. Most of all, especially with the divisive legacy of the June 2010 violence, Kyrgyz nationalism and anti-Uzbek sentiment have taken on a rising importance in the political legitimisation of ruling Kyrgyz elites, Kyrgyz nationhood, and the state.

The main **players who have been contesting Kyrgyzstan's political economy since 2010** have largely been drawn from the same elite circles who come in and out of power and state institutions since at least the early 2000s, although exile or death have meant that some key figures are not present any more.

Two **actors that the literature widely identifies as likely to cause significant conflict** in the future are actually the state itself, and Kyrgyz ruling elites. Both have failed to address economic and political problems, still risk mobilisation geographic and ethnic identities for violence, and do not necessarily have control over the police and military.

Despite rumours and perceptions to the contrary, the literature finds that **foreign governments did not actually have a direct involvement** in the 2005 and 2010 conflicts. Russia was caught by surprise by March 2005, and simply welcomed the change of regime in 2010. The USA avoided criticising the ruling regimes because it focused on maintaining its Manas air base, but that is all the literature identifies.

Overall, foreign governments – first among them Russia, China and the USA – and agencies – such as the UN, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation – **responded to the 2005 and 2010 uprisings in limited and cautious ways** (see section 4 for details).

Section 2 in this report presents the root causes, proximate drivers, and triggers of conflict. Section 3 examines the domestic actors, and section 4 briefly considers major foreign actors.

Map 1. Map of Kyrgyzstan

Source: UN (2011). *Kyrgyzstan (Map No. 3770 Rev. 8)*. UN Department of Field Support, Cartographic Section, June. <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/kyrgysta.pdf>. With permission from the UN.



Map No. 3770 Rev. 8 UNITED NATIONS
June 2011

Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section

Table 1. National politics in Kyrgyzstan – Timeline highlights
(sourced from multiple references used in this report)

Year (& month if relevant)	Event
1919	Soviet control established over the region
Aug. 1991	Independence from the Soviet Union
Oct. 1991	Askar Akayev elected president with 95 percent of the votes cast
March-Apr. 2005	“Tulip Revolution”: after parliamentary elections in March, protests force Askar Akayev to resign in April. Opposition leaders form coalition, Kurmanbek Bakiyev becomes President
Apr. 2010	“Revolution”: protests force Kurmanbek Bakiyev to resign in April. Transition government led by Roza Otunbayeva as acting President
June 2010	Violent clashes in Osh mobilising ethnic identities pitting Kyrgyz against Uzbeks; Uzbek population particularly victimised in violence
Nov. 2011	Elections won by Almazbek Atambayev, who becomes President

State of knowledge and knowledge gaps

A **large body of rigorous literature** addresses political economy and conflicts in Kyrgyzstan, through both country-specific and comparative studies. References come from varied academic, practitioner, and policy sources, within and outside Kyrgyzstan. The methods used are varied too, with a diversity of quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method approaches. Most references also integrate historical and sociological depth. Among others, there are discussions of single and combined structures of inequalities, such as socio-economic class, ethnicity, rural and urban contexts, internal and outbound migration, and to a lesser extent age. However, much of the literature fails to discuss gender and disability as structural inequalities. The literature taken as a whole covers the major regions of the country.

The **coverage of the different questions in the query is uneven**, however. There is significant knowledge available on events up to about 2013-2014, but this rapid review of academic and grey literature found fewer rigorous references on the more recent situation, especially on where key players are now. Conversely, due to the time constraints of the helpdesk, literature searches focused on publications from the past five years. As a result, the selected literature discusses the 2010 conflict much more than the 2005 one, but good-quality literature on 2005, published over five years ago, is available.

There is also little on the question of state efforts to regain legitimacy after 2005 and 2010, but it is likely this is because these efforts have been limited. The issue of covert foreign involvement in 2005 and 2010 is also not researched much, beside discussions of rumours of various countries' covert involvement. As for international actors mentioned in the query, the roles of the UN and UK have received little attention: the literature does not identify them as major players, compared to actors that are more powerful in Kyrgyzstan (such as China, Russia, the US), and compared to foreign actors such as the OSCE that happen to be better studied though not necessarily more influential.

A final aspect of the state of research is that the June 2010 violence in the south has received at least as much attention as the April 2010 conflict, if not more. This report sought to retain the focus on the April 2010 events and their development, but it does reflect the balance of the literature in including the June violence as a significant part of the aftermath and legacy of the April mobilisations.²

Many findings can be deemed conclusive, not just indicative, **and many demonstrate causalities**, not just correlations. Further, there is widespread agreement among authors on several macro-level points. However, some findings are contradictory. **Many debates remain**, particularly about the relative importance of different factors, such as economic recession, ethnicity, regionalism, or the comparative weight of elite struggles and popular movements.

2. Factors: root causes, proximate causes, triggers

Root causes

The root causes of the 2005 and 2010 conflicts were similar, as they stemmed from **structural problems – what Gullette called “institutionalised instability** – where political, economic, and social insecurities are systemic, and the government is unable or does not respond effectively to fundamental problems” (Gullette 2010: 90). These combined conditions stirred up discontent among large parts of the population

² Another noteworthy aspect of the literature is that, while the focus of this report is conflict, a number of references document and analyse peace, co-operation and cohesion (including through patronage).

– as well as some elites – and led to violent protest in both 2005 and 2010 (Gullette 2010; Temirkulov, 2010). Common factors, which continue to this day, are as follows.

Low levels of economic and social development

A fundamental factor of conflict in Kyrgyzstan has been the low levels of economic and social development, related to several structural issues. First, levels of **inequality, poverty and unemployment** have been high (Gullette 2010; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 123-124, 126). Kyrgyzstan has remained one of the poorest countries in the world, with high unemployment and persisting poverty in rural areas. Over the past two decades agriculture and industry declined to each involve only one quarter of the active population, while services came to employ half of the working age population (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 126-127). These shifts were connected to:

- **A significant worsening of agricultural livelihoods** in the 1990s, in a context where agriculture has been vital to the livelihoods and incomes of many. Rural areas became and remained dramatically impoverished. This made rural domestic economies, sales of products in markets, and remittances from migrants workers all the more vital. This general situation resulted in a serious social crisis in rural areas which ruling elites left unresolved. It also made arable land a particularly valuable asset. Lastly, the lack of perspectives has led some people in agricultural areas to offer to be hired as demonstrators in exchange for a small sum and the payment of transportation, food and alcohol – this has facilitated the organisation of popular uprisings and instability (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 119, 124, 127; also see Gullette 2010; Hierman & Nekbakhtshoev 2014).
- **Considerable internal migration**, prompted by economic, social and environmental changes. First, as herding collapsed, populations from high-altitude areas moved towards lower altitudes to turn to agriculture. This led to rising demographic pressures on arable lands, especially in the Fergana Valley. It also led to conflicts for access to water, particularly in the Batken region (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 127; also see Hierman & Nekbakhtshoev 2014). Secondly, hundreds of thousands of individuals moved from rural areas to provincial towns and the capital (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 127).
- **An increase in territorial inequalities of wealth.** The North has been more urban, industrialised and prosperous than the South. Where one third of the urban population is poor, two thirds are in rural areas. Poverty is thus high in rural areas, in some mountainous regions such as Naryn, and in the regions of Talas and Osh. In contrast, Bishkek and the region of Chui have better socio-economic indicators (Gullette 2010; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 127).

Second, **public services have been poor – and worsening.** Due to a lack of state investment, infrastructures that Kyrgyzstan inherited from the Soviet Union have become run down. The state drastically cut or partially privatised public services such as health care, public transport, and school. This has resulted in reduced access and, ultimately, worsened social development. For most of the population, the transition to capitalism meant above all the disappearance of social protection by the state. For example, literacy fell from 99 to 84 percent by 2009, and school became inaccessible for some rural populations, particularly for girls (Laruelle cited in Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 127; also see Gullette 2010; ICG 2010a).

Third, **energy shortfalls** have kept disrupting the national economy. Some of the reasons for this are structural, such as natural aridity, mountainous areas, and limited natural resources other than water. Other reasons stem from history and recent developments: the Soviet legacy of energy-sharing in the region that broke down in the early 1990s and led to a drastic drop in electricity production; the

cultivation of cotton; the poor state of hydroelectric infrastructure; an absence of regional cooperation; large-scale corruption; and intensive water usage by parts of the population (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 124; also see Gullette 2010; Undeland 2013; Wooden 2014). Successive governments constantly manipulated the nexus between water and energy for foreign policy and for domestic political legitimacy, even as energy prices would be expected to rise due to the structural constraints in place (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 126; also see Undeland 2013; Wooden 2014).

Fourth, **the state budget has been constrained by dependency on trade, aid, and outward migration.**

- The **trade dependency** primarily involves exchanges with China, and to a lesser extent Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Afghanistan. China accounts for 60 to 70 percent of imports into Kyrgyzstan. This trade deficit overshadows trade with Russia or the EU by far. In any case, this high level of economic dependency on trade makes Kyrgyzstan vulnerable to changes in trade conditions that the country and competitors such as Kazakhstan are engaged in (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 126).
- Kyrgyzstan's **reimbursement of debt** thwarts its capacity for public investment, and its financial backers have contradictory expectations (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 126).
- **Outward migration of workers** from Kyrgyzstan has grown manifold since the end of the 1990s. By the early 2010s, about half a million citizens – about 20 per cent of the workforce – had emigrated, for short or long periods. Most originated from South are in rural regions, but growing unemployment has led university graduates to leave in increasing numbers. Half of Kyrgyzstan's migrant workers have gone to Kazakhstan, and half to Russia. Most have been men, but a growing number of women have been emigrating. Migrant workers' remittances to Kyrgyzstan amount to an estimated one third to one half of the annual state budget, and sustain over one million citizens in the five-million country (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 127). This context has made Kyrgyzstan vulnerable to economic downturns and politically motivated migration policies in destination countries (Gullette 2010; Oliphant et al. 2015: ii; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 9-10).

Neo-patrimonial rule and competition by elites

Another root cause of conflicts in 2005, 2010 and since has been neo-patrimonial rule and competition by elites, who seek to achieve increasing control over resources (Gullette 2010; ICG 2005; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 119, 124; Temirkulov 2010). The workings of this neo-patrimonialism included:

- **Ruling elites' efforts to maintain the *status quo*** in order to keep control over the distribution of resources. To this end, they used legal means, such as elections, control over the media, and legislation, as well as illegal means, such as the use of administrative resources and the assassination of opponents (Temirkulov 2010: 589).
- Efforts by **elites in the opposition to restrict the political and economic influence of the ruling elite**, to obtain a more favourable redistribution of resources. Oppositional elites used a range of legal and illegal means for this purpose, from electoral participation and mass mobilisation to the violent capture of state institutions (Temirkulov 2010: 589).
- History of increased **centralisation and authoritarianism of the political system to the benefit of the ruling elite, and then narrowly to the benefit of the ruling family**. This has led elites that are excluded from power to be dissatisfied (Gullette 2010; ICG 2005; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 6-7; Temirkulov 2010). Huskey and Iskakova also argue that the instability of formal

institutions has “complicated the development of a legitimate and effective opposition” (2011: 3). They note the frequent constitutional and legal changes in the rules about the size and structure of the parliament and of subnational institutions, and conclude that this has hampered the institutionalisation of competition through elections and of political contestation (*idem*).

- **Widespread large- and small-scale corruption** to obtain state posts and public services, and extortion of users in public services, particularly by the police (Gullette 2010; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 124). Since 1991, the population has perceived corruption to be “one of the most acute problems within state and society” (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 8).
- **Strong ties between ruling families and the illicit economy.** The Akayev regime, and even more so the Bakiyev regime, placed criminal groups under state supervision. This quickly delegitimised the state in the public eye (ICG 2010a; Marat cited in Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 124).

Repression and violence by rulers

Another significant root cause of conflicts has been rulers’ repressive tactics and violence against the political position, independent media, oppositional NGOs and ordinary protesters (Gullette 2010; ICG 2005; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 119; Temirkulov 2010). This can backfire for ruling elites however, as this closes down regular channels of protests and only leaves mass mobilisation or violence (ICG 2010a).

In sum, the 2005 and 2010 mobilisations are widely analysed as resulting from the **growing political and economic contradictions** between the interests of the ruling elites and the population, and growing elite dissatisfaction with the ruling factions. Writing about April 2010, Orozobekova and Wolters find that the root causes of the protests were widespread and longstanding problems of political and socio-economic nature that generated growing frustration in the public (2015: 4). The overarching political conditions that generated conflicts on this basis were the “conflict-ridden combination” of political manipulation and coercion with poor governance and political violence (*ibidem*).

This created conditions where the security of the regime (i.e. its ruling elites) was **detrimental to human security** (i.e. individuals’ political, economic and social security). The more the state secured the regime, the more there was a decline in human security, i.e. in socio-economic and political security for the public at large (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 3-4). This growing contradiction between regime security and human security laid the ground for the April 2010 clash between the public and the ruling elite, although this was not a sufficient condition to trigger mass protests (*ibidem*).

Proximate causes

Proximate causes common to the 2005 and 2010 conflicts

The 2005 and 2010 conflicts also share many proximate causes. In particular, the involvement of the **presidents’ families in political and economic decisions** generated social discontent among the population at large as well as within elites excluded from power and wealth (Gullette 2010; ICG 2005; Temirkulov 2010: 591). Neo-patrimonialism was paired with a centralisation of power and resources into the hand of the ruling families – the Akayevs and, even more so, the Bakiyevs. These ruling families privatised the country’s wealth and used nepotism widely (Gullette 2010; ICG 2005; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 119, 124).

Growing centralisation and exclusivity of political power

The **Akayev regime** gradually **increased presidential powers** and limited parliamentary powers, through constitutional amendments adopted by referenda in 1996, 1998 and 2000 (ICG 2005; Temirkulov 2010: 591). Simultaneously, both rumours and facts pointed to the involvement of the president's wife, son and daughter in high-level politics. For example, both children participated in the 2005 parliamentary election for the presidential party *Alga Kyrgyzstan*. This was a major source of mobilisation in March 2005 (Temirkulov 2010: 591).

Under Bakiyev, the regime transformed the political system into a **centralised bureaucratic machine**, where informality and extortions became the dominant means to achieve political ends (ICG 2010a; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 6). In the first two years and a half of Bakiyev's rule, the regime used political manipulation to secure its interests and to accrue legitimacy by paying lip service to the common interest. To achieve this, the regime manipulated elections, constantly changed the constitution, and co-opted officials. The show of referenda, elections, and political debates actually paved the way to a powerful presidential system (ICG 2010a; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 6; Temirkulov 2010: 594).

In the face of this, the behaviour of opposition figures and groups ended up making the ruling regime stronger: the opposition lacked unity, and many of its members were ready to change sides for a good offer from the regime. As a result, the parliament elected in December 2007 served the purposes of the regime, turning into a rubber-stamp chamber (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 7).

In the meantime, the regime lost popularity over its **reluctance to bring about substantial improvements in the public sector** (Marat cited in Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 7).

Growing centralisation and exclusivity of public and private resources, including in the illicit economy

In the clash of interests between ruling and oppositional elites, the increasing centralisation of public and private resources into the hands of the ruling family led to **growing dissatisfaction among business and political elites outside of power** (ICG 2005; Temirkulov 2010: 589-590). This alienated the national opposition, but also some regional leaders. In the latter case, the leaders were mostly from the south in 2005, and regional leaders from the north in 2010 (ICG 2005; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 119).

The **Akayev family** used political power to **access and control economic resources**. For example, major, profitable industries were consolidated into the hands of the ruling family. Corruption was present on a massive scale (Engvall cited in Temirkulov 2010: 591). The personal enrichment and corruption of the president's family at the expense of state resources increased popular discontent, against a background of mass poverty (ICG 2005; Temirkulov 2010: 592).

Similarly, **under Bakiyev, cronyism and clientelism in the state** were systemic, and corruption worsened as the state turned into a market for corrupt investments. Bakiyev had made early promises to combat corruption. However, the population quickly saw his reforms as attempts to institutionalise and expand his family's grip on the resources that power gave them access to (ICG 2010a; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 8; Temirkulov 2010: 594-595). Under the Bakiyev family, the regime turned Kyrgyzstan into a predatory state, appropriating all significant resources in a country with a scarce economy, and using corruption to exploit resources (de Pedro cited in Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 13; ICG 2010a; Temirkulov 2010: 595).

This extractive dynamic combined with the **increasing centralisation of power and resources**, so that even the ruling coalition was eventually reduced to the Bakiyev family network. This excluded several influential political figures from power and from neo-patrimonial networks of wealth. The excluded figures and their political parties then joined the opposition, and the 2010 mobilisations (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 13; Temirkulov 2010: 595).

Simultaneously, the **nexus between state and organised crime** “became a constituting feature of the regime”, as the state newly centralised control over all possible illicit activities (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 8). Conversely, members of organised crime bought positions in governing bodies (*idem*: 10).

This nexus created “an **atmosphere of violence**” which worsened over time (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 10). Political and economic competition reigned among criminals, among politicians, and sometimes between both categories. State or illicit organisations threatened and attacked critical journalists and writers, forcing a number of them to flee the country. Businessmen were extorted. Maxim Bakiyev, the President’s younger son, drove competitors out of the economy to establish his business empire (*idem*: 10-11).

Economic problems with poor growth and employment

The majority of authors identify **economic downturns** as important proximate causes for the 2005 and 2010 conflicts. As a minority counterpoint, Temirkulov argues that economic factors such as a weak economy did not play an essential role in the 2005 and 2010 mobilisations (2010: 590-591). He states that mass mobilisations took place during the period of economic growth, not economic crisis. Instead, together with most authors, he suggests that the main economic factors at play were the unfair redistribution of economic resources, increasing inequalities between poor and rich, and unemployment - as well as opposition leaders’ discourses on the economy as rhetoric to mobilise the public (*idem*: 591).

Elite and popular response to repression

Ruling elites used persecution to intimidate people, but the violations of human rights had the opposite effect and led to an increase in social discontent that eventually fed into mobilisation (Temirkulov 2010: 590).

Under Akayev, social protest increased in response to the persecution of opposition leaders (including figures such as Topchubek Turgunaliyev, Felix Kulov, and Azimbek Beknazarov), protesters, and independent media (ICG 2005; Temirkulov 2010: 592). These early protests in 2000-2005 created a precedent for mass mobilisation and clashes with police. In particular, they demonstrated that mobilisation was possible and effective, and trained opposition politicians and activists in organising people, which they would do again after the rigged 2005 elections (Radnitz cited in Temirkulov 2010: 592).

Under Bakiyev, the repression of political opposition and independent media, through imprisonment and violence, started as early as 2006. This succeeded at intimidating the population, but also provoked popular mistrust and anger towards the ruling elite. Ordinary protests were also repressed, such as the October 2008 mobilisation in the southern Nookat district. In that instance, state repression alienated not only the religious segment of society, but also to those who had considered protesting (Temirkulov 2010: 595-596; on Nookat, also see Khamidov 2013).

Additional indications on proximate causes in 2010

Compared with the electoral issue at the centre of the March 2005 conflict, the April 2010 mobilisation “was more akin to a social outburst” (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 119).

Poor economic policies worsened by economic crisis in Kyrgyzstan, Russia and worldwide

Between 2005 and 2010, the economic situation and living conditions for ordinary citizens became much more difficult, due to both **bad governance and the 2008 global economic crisis** (Gullette 2010; ICG 2010a; Temirkulov 2010: 596). The UN described these interlocking problems as a “compound disaster” (Gullette 2010: 94).

The period 2008-2009 saw a **recession of per capita GDP**, World Bank data showed (cited in Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 9). By 2009, nearly 32 per cent of the population still lived below the poverty line (World Bank cited in Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 9).

The situation in the **domestic labour market** worsened. By 2010, **unemployment** had skyrocketed, which increased “public grievances and dissatisfaction with the regime” (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 9). Unemployment was very high among youth, “and in rural areas where the majority of the population lived” (*idem*: 8-9). Average monthly salaries stagnated at around US\$150 by 2009 (*ibidem*).

The **economic crisis that hit the Russian Federation** during that time forced tens of thousands of migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan who had worked in Russia to come back home (Gullette 2010; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 9). Simultaneously, migrant remittances decreased due to the global economic crisis (Gullette 2010; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120).

In addition, **problematic economic policies** by the regime worsened the effects of the high levels of corruption and unemployment, and of low economic growth, as widely noted in the literature.

The regime allowed for **rising prices for food** in the cold winter of 2007-2008, leading to a number of local protests as early that were ignored (Gullette 2010; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 9-10).

The regime also **increased prices steeply for water, gas, electricity, heating and telecommunications** in winter 2009-2010 (Gullette 2010; ICG 2010a; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 9; Temirkulov 2010: 596; Wooden 2014). In November 2009, the regime announced that tariffs would be multiplied by nearly 1.5 for gas, by two for electricity and heating, and by three for hot water (Gullette cited in Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 10). From spring 2008, electricity shortages and restrictions became a daily reminder of the ineptitude, corruption, and regional vulnerability of the government (Wooden 2014).

Several factors led to this situation in the energy and water sectors (Gullette 2010; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 125; Wooden 2014). Kyrgyzstan had an energy deficit to begin with. Winter in 2007-2008 was particularly cold. The regime’s corruption of the energy sector made the problem worse (*idem*). So did Moscow’s removal of tax exemptions for Kyrgyzstan’s oil imports. That act led to a surge in gasoline prices, which in turn affected the price of basic goods (Gullette 2010; Trilling & Umetov cited in Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120). Water scarcity in the winter of 2008-2009 also heavily hit agriculture, causing crop production to drop by 40 percent (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 125; also see Gullette 2010).

In response to these problems with energy and water supply, the Bakiyev administration tried to relate the crisis to natural causes and to nationalism. However, this framing resonated only partly with the population: it created a mismatch with daily experiences and widespread suspicions of corruption in the sector. This mismatch ultimately generated collective shame and blame, which contributed to later protest (Wooden 2014).

Nexus of state and non-state coercion at the service of the regime

Over five years, the ruling elite developed a **strong apparatus for coercion** to consolidate its rule, and Bakiyev turned out to be more authoritarian than Akayev (Gullette 2010; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 7; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120). Its mechanisms drew on both formal power from security services and the judiciary, and informal mechanisms through organised crime (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 7).

As the regime lost popularity, it effectively used **state security forces** to keep opposition movements quiet (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 7). Bakiyev gradually replaced influential officials in security and military functions with his cronies, to ensure the loyalty of the apparatus (*ibidem*).

The regime also **reduced judicial independence**. It used constitutional reforms initiated in 2007 to appoint and dismiss judicial civil servants (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 7).

The regime also **used groups in organised crime** to sustain an environment of violence and fear through racketeering and even murder. The president's brother, Zhanysh Bakiyev, increasingly controlled intelligence services and organised crime, using them to attack political opponents (ICG 2010a; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 7-8).

Using the various coercive institutions under its control, Bakiyev **suppressed opponents and critics** of the regime: between 2005 and 2010, three journalists and six members of parliament were murdered (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 10).

Infighting in ruling family

The ruling elite also fell victim to its own weaknesses before and during the April 2010 conflict, which had weakened the regime and decreased its chances of staying in power (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 3, 11). In particular, **members of the ruling family clashed in increasing conflict and rivalries** (*idem*: 3). The conflicts within the Bakiyev family stemmed from the division of power and resources between two factions. One faction was led by a brother of the President, Zhanysh; it controlled coercive forces in the state and organised crime. The other faction was led by the President's younger son, Maxim; it controlled the economy and business environments. The rivalry between both locally undermined the unity and capacity of the regime (*idem*: 11-12).

Fragmentation and division in state security forces

Despite ruling elites' drive to control state security forces, the security apparatus ended up in a state of fragmentation (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 3). Zhanysh Bakiyev succeeded in ensuring obedience by police and intelligence services, but he failed to secure complete control over the military (*idem*: 12). The military was reluctant "to protect the ruling regime in times of social unrest" (*idem*: 3). As a result, when the uprising started in April 2010, the police shot arts crowds but could not withstand clashes, while the military did not intervene (*ibidem*). Further, the army did not attempt to resist change and immediately endorsed the new government, in a sign of its neutrality (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120).

Information and communication technology

New technologies for media and communication served as channels to escalate mobilisation once they had started (Gullette 2010: 90; Schmitz & Wolters cited in Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 13).

Triggers

The literature distinguishes between triggers of conflict for elites (e.g. over the production, appropriation or redistribution of resources such as rents) and for the rest of the population.³

Triggers of conflict in March 2005

The trigger for the March 2005 conflict was a highly political event: the **rigging of parliamentary elections** in February-March 2005 (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 119; Temirkulov 2010: 592-593). A related trigger was the electoral victories of the president's son, daughter and sister-in-law as candidates (Temirkulov 2010: 591, 593). The public was concerned that after these elections, the Akayev family would assert power once and for all, by using the new constitution and transferring power dynastically (*idem*: 593). In

³ Question 1 in DFID's query is about the immediate triggers in 2005 and 2010. Question 2 seeks to identify triggers and their indicators that would be associated with major cases of actual or potential conflicts.

addition, the repression of oppositional leaders, protesters, and independent media created incentives for mobilisation not just among elites, but also in the rest of the population (*idem*: 592).

Triggers of conflict in April 2010

The **shooting to death of “ordinary people suffering from social deprivation”** was the most significant trigger (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 3). The shootings in front of the White House in Bishkek constituted the point of no return, when police forces killed 86 and injured 1,500. These shootings turned mobilisation into open confrontation against the regime (*idem*: 3, 13). The arrest of opposition leaders by the regime mobilised selected groups, as Bakiyev excluded several leaders from the traditional meeting of leaders – the *kurultay* – in March 2010 (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 3, 13; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120; Temirkulov 2010: 597). But the shootings were the determining trigger.

Actual and potential triggers of conflict in other cases

Socio-economic factors

Many authors note that the **general socio-economic conditions** that contributed previous mobilisations are still present, such as high levels of unemployment, widespread corruption, and rising inequality (see e.g. Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 15).

Cash crops (licit or illicit) have also given rise to violence, especially local violence. In the context of Kyrgyzstan, cash crops have high barriers to entry and low ratios of value to weight. This makes their local economies vulnerable to corruption, to weakened capacity on part of the state, and to “the rise of unruly elites” (Markowitz 2015: 2-3). All of this enables a highly contentious seeking of rents that divides elites and promotes local violence. Local elites become dependent on rents and political patronage. If they lose their rents, they support the use of violence against their local competitors (*idem*: 3).

Mining (notably the Kumtor mine) has also given rise to violent conflict. This is because mining companies have failed to engage meaningfully with communities, and their presence has clashed with rising poverty and nationalism. Allegations of pollution and corruption have fuelled protests. Debates on rumours have circulated from one site to another, prompting a number of protests (Gullette 2014; also see Tiainen, Sairinen & Novikov 2014).

The US Manas **air base** has been an object of significant political and economic struggles among ruling elites that sort the rents generated by supplying fuel to the base. The base was an object of contention between the ruling elite and the opposition, both in 2005 and 2010. The fuel contractors worked in secrecy, with their beneficiaries unknown their registration offshore and their visibility low. The contracts and sub contracts involved or lucrative and illicit. The contractors built close connections to both the Akayev and Bakiyev regimes, which in turn used them to enrich the presidents and their entourage and to strengthen the regimes. However, these issues also contributed to the downfall of the regimes (Toktomushev 2015).

The failed attempt of the Bakiyev regime to frame the **hydroelectric** crisis of 2008-2009 in nationalistic and environmental terms has left a lasting legacy. Since April 2010 administrations have avoided raising tariffs, while trying to attract investments in the sector and developing energy capacity. Energy production and prices remain sensitive issues (Wooden 2014: 464).

Political factors associated with socio-economic issues

Writing about the June 2010 riots, McGlinchey argues for the need to go beyond the actual or alleged triggers that are often mentioned – in the case of Osh, a fight between some Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in a casino, the alleged rape of Kyrgyz women at a university, and “turf wars between crime syndicates”

(2011: 80). McGlinchey identifies two main structural causes behind such violence and the enduring political instability in the country: **the fragmentation of political elites; and “a civil society that can readily be mobilised for both liberal and illiberal ends”** (*ibidem*).

The **perpetuation of the same elites, be they in power or in the opposition**, contributes to constant intra-elite conflicts and competition for narrow particular interests, consolidates elites' position in politics, and impedes co-operation for political and social economic improvements. These old elites' approaches and practices, focused on regime security rather than human security, also contribute to outward migration of workers, public frustration, and social deprivation (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 15). Factional competition among Kyrgyz elites involves traditional divisions based on North-South opposition, as well as “opposition between ‘revolutionary’ and ‘revanchists’” after 2010 (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 129). Changes to the existing distribution of power and resources among elites can prompt political entrepreneurs to defend their interests through violent protests, even when the changes are meant to advance democracy or the fight against corruption (McGlinchey 2011: 80).

In addition, where political or ethnic identities are mobilised, the **use of minor or major violence by parts of the population, together with the circulation of rumours**, is widely noted to have triggered a continuation or escalation of violence in the past. The most discussed example is June 2010.

Conversely, the **use of violence in State responses to protests** is another important factor that can shape the level of violence involved in contention, as a comparison of 2005 and 2010 shows. In 2005, Akayev had refused to use violence against protesters, making for a fairly peaceful transition of power among elites. In contrast, the security forces serving Bakiyev fired at demonstrators in April 2010, which immediately led to an escalation of violence and mass mobilisations (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120).

The April 2010 conflicts signalled a new phase in the **destabilisation of Kyrgyzstan based on the political mobilisation of geographic or ethnic identities** (ICG 2010b & 2015; Melvin 2011; Peyrouse and Laruelle 2012: 121). Indeed, one study found the largest threat of violent extremism and insurgency in Kyrgyzstan to be the growing Kyrgyz nationalism (Robert 2013: iv). Long-standing tensions along several lines “are easily reactivated” and have “functioned as a political resource for violence” (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 122). Such tensions are multiple and sometimes overlap. They include the old resentment of herders and former nomads in rural areas against farmers in the plains and urban traders (Melvin 2011; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 122).

Other related fault lines revolve around the socio-political differences between Kyrgyz and Uzbek, and among Kyrgyz groups from the north and south. In broad terms, Uzbeks primarily live in the south of the country (representing between one quarter and one third of the population there), dominate the economy of the bazaars and the private sector, but are underrepresented in local and national administrations and politics. Conversely, Kyrgyz control state structures, especially powerful ministries, and dominate the shadow economy, especially drug trafficking, although criminal groups from both communities share in on this (Melvin 2011; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 122-123; also see e.g. Melvin 2011).

These various tensions can coalesce, for example when rural dwellers accuse urbanites, and especially Uzbeks, of enriching themselves at rural dwellers' expense by speculating on prices in the bazaar (Melvin 2011; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 122-123).

There is also a long history of tensions that mobilise ethnicity, since the June 1990 riots in Uzgen over arable (Hierman & Nekbakhtshoev 2014; Melvin 2011; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 123). In 2010, before leaving the country, Bakiyev rekindled the conflict between southern elites and northern elites. In turn, this “exacerbated interethnic relations” (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 121). Kyrgyz supporters of Bakiyev

and Uzbek supporters of the new transitional government engaged in violent actions between April and June 2010, all of which ratcheted up tensions that were framed as ethnic confrontations (Melvin 2011; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 121). The worst violence then occurred in June in Osh. To this day, the situation in the south “remains very volatile and ethnic tensions continue” (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 122; also see e.g. ICG 2015; Melvin 2011).

Crisis Group states that **radicalisation towards violence and intolerance which is based on religious identity rooted in political Islam** has been on the rise (ICG 2015: 1). Instead of confronting this, political parties have incorporated it, and sometimes presented it as being traditional Kyrgyz values (*idem*). Zenn and Kuehnast (2014) also mention concerns that poor socio-economic conditions, the lack of public services, and other factors related to regional and international developments, might foster violent extremism in Kyrgyzstan. Secular citizens as well as youth who are more invested in their Muslim identity agree that there is a problem of grassroots radicalisation of young men and women, especially in the Fergana Valley. In particular, “hyper-ethnic nationalists”, and educated religious leaders have had polarising influences on women, who have become marginalised over the past 20 years (*idem*: 1; also see ICG 2009). Another study notes that the current threat of Islamist violence is very low, but also identifies factors and scenarios that could increase that threat in the future (Robert 2013). Other authors caution that views differ – locally and internationally – on the real significance of the threats posed by radicalisation to state and society (Saferworld 2016: 1).

Other factors of risk related to security that authors identify include uncertainty in Afghanistan, and “the possibility of a chaotic political succession in Uzbekistan” (ICG 2015: 1).

Environmental factors related to socio-economic dimensions

A 2011 mixed methods study on tensions and disputes between communities in Osh, Jalalabad and Batken identified a number of **environmental factors related to conflict**. At their core are problems of **governance, from national to local levels**. These problems then play out as conflicts over the allocation of resources. The drivers of such conflicts between communities include for example: the pollution of sources of drinking water; the decline of agricultural economy; a reduced supply of irrigation water; a lack of clarity, trust and understanding over grazing rights; thefts of cattle; perceived bias on the allocation of stalls in bazaars; and difficulties in accessing education in all languages (II 2011).

Similarly, other authors note that **access to and use of water and arable lands** has provoked some conflicts, as a result of internal migrations. This has particularly been the case in the Batken region (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 127; also see Hierman & Nekbakhtshoev 2014). Conflict over control of arable land constituted a trigger in the June 1990 riots between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Uzgen: the spark of the riots was allegations that Kyrgyz were trying to build houses on an Uzbek collective farm (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 123; also see Hierman & Nekbakhtshoev 2014).

Another mixed-method study on the management of water for irrigation in the south of the country found that growing competition over access to this water has been fuelling conflicts in many rural areas. The study found four major types of conflicts: organisational conflicts between local departments of water resources and water user associations, and among such associations; conflicts between these associations or the *murabs* and powerful individuals; conflicts between these associations or the *murabs* and ordinary people; and conflicts between communities, particularly upstream versus downstream, along the border, or based on ethnicity (Undeland 2013: 8-9; on border tensions, also see Oliphant et al. 2015: 8-9).

Warnings about factors that are mistakenly seen as sources of conflict

Much of the literature also emphasises that some socio-economic characteristics are not triggers or causes of conflict, counter to some misconceptions held by domestic or foreign actors. In particular, a

number of references note that **ethnicity as such** has not triggered violence, even in the case of the June 2010 riots in Osh: it was the political mobilisation of ethnicity that mattered (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 122), which can for instance be understood well through the lens of nationalism (Megoran 2013).

Similarly, several references emphasise that **Islam as such, or political Islam as such**, are not a trigger or cause of conflict or violence. To begin with, one study, using desk-based research, finds “no evidence of a strong tendency towards political Islam” (Robert 2013: iii). Even Hizb-ut-Tahrir remains marginal, and shows no sign of being inclined to use violence. The study concludes that there is “presently very little risk” of violent extremism or insurgency, unless it were nationalist or perpetrated by foreigners (Robert 2013: iv). Further, a briefing based on fieldwork finds that, contrary to some perceptions, there have been “few incidents of actual violence linked to extremist religious narratives or ideology”, and “little evidence of radical ideologies taking hold over large sections of society” (Saferworld 2016: 1). There is mistakenly “a widespread equation of ‘radicals/extremists’ with different forms of religiosity, or religious practice, especially linked to Islam” (*ibidem*).

3. Domestic actors

Main political players in the 2005 and 2010 conflicts

The mechanisms of mass mobilisation differed considerably between the 2005 and 2010 conflicts, including in the roles that elite figures played (Temirkulov 2010).

2005 conflict

The 2005 protests started from the concerted action of **various opposition parties, civic groups, and NGOs**, all challenging the results of rigged elections (Gullette 2010; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120; Temirkulov 2010: 593). In particular, the elections left a set of leaders and parliamentary candidates dissatisfied (Temirkulov 2010: 593).

However, the opposition soon realised that mobilising political parties, NGOs, human rights networks, and the media, was insufficient to generate an effective, large mobilisation. It then turned to **patronage networks and traditional institutions** in provincial peripheries in order to mobilise residents, including peasants. These networks and institutions, for their own material ends, offered crowds incentives of material gain and solidarity. Formal local NGOs collaborated closely with these informal actors, providing informational, institutional and organisational resources (Temirkulov 2010: 593-594).

Once mobilisation had taken off, the opposition took control and united protests around the message of overthrowing the regime. Opposition parties created the **People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan** to unite different patronage networks against the ruling regime (*ibidem*).

As soon as the overthrow of Akayev was achieved, **the opposition became divided again**, and patronage networks started to compete with each other for access to resources. Mass mobilisations for and against some leaders continued for months, as did the organised capture of land and properties (*ibidem*).

2010 conflict

The origins of the April 2010 mobilisations were **much more popular** than those in March 2005 (Gullette 2010). Unlike in March 2005, material and other incentives played no crucial role in the April 2010 mass mobilisation (Temirkulov 2010: 597). The 2010 mobilisations formed **a part of localised protests**, where

opposition parties were not the source of dissent (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120; Temirkulov 2010: 597). The protests started from the poorest regions in the north, Talas and Naryn, after violent responses by the police to demonstrators on 6 April. Protests then took place throughout the country on the next day, including in Bishkek (Gullette 2010; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120; Temirkulov 2010: 597).

The great **mass of protesters in April 2010 mobilised spontaneously** out of a sense of purpose, when news of the 7 April killings spread through media, phone or internet (Temirkulov 2010: 597). Opposition parties had laid out demands, with an ultimatum for 17 March, and a date for mobilisation for 7 April. The demands were the removal of the Bakiyev family from power, the return of privatised companies to the state, and a decrease in tariffs. The arrest of opposition leaders on 6 April mobilised their supporters. However, it was the shooting of protesters in front of the White House in Bishkek that led to mass mobilisation (Gullette 2010; Temirkulov 2010: 596-597).

Opposition leaders played a major role in mobilising the public to join the protests, but they had not planned the uprising itself nor shaped its unfolding sequence. **No individual or group could control** the course of events: while the actors in the movements belonged to a distinct position, the mobilisation itself was more bottom-up (Temirkulov 2010; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 3). In fact, opposition leaders were detained prior to the uprising, and crowds in Bishkek "were largely self-led" (ICG 2010: 12).

The **elites who were involved** included leading figures and their political parties who had initially been part of the ruling coalition after 2005, but who had been sidelined by the Bakiyev. This included Almazbek Atambaev, Roza Otunbayeva, Azymbek Beknazarov, Temir Sariev, Omurbek Tekebaev, and Felix Kulov (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 13). The opposition parties involved were suggested to be the socialist Ata-Meken, the liberal Ak-Shumkar, and the Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (Temirkulov 2010: 597).

Main winners and losers in the 2005 and 2010 conflicts

Main winners and losers in the 2005 conflict

There is a consensus in the literature about the **immediate outcome** of the 2005 conflict. The Akayev family and their political party Alga Kyrgyzstan were the major losers. The coalition of the opposition that came into power, including prominent former opponents such as Felix Kulov, was the immediate winner.

Then, **over the two years following March 2005**, Bakiyev led a self-interested transformation of state and politics after March 2005. This rapidly sidelined the opposition and several top political figures who had been part of the immediate 'winners' of the 2005 conflict (Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 6). Opposition parties, like Ata-Meken and Ak-Shumkar, failed to retain public support and lost at the ballot in December 2007, which left them without influence over political decisions. People who had served as prime ministers after the 2005 conflicts were either marginalised or engaged in power plays that served the regime: Felix Kulov, Azim Isabekov and Almazbek Atambaev (*idem*: 7). In less than three years, "state politics was eventually replaced by family politics" (*idem*: 3).

In addition, the Bakiyev regime did not need the support of Uzbek citizens, and in fact many around the President competed with Uzbeks in the south, in politics and in licit and illicit economy. This led to tensions between the regime and Uzbek communities and businesses (Melvin 2011: 12).

Main winners and losers in the 2010 conflict

There is a consensus that, in the **immediate aftermath** of the April 2010 conflict, the main loser among elites was the Bakiyev family, and the main winners among elites were the groups and individuals associated in the coalition that rode into power on the wave of popular protests – most prominently Roza Otunbayeva.

The **interim government** quickly sought to weaken the space for patronage that political elites in the south had held. In turn, this seemed to enhance the status of the Uzbek community in the south. To fight the loss of their rents from cash crops, Kyrgyzstan's southern elites then protested, and eventually encouraged widespread violence against Uzbeks in June 2010. Local figures such as Melis Myrzakhmatov thus retained their control over rents from cash crops over competing local figures such as Kadyrjan Batyrov (Markowitz 2015).

After the 2011 elections, Almazbek Atambayev and his Social-Democratic Party emerged as winners when they received over 60 percent of the votes cast in the first round. Of the other major contenders, the losers were two rivals who both draw on nationalistic themes and Kyrgyz voters from the south: the former speaker of the parliament Adakhan Madumarov, head of Butun Kyrgyzstan, and Kamchybek Tashiyev, leader of the nationalist party Ata Jurt (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 129).

State actors and their legitimacy

Limited action for legitimisation by the State after 2005 and 2010

There is a consensus in the literature that ruling elites actually took limited action to regain legitimacy and reconnect with all people in Kyrgyzstan after March 2005 and April 2010 – though the post-2010 period shows elites' greater attention to their legitimacy than the Bakiyev regime had.

After March 2005, ruling elites quickly turned to consolidating their own grip on power and resources. Further, the dominant Bakiyev ruling family quickly focused on centralising its control over state and private resources.

After April 2010, the interim government proclaimed its aim to be changing the regime. However, ensuing practices have a **mixed record**. For example, a new constitution, approved by over 90 per cent of voters in a June 2010 referendum, enabled a transition from a presidential to a parliamentary system. Yet, about 500,000 labour migrants and Kyrgyzstan based in Russia and Kazakhstan did not vote. Voting conditions for the hundreds of thousands of refugees in the south of the country can be questioned. There were also signs of tampering with electoral rolls in some northern areas such as Chui and Issyk-Kul. In addition, the electorate voted primarily for a return to stability, not for a new political system (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120-121). Lastly, the parliamentary system does not automatically change political practices: parties remain poorly organised, often with no clear ideological platform, and some parties call for 'order' and a return to an authoritarian presidential system (Luong cited Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 121)⁴.

If anything, the literature notes many instances where efforts at legitimisation and reconciliation have stemmed from society, not the State. For example, in response to the mobilisation of ethnicity for conflict – especially after the June 2010 riots in Osh – **local religious leaders and male elders from the community** (*aksakals*) acted as facilitators for mediation and peace (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 122).

⁴ For an analysis of the drivers of voters' preferences in the October 2010 elections: Huskey & Hill (2013).

Changes in the workings of legitimisation

Fundamentally, the literature points to **changes in how popular legitimisation works** in Kyrgyzstan.

A major development is the **profound disillusionment of the population towards politics**. The shift from a presidential to a parliamentary system has not been enough to counter this (ICG 2015; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 128).

The March 2005 and April 2010 mobilisations increased the general feeling that **street protests appoint and remove government** has increased. Both conflicts showed the difficulty that ruling classes have in controlling demonstrators, and while the first uprising had required nearly a month, the second one took only two days (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120).

The legacy of the June 2010 violence in Osh has enabled new political forces to cohere around **Kyrgyz nationalism** which from there on has played a key role in political legitimisation in Kyrgyzstan (*idem*: 119). Media discourses that have merged supposed enemies from inside and outside the country have been “a powerful driver of nationalist radicalisation”, which has brought together diverging groups (*idem*: 128). The memory of mutual benefits between respect and Kyrgyz communities has been fading, replaced by a narrative of competition for natural resources and economic opportunities. A number of Kyrgyz interpret the failings of statehood as a failing of nationhood. In that vision, an increased emphasis on Kyrgyz identity and a marginalisation of minorities from decision-making will enable Kyrgyzstan to reconstruct itself as a state (Melvin 2011; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 129).

In particular, the **state has not taken a neutral role, but rather has fed tensions that mobilise ethnic identities**. For instance, the government has refused to acknowledge that, after June 2010, persecution and land grabs have largely been to the detriment of Uzbeks (Melvin 2011; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 128-129). Opinion among the majority Kyrgyz media, intellectual and political elites “is very clearly anti-Uzbek” (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 122). At this point, the majority of the Kyrgyz “regard Kyrgyzstan as their ethnic state where minorities are merely ‘guests’” (*idem*: 123). Even opposition media have remained largely silent about the police disproportionately targeting Uzbeks in raids and arbitrary arrests (*idem*: 128). In turn, Kyrgyz nationalism, combined with a lack of support for Kyrgyzstan’s Uzbeks from the state of Uzbekistan, has pushed some Uzbeks to seek protection from among proliferating Islamic groups (*idem*: 123). At this point, the Uzbek and Kyrgyz narratives of victimhood are totally polarised, and the politics of grievances hinders the construction of a civic identity (ICG 2010b; Melvin 2011; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 129).

High tensions around mobilised and politicised geography and ethnicity is exemplified and compounded by the **continued division in interpretations of the Osh violence, which successive inquiries have not alleviated**. On the one hand, Kyrgyz elites accuse Uzbeks of being heavily armed, of organising uprisings to gain independence, and of initiating ethnic killings to prompt a Kyrgyz reaction. The government has blamed the riots on the Bakiyev clan, as well as – implausibly – on the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hizb ut-Tahrir, al-Qaeda, and the Islamic Party of Rebirth of Tajikistan. It has also more discreetly mentioned the ambiguous role of Uzbek leaders, mainly Kadyrzhan Batyrov. Batyrov is a successful Uzbek businessman who has been calling on the Uzbek minority, which has traditionally been distant from politics, to become politicised. As for Uzbeks, they speak of an ethnic conflict organised by the state that victimised them, with some Uzbeks talking of genocide (ICG 2010b; Melvin 2011; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 122).

The various investigative committees on the Osh violence have also failed to settle opposition between the Kyrgyz majority and national minorities. These committees have failed to assign responsibility and inhibited any national reconciliation (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 129).

Main players contesting political economy and generating conflict since 2010

Main players contesting political economy since 2010

Many of the same leading elites, if not individuals, have kept rotating in and out of power and state institutions since the days of Akayev's rule, and have kept vying for political and economic resources (at least those leading figures that have remained in Kyrgyzstan). The exception is when exile or death has meant that some key figures are not present any more. All this is a point of consensus in the literature (see e.g. Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 15).

Main players likely to generate conflict since 2010

The state itself and Kyrgyz ruling elites are widely identified as a major source of potential conflict in the future. First, since April 2010, the ruling leadership has **failed to address major economic and political problems**. These include high poverty, declining social services, corruption, economic dependency on remittances, as well as Kyrgyz nationalism (ICG 2015).

Second, power structures within the state still risk **mobilising geographic and ethnic identities for violence** (ICG 2015; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 129). If anything, the Kyrgyz nationalist narrative that emerged after June 2010 "is now firmly entrenched and facilitated by a variety of groups across the country" (ICG 2015: 1). Triggers of conflict related to the mobilisation of geographic and ethnic identities enable the state to take sides in nationalistic mobilisations (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 128-129). In addition, Kyrgyz elites outside of state power – such as Madumarov and Tashiyev – have pushed nationalist narratives that have shaped public discourse while avoiding discussion of socio-economic issues and neo-patrimonialism (*idem*: 129). Tensions in the South between Kyrgyz and Uzbek players have also persisted since June 2010 (ICG 2015).

Third, the June 2010 riots in the south showed that the interim government **lacked control over power structures such as the police and parts of the military**, which have remained largely sympathetic to Bakiyev (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 123). The riots also revealed that the government did not control all look of its territory (ICG 2010b).

There are also **international dimensions** to the contention of Kyrgyzstan's political economy. Among others, skirmishes at the borders with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan "are not uncommon" (ICG 2015: 1).

4. Key foreign actors: involvement, position and response

Involvement of major foreign governments in the 2005 and 2010 conflicts

The events of March 2005 surprised **Russia** (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120). Regarding April 2010, there is no proof of a direct interference of Russia in the regime's affairs before the conflict, or of Russian backing of the mobilisation (ICG 2010a). On the other hand, during the April conflict, Russia did not condemn the mobilisations and the violent shift of power. Instead, it recognised the interim government even as Bakiyev was still in Kyrgyzstan, while official Russian media repeated the opposition's allegations against the Bakiyev regime. This played "a significant but secondary psychological role" in the mobilisation (ICG 2010: 12; also see Gullette 2010).

The **USA** sought to maintain its Manas air base, and therefore was unwilling to confront the Bakiyev regime (ICG 2010a; also see Nichol 2014).

Position and response of key foreign actors after the 2005 and 2010 conflicts

Positions and engagement of multiple foreign actors

Western States have tended to find the “superficial stability” of authoritarian regimes attractive for commercial or security purposes, such as their war in Afghanistan (ICG 2010a: 1). Since April 2010, the relations between Western States and Kyrgyzstan’s rulers have soured (*idem*).

In the face of the June 2010 violence, most countries deferred to Russia, which declined to send peacekeepers (ICG 2010b). The UN Security Council did not act, as it was blocked by Russia (Melvin 2011: 36). The International Committee of the Red Cross did deploy promptly, whereas key UN agencies were hampered by constricting internal rules on security (ICG 2010b).

In the **2011 elections, Russia, Turkey and the West** had a preference for Almazbek Atambayev and his Social-Democratic Party (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 129).

Russia

In 2005, Moscow tried to support Akayev at first, before resorting to recognise the legitimacy of the new government (Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120).

In 2010, Russia welcomed the ousting of Bakiyev, with whom it was dissatisfied for geopolitical reasons and due to the ruling family’s misuse of public Russian funds (Gullette 2010). In 2009, Bakiyev had promised Moscow to close down the US air base at the Manas airport in Bishkek, in return for a US\$2 billion loan. At the same time, Bakiyev was bargaining with the US and obtained an increase in US payments from US\$17 million to US\$60 million. Eventually, the regime decided not to keep its promise to Russia and maintained the base as a transit centre (Gullette 2010; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 12). Russia criticised Bakiyev’s handling of the airbase (Gullette 2010; Orozobekova & Wolters 2015: 3). This being said, Russia remained sceptical of Roza Otunbayeva, a former minister of foreign affairs and ambassador to Washington, and of her government (Marat cited in Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 120).

When the transition government requested Russian military assistance to regain control of Osh in June 2010 in the face of riots based on ethnic mobilisation, Russia declined. This is because Russia did not view the violence as a direct threat to its interests, there was a risk the move could have been misinterpreted, and non-intervention had no direct political cost (Oliphant et al. 2015: 18, 25; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 121-122). Eventually, Russia agreed to provide some military equipment and humanitarian aid, while reinforcing the security of its military facilities (Melvin 2011: 36). Simultaneously, Russia seemed to restrict UN and OSCE involvement in the crisis (*ibidem*).

In the period since April 2010, Kyrgyzstan has increasingly depended on Russia, politically, economically and militarily. It became a full member of the Eurasian Economic Union, led by Russia, in August 2015 – the move was debated by some Kyrgyz businesses concerned about trade with China, but there is strong popular support for closer ties with Russia (ICG 2015; Oliphant et al. 2015: 11, 22). This Union is meant to bolster Russia’s economic influence in the region and to create a common trading bloc. The inclusion of Kyrgyzstan is an attempt to shore up economic solidarity in the face of the expansion of Chinese trade and investment (Oliphant et al. 2015: ii). In 2014, Gazprom took over the ailing network for gas distribution in Kyrgyzstan and has committed some US\$500 million in investments in energy infrastructures by 2017. Russian state companies “have also promised major investments in hydroelectric projects” (*idem*: 22).

However, the recent downturn in the Russian economy has profoundly affected Kyrgyzstan's economy, which depends heavily on remittances sent in rouble and on Russian investments (*idem*: ii-iii, 13-14). The weakening of the Russian rouble has also pushed down Kyrgyzstan's currency, and Kyrgyzstan's central bank has had to tap into its limited reserves to respond. Still, local currencies have fallen too and the cost of imported goods, including food, has risen (*idem*: 14). At the same time, Russia has had to recognise that it is now one player among others in Central Asia, especially alongside China. For example, in 2010, Russia had been overtaken by China as Kyrgyzstan's main trading partner (*idem*: 11).

Military cooperation and economic relations have gone hand-in-hand, as Russia seeks leverage. Kyrgyzstan has remained the main focus of Russia's security engagements in Central Asia, as Moscow has committed to spending over US\$1.5 billion to strengthen the Kyrgyz and Tajik militaries (with two thirds of the amount going to Kyrgyzstan). Other major developments have included an extension of the Russian military facility at Kant, and the conversion of Kyrgyz debts into a capital holding for Russia in one of Kyrgyzstan's only military industrial enterprises, called Dastan (*idem*: 16-17).

USA

Since Akayev's rule, the US has focused its engagement in Kyrgyzstan narrowly on ensuring its continued use of the Manas airbase to supply its forces in Afghanistan. Under the Akayev and Bakiyev regimes, the US agreed to fuel contracts for the base with the regime with no transparency. As a result, the US supported the *status quo* and did not protest against the deterioration of human rights and politics under Bakiyev (Melvin 2011: 37; also see Nichol 2014).

In the face of the June 2010 violence in the south, the US was not prepared to support an international mission in Kyrgyzstan. However, it supported the move towards a parliamentary system, gave humanitarian aid, publicly supported the idea of an international enquiry, provided assistance on the capacity of the police, and gave greater aid (*ibidem*).

China

China has **sought resources** in Central Asia, including in the non-hydrocarbon mining sector in Kyrgyzstan. It has also **sought to invest** in connecting Xinjiang to Central Asia and to develop the region, for example through upgrades of the two main border crossings into Kyrgyzstan. It has ambitious plans to develop a railway line across Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan as well. Further, patterns of economic development have developed more organically. For example, significant amount of trade has been driven by Chinese small traders and small and medium enterprises: they bring generally low-value consumer goods into Kyrgyzstan which are then traded onto other places. This has given rise to a significant Chinese diaspora (Oliphant et al. 2015: 31-32; also see Reeves 2015).

So far, China has **not used its "economic influence to exert overt political pressure"**, beyond a few isolated incidents such as Kyrgyzstan's police breaking up a Falun Gong protest outside the Chinese Embassy in 2005 (Oliphant et al. 2015: 33). For a country like Kyrgyzstan that is heavily dependent on the Russian economy, having a new major trading partner helps lessen dependency and increases negotiating power (*idem*: 36).

Public information about **financial or technical support from China**, though very limited, does suggest that the main Chinese focus has been on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. China views Kyrgyzstan as the weakest Central Asian state in terms of security, due to "its substantial Uyghur population, weak government, and long borders with China" (*idem*: 35). Security related support has been limited its, but more significant engagement may be planned (*ibidem*).

Nonetheless, China has shown **little willingness to intervene or mediate during violence**, such as the June 2010 riots. The Chinese embassy simply evacuated Chinese nationals from the affected areas, and China subsequently provided US\$1.18 million in humanitarian aid (*ibidem*).

However, the structural effect of China's economic statecraft may well be creating **unintended conditions where China exerts "structural violence"** in Kyrgyzstan (Reeves 2015). Conversely, there have been local sensitivities about some of China's projects. For example, some in Kyrgyzstan perceive the railway line project as offering very little to the local population, while exacerbating its North-South fault line (Oliphant et al. 2015: 37; also see Reeves 2015).

Turkey

Turkey formally welcomed the **change of regime in 2010**. However, Turkey seeks to be perceived as neutral. This is because Turkey does not want to upset Russia by driving a pro-democracy agenda too openly, and because some protests in Kyrgyzstan had targeted Turkish businesses in 2010 because they were seen as too close to the ruling government (Wheeler 2013: 5).

In response to the **June 2010 violence**, Turkey provided humanitarian aid during the riots, and later pledged US\$20 million for technical assistance and joint projects (*ibidem*). More broadly, while Turkish aid to Kyrgyzstan was relatively insignificant in the 1990s and early 2000s, it has increased markedly since 2004 and Kyrgyzstan has become the largest recipient of Turkish aid in Central Asia (*idem*: 9).

Kyrgyzstan represents an **important economic opportunity** for Turkish trade and investment, and the two countries have excellent political relations. However, the level of economic relations has remained limited. In 2012, Kyrgyzstan ranked 72nd among Turkey's destinations for exports, at a market value of US\$257 million, while Turkish imports of goods from Kyrgyzstan totalled only US\$45 million. Turkey was only the seventh largest investor in Kyrgyzstan in 2013 (*idem*: 6-8). Turkey represents an alternative partner to Russia, China, and the US. For this reason, "Turkey may be more important to Kyrgyzstan than vice versa" (*idem*: 5).

Turkey started providing Turkish **equipment and training to Kyrgyzstan's military, and training to the country's special forces**, from the early 2000s. The stated purpose was to combat insurgencies. In 2012, Turkey "agreed to provide military aid to Kyrgyzstan to fight terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal migration, and to strengthen the defence and security sectors" (*idem*: 10). In 2013, Turkey suggested it would help Kyrgyzstan turn the NATO military base into a commercial airport. Lastly, Turkish aid has funded police trainings as well (*ibidem*).

Highlights about other international actors

The literature mentions briefly the response of a few other foreign actors. With **the European Union (EU)**, while the official emphasis is on democracy and human rights, issues of energy and security have dominated in practice. Following the June 2010 violence, the EU increased its aid, and indicated support for the OSCE police mission and an international enquiry. No further action was taken (Melvin 2011: 37; also see Babaud & Quinn Judge).

Several references conclude that the **OSCE** performed poorly as the conflict in the south of Kyrgyzstan unfolded after April 2010 (among others, see Cooley 2011; Evers 2012; Melvin 2011). For example, the modest OSCE police mission failed to deploy immediately after the June 2010 violence in the south, when it would have been most needed (*idem*).

The **Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)**, a regional organisation dominated by Russia, declined to intervene (Melvin 2011: 36; also see Cooley 2011).

The **Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO)**, a regional organisation dominated by China, took no action during the June 2010 riots in the south of Kyrgyzstan. One reason for this is the political reassurance among member states, and mistrust among regimes in the region. Regional elites consider the security of their state and regime as paramount. Further, non-interference takes precedence over humanitarian considerations. Another reason is the serious limitation of the organisation in its capacity for peacekeeping. Lastly, member states perceived the June 2010 riots as an affair internal to Kyrgyzstan, because they did not directly threaten the security of other members. All this dissuaded even the main member states from acting, be it alone, through the SCO, or through the CSTO (Aris 2012; also see Cooley 2011). Overall, to China, the SCO has been an instrument to develop relations with Central Asia, and to secure a voice in regional co-operation on security. For a poorer country like Kyrgyzstan, participation in the SCO aims to secure funding and political support (Oliphant et al. 2015: 37).

On other foreign actors:

- **Uzbekistan** has sought above all to preserve the stability of the Karimov regime, and has therefore refused to intervene in crises internal to Kyrgyzstan (Melvin 2011: 38; Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 123). For example, In response to the June 2010 riots in Osh, Uzbekistan only accepted women and children among the 120,000 refugees who fled to its border, and sent them back two weeks later (Melvin 2011: 38; Volosevich cited in Peyrouse & Laruelle 2012: 122). On other Central Asian States, see CADGAT (2013: 4); Kubicek 2011. On Kazakhstan, see Melvin (2011: 39).
- **India:** in July 2011, the Indian Defence Minister announced plans to open a joint military centre for research in Kyrgyzstan, and to train soldiers from Kyrgyzstan to serve in UN peacekeeping missions. India considered that such initiatives would allow Indian officers to build relationships with their counterparts in a manner that would be less threatening to Russia (Campbell 2013: 5).
- **The UN system:** see Melvin (2011) about UN **declarations and aid after the June 2010 violence** in the south; Gullette (2010) on UN development programmes up to 2010.

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Key websites

- Central Asian Survey – Journal aims and scope: <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=ccas20>
- International Crisis Group – Kyrgyzstan: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan.aspx>
- Nationalities Papers - The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity: <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cnap20/current>
- OSCE – Kyrgyzstan office: <http://www.osce.org/bishkek>

- OSCE Academy: <http://www.osce-academy.net/en/>
- ReliefWeb - Updates – Kyrgyzstan: http://reliefweb.int/updates?primary_country=134#content
- Saferworld – Resources – Kyrgyzstan:
[http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/search?country\[\]=Kyrgyzstan](http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/search?country[]=Kyrgyzstan)
- SIPRI – Life in Kyrgyzstan: <http://www.sipri.org/research/security/security-and-development/kyrgyzstan>
- United States Institute of Peace – Kyrgyzstan – Publications:
<http://www.usip.org/category/countries/kyrgyzstan/publications>

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