

**Ethnic Uzbek Grievances in Post-Tulip Revolution Kyrgyzstan:
Issues of Political Representation and Religious Freedom**

A Major Paper by
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Glossary

(In order of discussion)

Ferghana Valley – Area of 22,000 square kilometers, home to 10 million people. Most populated part of Central Asia. Divided between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

Bishkek – Capital city of Kyrgyzstan located in the north close to the Kyrgyzstan/Kazakhstan border. Population 1 million, most of who are ethnic Kyrgyz.

Osh – The second largest city in Kyrgyzstan. Osh city is located in the south close to the Kyrgyzstan/Uzbekistan border. Osh city is also the provincial capital of Osh province, which is the most populated province in the country. A majority of Kyrgyzstan's ethnic Uzbek population resides in Osh city and the villages of Osh province. The city was the center for bloody inter-ethnic conflicts in 1990.

Jalalabad – The third largest city in Kyrgyzstan. It is located in the south, close to the Kyrgyzstan/Uzbekistan border, and just north of Osh city. Current President Bakiev claims it as his hometown. Jalalabad city is also the provincial capital of Jalalabad province. Jalalabad province has the second largest ethnic Uzbek population in the country.

Hijab – A headscarf worn by female Muslims who observe Islamic dress codes of modesty.

Manas – One of the world's longest epic poems. It records the life of Manas, a legendary Kyrgyz warrior who united the forty Kyrgyz tribes to defeat foreign aggressors and establish the first Kyrgyz state. In 1995, ousted President Akaev used the cult of Manas to promote Kyrgyz national unity.

Kurultai – Traditional gathering of people for an important event, meeting, or congress. Today, used by presidential administrations as 'people's assemblies' to discuss pertinent national issues.

Hizb-ut Tahrir (HT) – Radical group derived from the Saudi-sponsored Wahhabist sect of Islam. Banned in all Central Asian nations, but still active in the Ferghana Valley area, HT advocates for the peaceful overthrow of government in favour of an Islamic Caliphate.

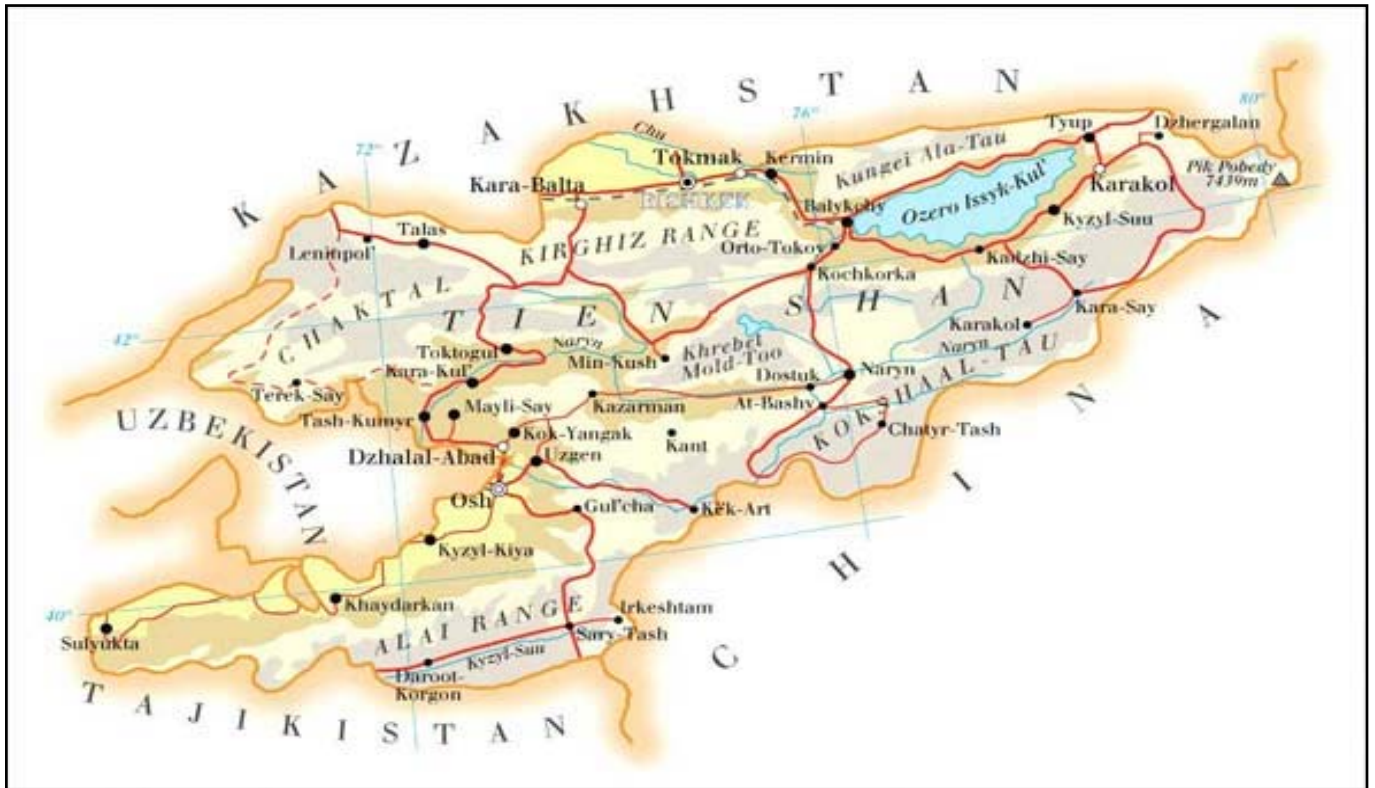
Introduction

Issues of identity are at the heart of questions regarding citizenship in Central Asia. The tension between nationalism and ethnic identity has been the primary concern of nation-states in Central Asia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Smith, 1999). These nations have been working to reconcile their new titular ethnic homelands (*Kyrgyz-stan*, *Uzbek-istan*, *Kazakh-stan*, *Tajik-istan*, and *Turkmen-istan*) with issues of citizenship and multiethnic populations. Nowhere is this conflict between nationalism and ethnic identity more pressing than in Kyrgyzstan (also known as the Kyrgyz Republic, used interchangeably throughout the paper). Here, the struggles between the ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbek play out in the imagined national community of Kyrgyzstan. The creation of the Kyrgyzstani imagined community is influenced by a geographical divide and political differentiation of the minority ethnic Uzbek by the dominant ethnic Kyrgyz.

This paper attempts to illustrate how Kyrgyzstan is imagined as a community (Anderson, 2006) and how state institutions respond to grievances emanating from ethnic minority groups. Within the political borders of Kyrgyzstan, the ethnic Kyrgyz are the dominant ethnic and cultural group. According to the Kyrgyz Republic's 2007 population survey¹, ethnic Kyrgyz comprised 68.8 percent of the national population. The largest of the minority groups is the ethnic Uzbek community. They constitute 14.3 percent of the national population and are geographically centered in Southern Kyrgyzstan. As you can see in Map 1, the nation is divided physically into north and south by the beginning of the Tien Shan mountain range, which splits the country width wise. Bishkek, the administrative capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, is located in the northern part. Most of the ethnic Uzbek citizens, however, reside in the south and namely in the cities of Osh, Jalalabad, and Uzgen. This geographical and political divide gives rise to the local saying that "the mountains are high and the emperor is far away".

¹ *Naselenie Kirgizskoi Respubliki 2007*

Map 1. Political and Topographical Map of the Kyrgyz Republic



Source: <http://en.18dao.net/images/5/56/Map-Kyrgyzstan.jpg>.

Research Questions

This study examines the conflict between nationalism and ethnic identity in the time after the March 24, 2005 events of the Tulip Revolution. The chosen examples illustrate how the dominant ethnic Kyrgyz in power narrowed the national multicultural space through the political differentiation of the ethnic Uzbek minority group. This constriction of space, coupled with geographical spacialization of the Uzbeks, has led to a Kyrgyzstan nation-state in which ethnic Uzbeks express grievances concerning political representation and religious freedom. The two questions investigated in this paper are:

1. How is the conflict between nationalism and ethnic identity realized in the actions of the dominant ethnic Kyrgyz and minority ethnic Uzbek?
2. What are the Uzbek grievances against the Kyrgyz state?

Methods of Research and Format of the Study

I focused on changes that have occurred in Kyrgyzstan since the Tulip Revolution. To accomplish this, I predominantly used secondary sources to illustrate the concepts of the conflict behind nationalism and ethnic identity. I drew upon Benedict Anderson's (2006 edition) seminal classic *Imagined Communities*. For other issues of nationalism, I relied on works by Etienne Balibar (1991), Stephen Castells (2000) and Graham Smith (1996, 1998, 1999). Work by academic Nick Megoran (2004, 2007) on ethnic Uzbeks in the Ferghana Valley was also used. For current information, I accessed scholarly articles and papers through various academic journals and quarterlies. I also consulted reports from the International Crisis Group, the Jamestown Foundation, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Eurasianet.org, Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and the blogging/reporting collective of Neweurasia.net.

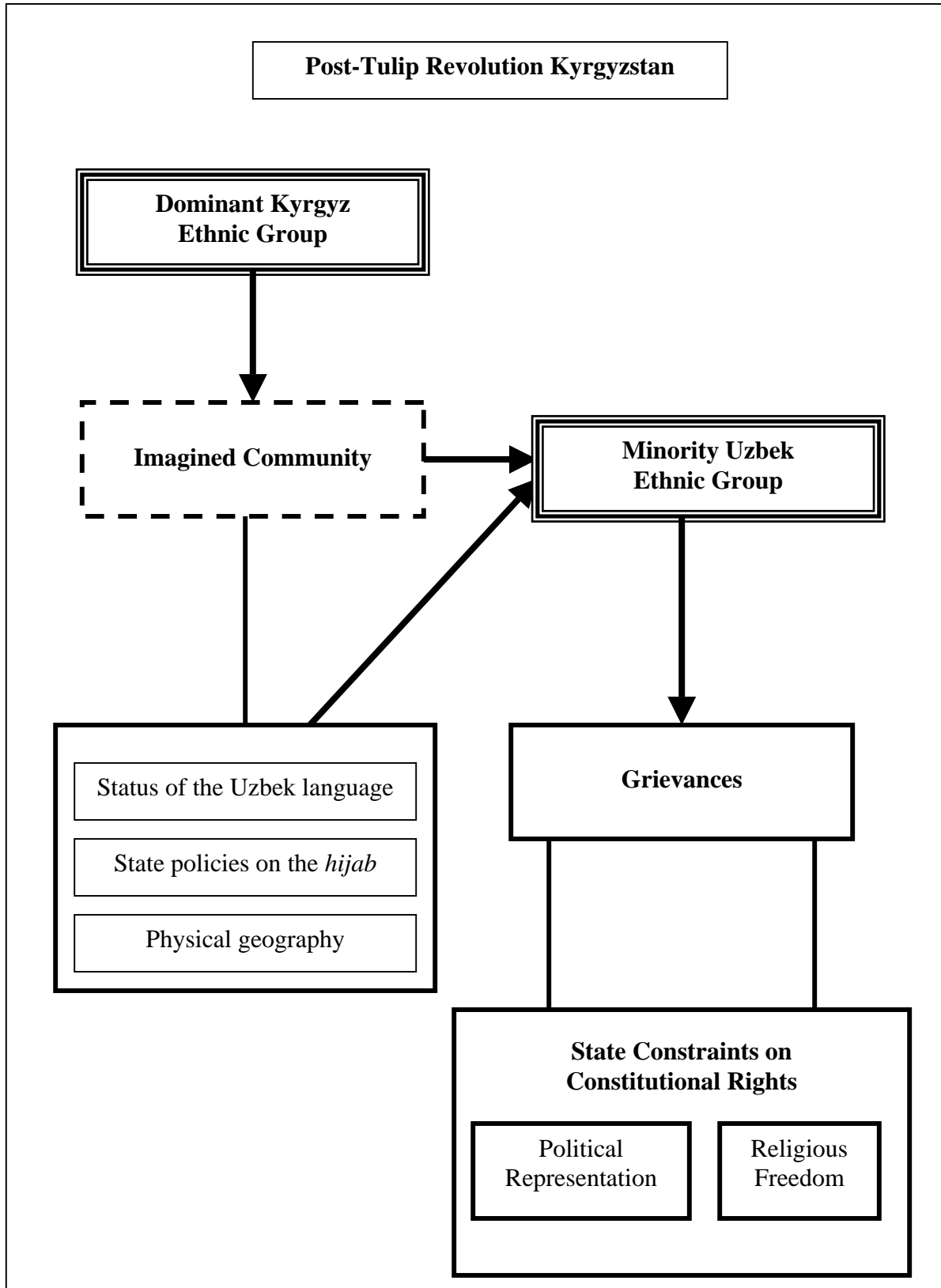
I also examined various primary sources such as the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, data from the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as data and case studies from other websites and international organizations. Additional primary information was gathered from blogs.

Before introducing the grievances of the ethnic Uzbeks against the dominant ethnic Kyrgyz, it is necessary that I provide background. In the section that follows I outline the conceptual perspectives on nationalism, citizenship, ethnic minorities, and the bases of inter-ethnic conflict. I then offer a general overview of ethnic tension in the Kyrgyz Republic. I explain the Tulip Revolution as a significant historical turning point, followed by discussion of selections from Kyrgyzstan's Constitution that will lay the groundwork for subsequent analysis. In the last sections of the paper, I examine the policies that reflect the treatment of Uzbeks as an ethnic minority, and I investigate the nature of Uzbek grievances against the state.

Conceptual Perspectives

This study was situated within a range of scholarly works that explore the conflicts between nationalism and a country's diverse ethnic population. Through these concepts, I have been able to investigate the national Kyrgyzstani imagined community and how ethnic minorities are created. To investigate political differentiation, I have explored state constraints on the Uzbek language and regulations concerning the *hijab* in public schools in the time after the Tulip Revolution. These examples highlight ways in which the dominant ethnic Kyrgyz discriminated against the ethnic Uzbek minority. In reaction to state narrowing of multicultural space, the Uzbeks challenge limits on their rights to political representation and religious freedom as guaranteed by the country's Constitution. Consult Chart 1 on the following page for a graphical interpretation of the research investigation of this paper.

Chart 1. Flow Chart of Research Investigation.



Nationalism

Benedict Anderson (2006: 6-7) defines the nation as “an imagined political community”. The construction of the imagined community is limited by the cartographic boundaries that delineate the physical country from its neighbors. Within this imagined community are ‘fictive ethnicities’ that are the product of historical and institutional effects. These historical and institutional effects fabricate ethnicities because

no nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized – that is, represented in the past or in the future *as if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individuals and social conditions (Balibar, 1991a: 96). Therefore, the nation, as an entity, exists primarily in the minds of the people who are constrained by arbitrary political borders (following geographical features or drawn by a colonizing entity) around a particular piece of land.

As a strategy to create national solidarity, the nation is also imagined as though it is a singular ethnic identity. Anderson (2006: 150) argues that national unity of one group can result in racism that manifests itself within national borders as “domestic repression and domination”. Thus, the elites of the dominant national group create national unity through the reification, or ‘othering’ of ethnic minorities within their national borders. Etienne Balibar (1991b: 59) suggests that the national unity of the dominant group is a self-identity based on “an excess of ‘purism’” that in fact is racism. This racism stems from the mythological construction of the nation as “racially or culturally pure.” Any group that varies from the ethnic purity standards, or single ethnic identity, experiences discrimination that is grounded in the “stigmata of exteriority and impurity” and becomes an ethnic minority (Balibar, 1991b: 60). Empowered by mythology to be the only legitimate national identity, the dominant ethnic group utilizes racism to construct

the internal Other, i.e., those citizens whose ethnic origins vary from the national ideal. This constructed norm is used as the “ethnic identity of the dominant group [that] is privileged as the core of imagined community” (Alonso, 1994: 390). In creating national unity through the “otherizing” of ethnic minorities and variants, the dominant ethnic group solidifies power around a national identity and legitimates its own control over the nation-state’s internal political and economic affairs. Therefore, any minority group that does not comply with the created national identity immediately becomes perceived as a dissident group and problematic for the nation and dominant ethnic group.

Citizenship, limits to citizenship, and institutions

A country’s citizenship standards are far more tangible than the imagined national community and ideas of national unity. Through rules and documentation, citizenship laws set the standards for inclusion and define the parameters for exclusion. However, citizenship standards also operate to limit the rights of some of those who are included. Exclusion of citizens can be derived from such markers as ethnicity. For example, an ethnic minority may have the right to vote, but “social, economic and cultural exclusion denies them the chance of gaining political representation or of having any real say in the decisions that affect their lives” (Castles and Davidson, 2000: 11). This exclusion connotes the ability of the dominant ethnic group to use its power to regulate processes in a way that institutionalizes the internal Other. Through such regulations, ethnic minorities are granted a limited citizenship.

The Kyrgyzstan state derives its notion of limited citizenship from Soviet influences on Central Asia. Through manipulation of language and historical past, the state limits citizenship for some in order to pose effective barriers to political and economic power. Graham Smith *et. al.* (1998: 139) contend that the Soviets influenced Central Asian nations with an ideology that

facilitated the construction of a dominant ethnic group within physical boundaries of a designated 'homeland'. During their rule, the Soviets endorsed the idea that "each titular nation is indivisibly connected through its putative history to a particular territory that is the national patrimony of that nation" (Smith *et. al.* 1998: 139). Upon independence from the Soviet Union in the early 1990's, Central Asian states implemented "nationalising policies and practices that seek to assert the hegemony of their respective titular nations". The titular nation and corresponding ethnicity became the dominant citizen group. This dominant citizen group enforced policies that assigning a privileged status to the titular language (Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Kazakh, Turkmen, or Tajik). The privileged status of the titular language effectively excluded ethnic groups from places of political and economic power (Smith *et al.*, 1998: 139).

The exclusion of minority ethnic citizens through language privileging is also evident in the nationalizing of historical pasts. Kyrgyz political elites "regarded the question of developing a national ideology for independent Kyrgyzstan as of the utmost importance" (Megoran, 2004a: 118-117). The Kyrgyz administration put forth the historical narrative of 'Manas', a legendary Kyrgyz warrior. The incorporation of Manas into the national historical past did not include the ethnic Uzbeks or Russians, relegating the two groups to the periphery of Kyrgyzstan's imagined community. In effect, variant and minority pasts "that cannot be incorporated are...consigned to the margins of the national and denied a fully public voice" (Alonso, 1994: 389). The "selective tradition of nationalism, which is key for the consolidation of the idea of the state, is produced by the institutions and personnel of the state system", giving the dominant group control over the institution of citizenship (Alonso, 1994: 389). As a result, ethnic Kyrgyz commandeered national identity and state political institutions, turning the imagined community into a Kyrgyz one. And citizenship into a Kyrgyz dominated institution.

In the context of this paper, the term institution refers to any state sanctioned process. These processes include establishing citizenship, voting, and attaining positions of economic and political power within the state administration. Additionally, state structures like the Constitution, official mandates, and state policies are part of the general institution that supports the daily operations of the state. This paper will explore how some of these institutions, under the influence of the dominant ethnic group, are used to differentiate ethnic minority groups.

Racialization of ethnicity, multiculturalism, and potential for ethnic conflict

Within a nation, the dominant group creates minorities, primarily through the imposition of an official language and racialization of ethnicity. According to Balibar (1991a: 96) “history shows us that there are two great competing routes to [producing ethnicity]: language and race”. Balibar argues that language in a community is a more concrete means because it connects individuals through written and spoken message exchanges. Furthermore, “social differences are expressed and relativized as different ways of speaking the national language, which supposes a common code and even a common norm” (Balibar, 1991a: 97).

The state constructs ethnic minority status by assigning limited civil liberties to a group that shares a common racial, ethnic, or religious identity. These minority ethnic identities are subjugated to the peripheries of the nation, while the dominant group occupies the economic and political core (Dunaway, 2003: 10). Castles and Davidson (2000: 62) find that “majorities tend to see their own values, traditions and mores as ‘normal’ or as ‘the national culture’”. They assert that two facets of ethnicity are linked to minority status: self-definition and other-definition. Self-definition constitutes the shared perceptions of language, traditions, religion, and experiences of the minority group by the members. Other-definition connotes the dominant group’s “use of its power to impose social definitions on subordinate groups”. Hence, the use of a common language throughout state

institutions, schools, commerce, and family units denote a common ideal nation and a sense of belonging (Balibar, 1991a: 98). The individuals who do not hold language in common with their fellow citizens, have limited civil liberties and are considered an ethnic minority.

According to Graham Smith (1999: 128-131), the sharing of geographic space by numerous ethnic groups in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan constitutes a multicultural society and makes multiculturalism an integral part of Kyrgyzstan's governance policy. He notes that governments can either eliminate or manage multicultural space. Methods for eliminating multicultural space include genocide, forced-population transfers, and integration and/or assimilation. Strategies for managing multicultural space include nationalization of state practices, arbitration through third party intervention, power-sharing, and federalization. Kyrgyz government policies do not strictly adhere to the methods of elimination or management. Rather there is a *constriction* of multicultural space as they attempt "to make national and political space geographically congruent". Smith (1999: 132) finds that

political elites in the post-Soviet states have often responded to the challenge of multiculturalism by attempting to ensure the cultural and even political dominance of the homeland nation by giving them a predominant position in the political, administrative and coercive apparatus of the state, making it difficult for those who are not deemed to belong fully to the homeland polity to gain access to key socio-economic and political positions.

Because multiculturalism threatens the imagined nation of Kyrgyzstan, the dominant group excludes minority citizens from the social construction of the imagined nation. State policies to narrow multicultural spaces (reducing the possibility of including minorities, increasing dominant ethnic nationalism) stimulate 'recurring revivals' of ethnic identity and enliven the very minorities it seeks to constrain. On the one hand, the dominant ethnic group (who resides in the core) has

relegated the ethnic minorities to the periphery of the nation-state and the margins of imagined community. On the other hand, struggles between the dominant ethnic group and the rest of the citizens for political and economic power will be played out at the periphery of the nation-state, most likely over territory (Dunaway, 2003: 11).

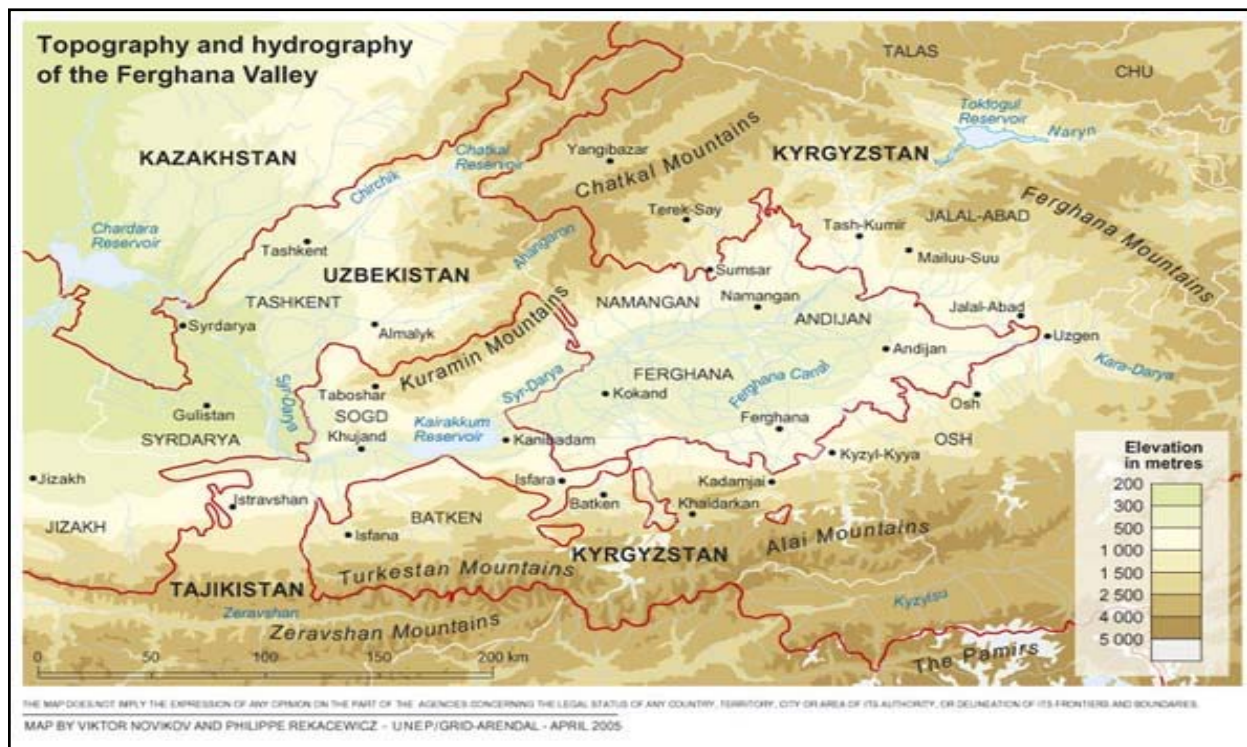
Closing of multicultural spaces by the dominant ethnic group may result in an increased potential for violent ethnic resistance. For such closures seek to eliminate minority cultures, languages, and religions and to capture minority-controlled lands (Wright, 1994: 159). The affected minority groups may react with what Manuel Castells (1997: 8-9) terms “the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded” through the social construction of a resistance identity. This identity building for resistance is “generated by those actors that are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination”.

While a resistance identity may lead to societal conflict, democratic governance can mitigate tensions through “greater decentralization, distribution, rotation, and representation of power than authoritarian regimes have been able to provide” (Jalali and Lipset, 1994: 243). The incorporation of ethnic diversity into political structures has deterred violent conflict in multiethnic nations, like Switzerland. Political systems that have institutionalized ethnic pluralism permit greater power sharing, diminishing the likelihood of perceived ethnic cleavages (Jalali and Lipset, 1994: 241). While this type of management of multicultural space may subdue identities of resistance, the nationalistic attempts of the Kyrgyz government to *eliminate* multicultural space provoke ethnic identities. State policies to narrow diversity often stimulate mass mobilization of minority ethnic resistance (Dunaway, 2003).

Overview of Kyrgyzstan's Ethnic Tensions

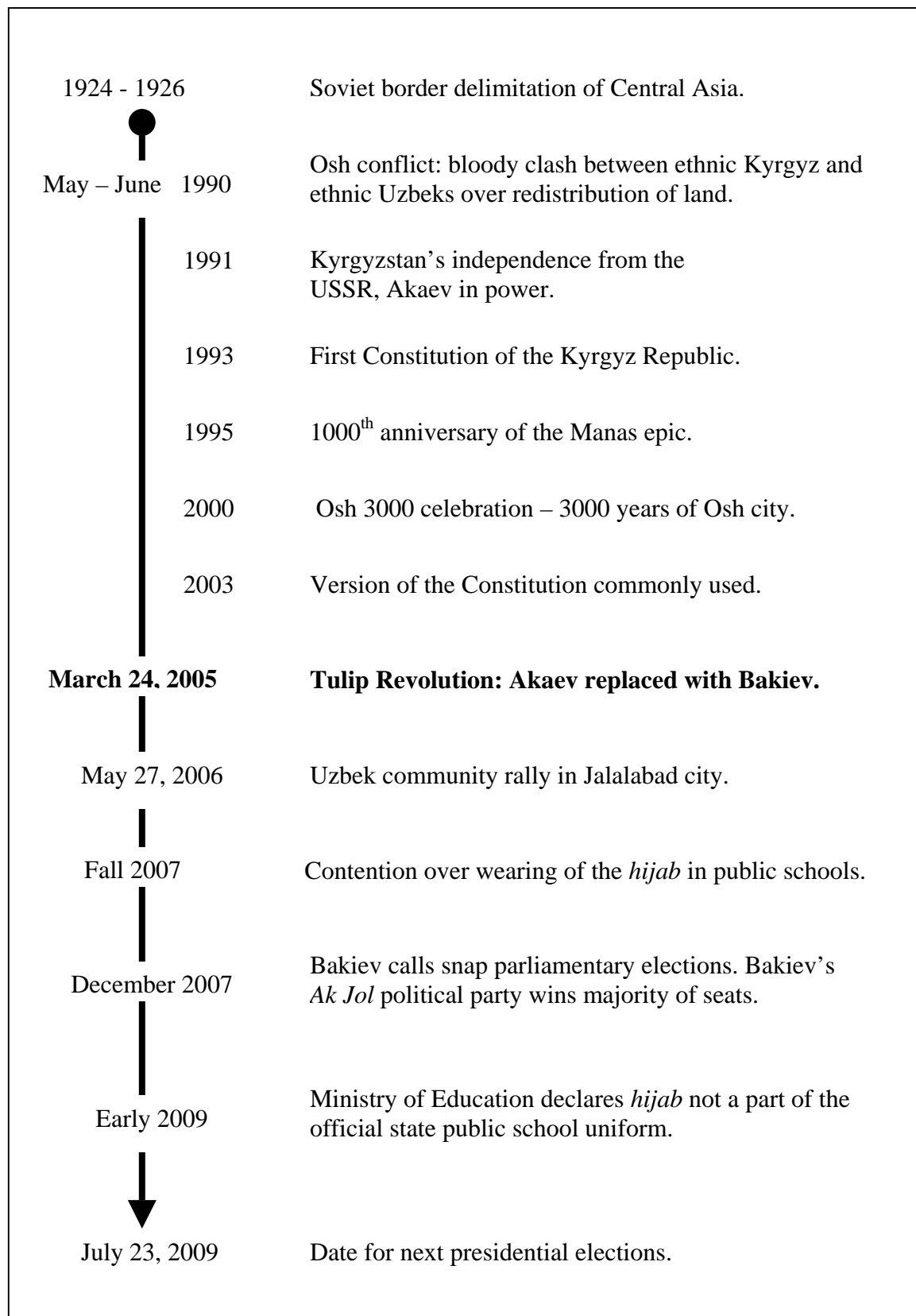
As shown in Map 2, the Ferghana Valley is located in the middle of Central Asia and is shared by Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The current political divisions that run through the valley are remnants of the Soviet border delimitation of 1924 – 1926. Please refer to Chart 2 as a reference to the major events that I will examine to illustrate the conflict between nationalism and ethnic identity as it occurs in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Map 2. The Ferghana Valley. Close-up of Southern Kyrgyzstan.



Source: www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullMaps.

Chart 2. Timeline of Major Events Discussed in this Paper



In the process of creating borders, the Soviets attempted to divide the area by ‘scientific’ means, via the geographical features and local ethnic and language groups (Mullerson, 2007: 46). As a result, the semi-nomadic Kyrgyz were sectioned off into the mountains while the Uzbeks occupied most of the valley. As an ethnic group, the Uzbeks are characteristically a sedentary agriculturalist society with a history of established, devout Islamic faith (Haugen, 2003: 190; Rotar, 2004). Because of the valley’s mild climate and availability of water, the Soviets utilized the valley extensively for the cultivation of cotton and silk. Today the valley is home to over 10 million inhabitants, 2 million of whom live in the Kyrgyzstan part of the valley (Abazov, 2004: 125 - 126).

As a result of the Soviet borders, water resources and citizenship issues are highly disputed amongst the three states. As seen in Map 2, Kyrgyzstan’s part of the valley starts at the top of the valley basin and circles around the side until the Alai mountain chain division between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Capisani, 2000: 225). The main sources of irrigation for the valley are from reservoirs in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. While administration of the valley took place in Tashkent during Soviet times, the current lack of centralized water resource planning and distribution is a constant point of conflict in Ferghana Valley international relations (Capisani, 2000: 109, 114, 225). The Soviets also included the city of Osh as a part of Kyrgyz territory even though the city is located less than 20 kilometers from the Uzbekistan border and is predominantly Uzbek in its ethnic composition (Roy, 2000: 69). Similar Uzbek-dominated cities exist in Tajikistan. Upon independence from the USSR in 1991, Central Asian states adopted the criteria of citizenship and voting rights on the principle of ‘zero-option’. Namely, those who resided within the national borders at the time of independence became its citizens (Smith *et. al.*, 1998: 161). Today, border control regimes of all three nations make the migration between the states exceedingly

difficult and dangerous. Therefore, families and ethnic groups are separated from their homes of origin and each other.

In terms of intra-state conflict, the dominant Kyrgyz established many public policies that can be construed as a way of closing the multicultural space in Kyrgyzstan. This narrowing of cultural space has been especially evident since the ousting of President Askar Akaev during the March 24, 2005 Tulip Revolution (locally referred to as the March 2005 events). His successor, current president Kurmanbek Bakiev, has no official stance on ethnic minority issues. Bakiev instead tacitly supports policies that close multicultural space and place limits on citizenship. This narrowing of multicultural space is resulting in the relegation of Uzbeks to second-class citizen status through state constraints on two types of Constitutional civil liberties: political representation and religious freedom. These restrictions are embodied in state policies about the official status of the Uzbek language and the wearing of *hijabs* in public schools.

One example of a standard that institutionalizes the exclusion of the internal Other is the ‘fifth column’ (*piataia grafa*). Historically, the fifth column of a USSR citizen’s internal passport marked ethnicity as separate from national citizenship (Smith *et. al.*, 1998: 154). Today, Kyrgyzstan issues international passports using the same ethnic marker. Internally, these passports and the truncated version in the form of a national ID card, are the only acceptable form of identification. Therefore, a citizen’s ethnicity is constantly displayed and highlighted as the passport/ID card is used to conduct a majority of day-to-day activities. The passports themselves contain three different pages in three different languages confirming the citizenship of the bearer. Kyrgyzstan only inserts the fifth column on the Russian and Kyrgyz language pages (both languages use the Cyrillic alphabet). The English page is void of the ethnic marker. By omitting the marker on the English page, the national preoccupation with ethnicity is rendered less visible to the international

community where English predominates. This action minimizes the potential for international backlash against practices that some nations may view as ethnocentric and discriminatory (Smith *et. al.*, 1998: 155).

A particularly egregious incident of intra-state conflict in Kyrgyzstan's past was the 1990 rioting in the Uzbek dominated city of Osh and surrounding villages (commonly referred to as the Osh conflict of 1990). The bloody skirmishes of interethnic violence originate from controversy over property ownership rights. In May of 1990, the government undertook a program to distribute privatized land in a way that favored the ethnic Kyrgyz over the ethnic Uzbek citizens. The events unfolded as plots of lands were distributed to the landless Kyrgyz from the land-owning Uzbek community. This communal disagreement escalated into retaliatory violence that could not be contained by local security forces. By the end of the conflict, 220 died and 1,000 were hospitalized. Unofficial estimates range from 600 to 1,200 killed and thousands more wounded and displaced (Abazov, 2004: 206). The consequences of this event echo in current property disputes, namely regarding the tenancy of land and settlement of landless people.

The Tulip Revolution

The Tulip Revolution of March 24, 2005 marks a change in the tension between nationalism and ethnic identity in the Kyrgyz Republic. The ousted Akaev administration (1991 – 2005) merged elements of multi-ethnicity with its Kyrgyz nationalism. After the Tulip Revolution, the Bakiev administration (2005 – present), focused more sharply on single-ethnicity Kyrgyz nationalism, and unlike Akaev, has never officiated any policies regarding ethnic minority rights or inclusion. Rather, policies set forth under Bakiev's administration actively exclude non-Kyrgyz citizens of Kyrgyzstan through limited political representation and infringements of religious freedoms. These policies will be investigated in detail in following sections.

Picture 1. Presidents of the Kyrgyz Republic



Askar Akaev
(1991 – 2005)



Kurmanbek Bakiev
(2005 – Present)

Sources: www.radionetherlands.nl, www.kyrgyzemb.jp.

Presidents in power

Askar Akaev (see Picture 1) came to power in Kyrgyzstan in 1991 when the new Kyrgyz Republic was established. He was the only Central Asian president who did not move directly from status in the Communist Party to power in an independent, democratic republic (Lewis, 2008: 123). Rather the old parliament under the Communist Party selected Akaev as a compromise candidate for the first presidential elections. As a son of academics, he spent his life in universities as a physicist and the former head of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences (Lowe, 2003: 113). For that reason, regional presidents and local political elites viewed Akaev as a new type of democratic leader. Once in power, he launched programs to reform the national economy in order to secure

funds and trade agreements with international economic institutions. Coupled with his “rhetorical commitment to democracy and economic liberalism,” such policies brought Kyrgyzstan to the forefront of the former Soviet Republics that were vying for Western favour (Lewis, 2008: 123). Kyrgyzstan was the first Central Asian republic to join the World Trade Organization, much to the chagrin of Russia.

Throughout his presidency, Akaev sought to accumulate political power by amending the constitution. He claimed that with greater power, the president could enact more economic and social reforms. However, he did little to address the country’s governmental corruption, organized crime, or endemic poverty (Lewis, 2008: 124). To complicate matters, the division between north and south Kyrgyzstan was widening. Because of their more Russified attitudes and lifestyles, the northern Kyrgyz drew resentment from the southern Kyrgyz. The southern elites complained that their counterparts in Bishkek were reluctant to share the political and economic wealth. This resentment was amplified by the fact that President Akaev was from the north, and many southern elites felt excluded from political and monetary benefits (Lewis, 2008: 125).

In the context of these socioeconomic problems, Akaev’s position always seemed fragile. After the police killed six unarmed opposition protesters in an incident in the southern region of Aksy, the government attempted a hasty cover-up that angered many citizens. Moreover, Akaev’s family members were delving into politics, after accumulating wealth through national investment deals. The personal had truly become political as “the broad opposition was united in their discontent with the ruling presidential family” (Lewis, 2008: 128-130). It was in this atmosphere that parliamentary elections were held on February 14, 2005. Before the elections, there were numerous protests against the disqualification of certain candidates. There were also widespread roadblocks and payoffs to voters. The results of the February election were highly contested, and

many opposition supporters took to the streets, occupied regional administration buildings, and demanded Akaev's resignation (Lewis, 2008: 138-139).

On March 6, former prime minister and opposition member Kurmanbek Bakiev (refer to picture 1) joined the protesters in calling for Akaev's resignation. This move marked Bakiev as "the first major politician to publicly side with the protestors in his own constituency" (Lober, 2007: 29). Bakiev's decision to join the protesters suggested a new political beginning, as more opposition members began to publicly demand the ousting of Akaev. As the new leader of the opposition movement, Bakiev initiated dialogue with the Akaev administration. The opposition leaders looked to the second round of elections on March 13 as a way to increase their movement's presence in parliament.² The second round of elections was followed by numerous "people's councils" throughout the nation, especially in Southern Kyrgyzstan. While the councils could not agree on a potential presidential candidate, there was consensus that Akaev should be removed from power. The continued occupation of state administrative buildings in the provincial capitals suggested that the opposition was increasingly open and comfortable in their challenges to Akaev's hold on power (Lober, 2007: 30-31).

The Tulip Revolution

The opposition was united in ideals of Kyrgyz nationalism. These ideals included the use of Kyrgyz as the national language, land for the landless Kyrgyz, more economic opportunities for the Kyrgyz business sector, and increased coherence in parliament regarding actions undertaken to ensure these ideals. As a way to assuage fears of ethnic Uzbek citizens, the opposition leadership appointed an ethnic Uzbek, as the 'people's governor' of Osh.³ However, ethnic Uzbeks had

² The opposition party had won only five seats out of 75 in the first round of elections.

³ The opposition removed this governor nine months after the Tulip Revolution.

generally supported pro-Akaev candidates in the contested parliamentary elections (Lewis, 2008: 140).

By the early afternoon of March 24, opposition leaders with more than 10,000 supporters, gathered at the Kyrgyz White House, to confront the presidential administration. Upon hearing that the White House was captured, Akaev escaped to Kazakhstan and then to Russia (Lewis, 2008: 143-144). At this point, there were two parliaments in power – the one seated before the February 14th election and the one seated after that election. In an effort to curb the disorder and looting that the protests had brought to Bishkek, the opposition effected a political compromise. The fused parliament agreed to appoint Bakiev the prime minister and acting president, in return for the opposition's recognition of the legitimacy of the parliament. Presidential elections were held on July 10, 2005, and Bakiev won by a landslide (Lewis, 2008: 147-148).

On nationalism and ethnic identity: Akaev vs. Bakiev

The administration of Bakiev has received mixed reviews, especially with regard to multiculturalism and interethnic discourse. Although both the Akaev and Bakiev administrations were ground in Kyrgyz nationalism, each had different responses to issues raised by the ethnic minorities of Kyrgyzstan. In general, Akaev's approach shifted from Kyrgyz nationalism (ethnic nationalism) to inclusive multiculturalism (civic nationalism). In contrast, Bakiev has neither embraced civic nationalist discourse nor multiculturalism.

The roots of the conflicting ideas of these two leaders can be traced back the nation building approaches of the Soviet Union. Civic nationalism derived from the idea that the *Soviet* nation is a supra-national entity that fuses people of different ethnic backgrounds. In terms of practice, however, the Soviets treated nationality in the Union republics as united and institutionalized under a single, dominant ethnic group. "In each republic, cadres of the titular nationality were cultivated

and promoted over other groups” (Megoran 2007: 256). Consequently, Akaev constructed Kyrgyz nationalism around ethnic nationalism, mirroring the way the Soviets treated the republics. Similarly, Akaev’s attempt to promote inclusive multiculturalism mirrored the Soviet ideal of civic nationalism.

Little wonder that Akaev centered his 1991 election platform in appeals to Kyrgyz nationalism. The historical backdrop for his platform was the Manas epic and the politicization and nationalization of that poetic work. The Manas epic celebrates the legendary life of Manas, the warrior-hero who united all the Kyrgyz tribes. Manas led his followers to “defend the Kyrgyz land from foreign aggression and to establish the first legendary Kyrgyz state.” The myth is important for Kyrgyz society because it serves as an oral testament to their history, cultural traditions, foreign relations, and social and political ethics. Under the auspices of Akaev, Kyrgyzstan celebrated the 1,000th anniversary of the epic in 1995. This celebration was the promotion of a symbol of Kyrgyz national unity and cultural identity (Abazov, 2004: 181-182).

In 2000, Akaev shifted his rhetoric to civic nationalism, and he utilized the Osh 3000 celebration to publicize his policy reorientation.⁴ Contrary to the singular ethnic identity of the Manas epic, the Osh 3000 celebration was employed to mark multiculturalism in Kyrgyzstan and to emphasize the country’s diverse international relationships. Akaev initiated his “Kyrgyzstan is our Common Home” campaign to promote inclusion of the two largest ethnic minority groups, the Russians and the Uzbeks (Marat, 2006: 108). This appeal to civic nationalism garnered support from ethnic minorities, especially the Uzbeks. Moreover, Akaev vetoed a law that restricted landownership to ethnic Kyrgyz, and amended the Constitution to ensure the rights of citizens to learn and develop their native languages (Anderson, 1999: 42). Akaev transformed the country’s

⁴ The Osh 3000 celebration marked the 3000th anniversary of the founding of the city of Osh, which is popularly claimed to be older than Rome.

kurultai (people's assemblies). Traditionally the *kurultai* was a "gathering of people for election of a khan or groups of tribes or a military leader for a period of war" (Abazov, 2004: 169). Akaev altered the *kurultai* into state-sanctioned public forums for debates about domestic issues that foster ideas of ethnic inclusion.⁵

Bakiev's administration has been marked by Kyrgyz nationalism from its inception to the present with a distinct lack of regard for ethnic minority issues. The opposition movement "defined 'the nation' as unambiguously ethnic, depicting the territory of Kyrgyzstan as primarily the home of Kyrgyz people and the bearer of Kyrgyz virtue" (Megoran, 2004b: 747). Shortly after the Tulip Revolution, the international NGO Human Rights Watch challenged Bakiev to address the fears that some ethnic minorities had regarding their exclusion from the new administration. Because the Russians and Uzbeks called for the new administration to dismantle its institutional discrimination, the Human Rights Watch urged Bakiev to start dialogues with representatives of these groups (Denber, 2005). In 2006, however, reports and complaints of increased ethnic-based discrimination still emanated from the Uzbek community. Complaints fell on the deaf ears of the Bakiev administration, for the administration was conceived as an opposition movement based on principles of Kyrgyz ethnic nationalism.

Bakiev's avoidance of topics concerning minority ethnic identities prompted the Uzbek community representatives, at their seventh annual conference in January 2006, to complain that:

We remain targets of a campaign of harassment launched by fiscal bodies, law enforcement agencies, and executive power structures that live on the taxes we pay...There is among representatives of the titular nation a tendency of incitement of hatred with regard to Uzbeks and other ethnic groups...Economic development and

⁵ The opposition movement worked with smaller version of *kurultai* to force Akaev's ouster during the Tulip Revolution.

prosperity are impossible without equal terms and opportunities for all ethnic groups (Eurasianet.org, 2006).

Community leaders have criticized Bakiev for failing to uphold Akaev's "Common Home" ideology, for remaining silent about inter-ethnic issues, and for being unwilling to adopt a clear policy stance on minority rights. It is likely that Bakiev is reluctant to alienate his Kyrgyz nationalist support base by supporting ethnic minority rights (Eurasianet.org, 2006). However, the Bakiev administration has continued to implement policies that differentiate and disturb the ethnic Uzbek community, such as limited political representation and bans on the wearing of the *hijab* in public schools.

While Akaev seemed concerned about creating national or multicultural unity, Bakiev focuses on strengthening his political power. The International Crisis Group (2008: 1) contends that "parliamentary democracy in Kyrgyzstan has been hobbled" because "the president's team was motivated purely by the desire to concentrate power in its hands." Because Bakiev realizes that his power comes from the Kyrgyz people and the Tulip Revolution, he has been careful not to incite his base over issues of support for ethnic rights. For, any nationalistic Kyrgyz violence might be aimed toward groups opposing Bakiev's government. Despite appeasing his base, his quest to consolidate power has resulted in numerous economic and political actions that may haunt him and his administration in future elections (International Crisis Group, 2008: 15).

The Constitution

The Constitution of Kyrgyzstan is the primary document outlining the citizenship, political, and civil liberties of all citizens of Kyrgyzstan.⁶ The preamble gives heed to the multiethnic composition of Kyrgyzstan in its preamble:

⁶ It has been through four amendments since its inception in 1993. The 2003 version is the most commonly used as it is the least contested.

We, the People of Kyrgyzstan, striving to ensure the national revival of the Kyrgyz [nation], the protection and development of interests of all nationalities, which – together with the Kyrgyz – constitute the people of Kyrgyzstan, on the strength of the ancestors' behest to live in unity, peace and concordance.

However, the Constitution institutionalizes the ambiguities of the relationship between the dominant Kyrgyz with the rest of the nation's citizens. Article 13, point 1 specifies that "a citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic shall be obliged to observe the Constitution and laws of the Kyrgyz Republic, respect rights, freedoms, honor, and dignity of other persons." Additionally, Article 23, point 1 states "citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic may participate in the governance of the state both directly and through their representatives." As an institution, the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic constructs the state as a multinational entity with unity, peace, respect, and representation of all citizens, even though non-Kyrgyz nationalities are singled out as auxiliary to the Kyrgyz.

The Constitution states in Article 5, points 1 and 2 that "the Kyrgyz language shall be the state language of the Kyrgyz Republic." The Constitution gives concessions to Russian as an "official language." No other language of any of the ethnic groups is represented in such ways. However, Article 5, point 3 states that "the Kyrgyz Republic shall guarantee that representatives of all the nationalities which constitute the People of Kyrgyzstan may enjoy the right to preserve their native languages, and the state shall provide [favourable] conditions for learning and developing them." The mandate that Kyrgyz and Russian languages hold official status implies that their corresponding ethnicities also hold similar privileges and have precedence in all affairs being conducted in Kyrgyz or Russian. While citizens have the right to learn and maintain their native languages, there is no avenue to use these languages to participate in state economic or social institutions. Rather, a burden falls on those citizens who preserve their indigenous language because they must learn and become acculturated to the Kyrgyz and Russian languages.

In terms of religion, the Constitution in Article 16, point 11 states that “everyone shall be guaranteed freedom of conscience, belief, and of religious or atheistic activities. Everyone shall have freedom to profess religion of his choice or not to profess any religion, and to choose, possess, and impart one’s religious or atheistic beliefs.” While this clause allows for freedom of religion, Article 8, point 4 states that “the following [activities] shall not be permitted in the Kyrgyz Republic: formation of political parties on religious and ethnic grounds. No religious organizations shall pursue political goals and objectives.” This article prohibits a religious and/or ethnic group from forming political parties and bars them from participating in the governance of the state.

Political Representation

In the conflict between nationalism and ethnic identity, language is a lynchpin that many people see as key to a multiethnic society. In Kyrgyzstan, however, the Uzbek language has not been given official status. On May 27, 2006, a rally of the ethnic Uzbek community occurred in Jalalabad city in Southern Kyrgyzstan (see Map 2). This was one of the first public events that the Uzbeks had held since the Osh conflict of 1990. The rally drew an estimated 700 participants. One of the keynote speakers was Kadyrjan Batyrov.⁷ As a Member of Parliament (MP), prominent entrepreneur, and outspoken critic of Bakiev, his address to the rally touched on the frustration of many regarding how officials in Bishkek treat their demands for the designation of official status to the Uzbek language. Since Russian was designated as an official state language in the 1993 constitution, Uzbeks have been demanding the same political consideration. This demand is based on the dominance of the ethnic Uzbeks in the south and their status as the largest ethnic group in the country.

⁷ Batyrov is one of only eight ethnic Uzbeks who hold seats in the 75-member national parliament.

Grievance: political representation

Official government response to the rally was rejection of the participants' demands. The Kyrgyz State Secretary was quoted as saying "we are not a confederation; we are a unitary state" and argued that acknowledgement of the Uzbek's demands would encourage other ethnic groups to follow suit (Khamidov, 2006). During the first Bakiev-administration sponsored *kurultai* on the issue of Kyrgyz as the national language, Uzbek MPs were not permitted to speak (Khamidov, 2006; Amanov, 2006). This snub further illustrated the disregard for the Uzbek community by the presidential administration. In general, the *kurultai* was viewed as a disappointment and an obvious propaganda tool. An opposition politician suggested that the assembly did nothing but increase ethnic tensions in society. Others noted that the assembly played out much like those held during Akaev's reign where "there were too many formal phrases spoken by formal people" with not enough popular representation and constructive debate (Amanov, 2006).

The May 27th rally facilitated increased discussion of political representation. Local ethnic Uzbek citizens reported that the issue of the status of the Uzbek language was not as important as proportional representation in governmental administration of national minorities. Citizens wondered "why don't they set a quota for national minorities in the state administration?" if indeed the government institutions were more free and democratic after the Tulip Revolution (Toursunof, 2006).

At the state level, ethnic Uzbeks constitute 15 percent of the national population. But Uzbeks only occupy 11 percent of the seats in parliament (Sadybakasova, 2006). Official state statistics corroborate that Uzbeks are under-represented in employment in state political, social, and economic institutions. At the regional level, the ethnic composition of Osh province is 31 percent

Uzbek, 69 percent Kyrgyz.⁸ However, 80 percent of the staff of the Osh's Department of Interior is ethnic Kyrgyz (OSCE, 2005: 4).

Ignoring the demand for proportionate representation indicates the closing of multicultural space. Uzbek community leaders stated, "we are in danger of forgetting that Kyrgyzstan is a multi-ethnic state and that Uzbek representation in government is declining" (Grebenshchikov, 2001). Domestically, these minority problems are masked by rhetoric of "Kyrgyzstan is our common home" or avoided completely. The perception of ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan is tainted by the delicate inter-national relationship the state has with Uzbekistan. In regards to natural resources, Kyrgyzstan is dependent on Uzbekistan for natural gas. During the winter, Uzbekistan often raises the price of gas and turns off the pipelines when Kyrgyzstan cannot pay. Many in Kyrgyzstan think it is unfair that Uzbekistan does not contribute to the upkeep of dams and reservoirs in Kyrgyzstan territory that provide water for the crops in Uzbekistan's part of the Ferghana Valley (Megoran, 2004b: 734). Socially, borders and citizenship prevent ethnic Uzbek families from gathering for important events like weddings and funerals. Economically, the border control regimes between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan hinder the trade between said countries, leaving the people of the Ferghana Valley area impoverished (Megoran, 2004a: 232, 246-247). Such discord prevents issues and problems of ethnic Uzbek citizens of Kyrgyzstan from being discussed on the international level with the government of Uzbekistan. The view that ethnic Uzbek citizens are problematic enforces their under-representation.

Journalist Igor Rotar (2006a) noted that "Uzbeks have generally stayed away from the Kyrgyz political revolution" and other political activities. During the Tulip Revolution, a majority of protestors active in the south were ethnic Kyrgyz. This disparity of political participation was expressed during a 2006 skirmish in front of Jalalabad regional administration building. There,

⁸ 2004 Population for Osh oblast: 393,900 ethnic Uzbeks and 865,500 ethnic Kyrgyz

Uzbek protestors accused the Kyrgyz of destabilizing Kyrgyzstan while Kyrgyz protestors blamed Uzbeks for supporting the ousted Akaev regime (Rotar, 2006a). Scholar Matteo Fumagalli (2007: 578-580) suggests that ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan may support “actors perceived to be capable of preserving inter-ethnic stability” as a way to avoid bloody conflicts like those that occurred in Osh in 1990. During the Tulip Revolution the Uzbeks did not see Bakiev as a capable candidate. Ethnic Uzbek citizens who become disillusioned with the supposed democratic political process may be pushed to join the radical Islamic group *Hizb-ut Tahrir* as a means of finding some sort of representation (Khamidov, 2002).

Furthermore, Uzbeks have chosen not to vote in elections. Because they fear that any leader will have Kyrgyz nationalist tendencies, they do not wish to incur increased state repression or community antagonism by supporting a candidate perceived to be in opposition. Such support of opposition leaders is perceived as being disloyal to Kyrgyzstan. Desire to avoid such labels is another reason why ethnic Uzbeks shy away from politics. In this light, many Uzbeks fear the consequences of posing ‘Uzbek’ questions in Kyrgyzstan national discourse because it can bring unwanted reprisal. One activist within the Uzbek community commented that:

Why should we get involved in politics? Uzbek problems should be solved within the community. People are afraid that by becoming active in politics, political struggles become a matter of ‘us against them’, of Uzbeks against Kyrgyz. As soon as we get involved, they will all unite and divert their problems against us. This is why during the Aksy riots, we told our people: Do not go there, stay home. Don’t go, they will blame us (Fumagalli, 2007: 580).

By staying away from issues that are framed as a case of “us versus them”, the ethnic Uzbeks have found a niche in the retail trade, police, and mass media sectors of Kyrgyzstan society. From these niches they can address their own problems that they perceive the state to be ignoring.

Paradoxically, such withdrawal implies consent of the limitations on political representation.

In addition to the perceptions of the Uzbek community, there are political maneuvers occurring at the national level that maintain limited political representation. As stated in the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, citizens of Kyrgyzstan can participate in state governance directly and through their representatives. However, in 2007, President Bakiev called a national referendum that resulted in Constitutional amendments regarding how Members of Parliament were elected and by what electoral code. According to the referendum, parliament was to be elected through proportional votes based on party lists, rather than the previous constituency elections. Moreover, the electoral code mandated that each party had to obtain 0.5 percent of the vote in each of the nation's regions (International Crisis Group, 2008: 2). Following the passing of the referendum, Bakiev dissolved parliament and called for snap elections in December 2007. This would ensure that his party *Ak Jol* (Kyrgyz. Literally translates to "White Way", figuratively, the good/right way) would capture a majority of seats and control who and what was represented at the national level of Kyrgyz public discourse. The Uzbeks in politics could either join a prominent Kyrgyz political party or create one of their own. However, the 0.5 percent rule would strongly limit the potential success of an Uzbek dominated party, or any minority party for that matter.

Indeed, Bakiev's *Ak Jol* party won a majority of parliament seats while *Rodina*, the newly formed predominantly Uzbeki political party, did not make the ballot (International Crisis Group 2008: 4-5). The Uzbeki party was perceived as a threat to *Ak Jol*'s dominance in the south, but the reformed electoral code of 0.5 percent of the vote in each region diminished *Rodina*'s chance of winning any seats. The failure of the Uzbeki party illustrates that the Constitutional reform was effective in limiting the political participation of any groups or individuals who did not adhere to the dominant norms.

As discussed, the Uzbek grievance concerning political representation is exemplified in three ways: institutionalized barriers to political success, official disregard of citizen's demands, and self-imposed political exclusion out of fear of reprisals. The demands made by the Uzbek community for official recognition of their language are ignored by the government administration. In turn, the citizens choose to limit their rights by not participating in voting as a way to avoid clashing with the dominant Kyrgyz political norms. At the national level, their rights for political representation are limited by the institutionalization of policies instigated by dominant Kyrgyz elites. All three combined effectively maintain the limited citizenship of the Uzbeks and their exclusion from the imagined community of Kyrgyzstan.

Religious Freedom

The Constitution declares Kyrgyzstan to be a secular state. However, state policies regarding a national ban on *hijabs* in public schools are ambiguous. In comparison to the Kyrgyz, the ethnic Uzbek are more likely to center their lives on their Islamic faith and are categorically more likely to wear the *hijab* from a young age, regularly attend mosque, and not eat pork or drink alcohol. The following discussion investigates the state policies that restrict religious expression through banning of the *hijab* from public schools. Since many of the public schools in Southern Kyrgyzstan are staffed and administered by ethnic Kyrgyz, state policies are regarded as turning something personal, like the *hijab*, into a national political matter. This politicization of a religious symbol sustains the friction between nationalism and ethnic identity. Specifically, it is this politicization that hinders the state from protecting minority rights as it selectively discriminates against a specific ethnic group. By choosing to differentiate the Uzbek, the state undermines any sentiments of national unity and targets citizens who then turn away from the state towards radical groups.

Paradoxically, it was the state's intent to prevent citizens from joining radical groups that propelled officials to constrain expression of religion.

Regulation the hijab in public schools

In 2006, the local Department of Education in Southern Kyrgyzstan attempted to stop Muslim schoolgirls from wearing the *hijab* to class. A mother of a *hijab* wearing schoolgirl reported that the school was "constantly putting psychological pressure" on her daughter to remove her *hijab* (Rotar, 2006b). The local Department of Education banned the wearing of *hijabs* in schools, citing that the *hijab* "collided with school regulations" and conflicted with the secularity of Kyrgyzstan (Mamaraimov, 2006). During subsequent public debates on the issue, the Department of Education ruled that each school had autonomy to set student dress codes. However, in the fall of 2007, the government declared that public schools would receive official charters banning the *hijab*. Not all schools received the new charters, and the regulations it set forth were haphazardly enforced (Ferghana.ru, 2007). Certain teachers and administrators in the south threatened Uzbek girls donning the *hijab* with expulsion for their disobedience. Parents protested these threats stating that their children's rights to freedom of religion were being ignored (IWPR, 2007).

The Kyrgyzstan Ministry of Education released its official decision to ban religious-style outfits in all public schools as of early 2009. This new ruling is a change from the previous charters and regulations that were not consistently enforced. By enforcing this ban, Kyrgyz dominated institutions have closed the multicultural space in regards to religion. The ethnic Uzbek community has responded by citing grievances against their rights to religious freedom as citizens of Kyrgyzstan (Ferghana.ru, 2009).

Grievance: religious freedom

The *hijab* itself is a religious marker of ethnic Uzbek identity. By wearing the *hijab*, ethnic Uzbeks make a visible statement about their faith and adherence to its tenets. The ban on wearing of the *hijab* politicizes the *hijab* and divides the local community over rights of citizens to express their religious affiliation. On one side, there are the non-ethnic Uzbek citizens who believe that *hijabs* should be banned for the sake of a secular Kyrgyzstan. On the other side, there are those, mostly ethnic Uzbeks, who challenge any ban as an infringement on religious freedoms guaranteed to them as citizens.

Those who agree with a ban on *hijabs* argue that students and parents unhappy with the policy could switch from public schools to Islamic *madrasas*. The national Committee on Religion states that 50 *madrasas* operate officially, but there are numerous other illegal Islamic schools that do not adhere to the state curriculum for *madrasas* (Toursunof, 2009). Besides not following state curriculum, a state investigation found that unofficial *madrasas* operated in conditions that did not meet sanitary or hygienic standards set by the Committee. Furthermore, the state does not recognize diplomas from *madrasas*, thus barring students from entering university. Policies outlined by the Committee support state operated *madrasas* and ensure that students also attend secular public schools. Through these actions, the state in announcing that secular Kyrgyzstan does not accept a religious education and will do everything in its power to control the promulgation of a perceived type of Islam.

In addition to *hijabs* and *madrasas*, the grievance of infringement of religious freedoms is exacerbated by state legislature that regulates religious organizations. State regulation of religious groups and their followers is the primary avenue for the Kyrgyz dominated state to monitor two

religious groups that they are particularly suspicious of: foreign Protestant Christian missionaries and the radical Islamic group *Hizb-ut Tahrir* (Mamaraimov, 2008).

The state fears that the Uzbeks will be attracted to *Hizb-ut Tahrir* (HT), or Party of Liberation, a religious group operating in Central Asia as part of the Wahhabist sect of Islam. HT advocates for the peaceful overthrow of political regimes in Central Asia in favour of a united Islamic Caliphate based in the Ferghana Valley (Heyat, 2004: 285). Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have adopted repressive policies towards HT while Kyrgyzstan has not. Despite this comparative leniency, the state has banned because it is regarded to be a national security threat to the Kyrgyz state. For, in Kyrgyzstan, there are several thousand active members of HT, of which a majority are ethnic Uzbeks who maintain a vocal and visible existence in the south. In fact, many families of the girls persecuted for wearing the *hijab* are members or sympathizers of HT (IWPR, 2007).

The main concern of the Kyrgyz state in regards to Christian missionaries and HT is that proselytizing and distribution of religious materials are infiltrating and appropriating the Kyrgyz Muslim communities. A HT member in Kyrgyzstan states that “the [Kyrgyz] authorities will label as an extremist any Muslim who thinks differently from them” (Mamaraimov, 2008). The fear that religious markers of other ethnic identities will usurp members of the dominant ethnic group drives the dominant Kyrgyz group to regulate and repress said markers. The promotion of Kyrgyz ideals of religion and faith as expressed through the policies that promote a ‘secular’ Kyrgyzstan are ways that the dominant group copes with its insecurities.

The Uzbek grievance of infringed religious freedoms highlights the contention between nationalism and ethnic identity. Although the Kyrgyz are also Muslim, the faith that the ethnic Uzbeks have is perceived as a threat and an attempt to overthrow the Kyrgyz government. Wearing the *hijab*, attending *madrassa*, and supporting HT are ways that the Uzbek Islamic faith is different

from that of the dominant ethnic group. By enforcing regulations on *hijabs*, *madrasas*, and religious groups, the dominant Kyrgyz strive to maintain their construction of Kyrgyzstan in which religion is safe and welcoming to the Kyrgyz. Through the guise of enforcing secularism, the dominant ethnic group is limiting the multicultural space that allows for multiple interpretations of religion. The exclusion of *hijabs*, *madrasas*, and religious groups from the Kyrgyz state allows the Kyrgyz to feel more secure in their majority. This is in contrast to the Constitution, which allows for freedom of religion to all its citizens. Such limited religious freedom further enforces the exclusion of the ethnic Uzbeks from the national imagined community.

Conclusion

Grievances: political representation and religious freedom

Since the Tulip Revolution, the ethnic Uzbek community of Kyrgyzstan has expressed grievances against their state regarding political representation and religious freedom. These grievances are illustrated in state policies and institutions that restrict national multicultural space. The restriction of multicultural space exemplifies the conflict between nationalism and ethnic identity. In this case, the dominant Kyrgyz ethnic group seeks to solidify an imagined national community where all other ethnic identities are minimized and marginalized, thus creating a pure *Kyrgyz Republic*.

By maintaining a disinterested position on minority issues, current president Bakiev has been very cautious not to incite Kyrgyz nationalist backlash. Paradoxically, the policies of his administration have institutionalized limits to citizenship rights. As seen in the previous sections, limits have been placed the right to political representation and freedom of religious expression. These limitations have relegated the ethnic Uzbek minority to the territorial periphery of the nation and margins of the imagined community. They have no space within the core and are reduced to

holding limited-citizenship status.

In regards to political representation, expression of Uzbek ethnic identity has been suppressed by dominant Kyrgyz political norms. The Uzbek grievance of limited political representation is grounded in the repressive tendencies of Kyrgyz ethnic nationalism. Policies regarding how political representatives are elected and what languages are official are biased in favour of the Kyrgyz. The limited representation of ethnic Uzbeks at the local and national level shows how the Uzbeks have been marginalized within the framework of the imagined community. While this marginalization is sometimes self-imposed (i.e. Uzbeks declining to vote), the option of choosing to fight marginalization may result in bloody ethnic conflict, much like the country saw during the Osh conflict of 1990.

The political differentiation of ethnic Uzbek citizens in the realm of the personal and religious is a way to eliminate ethnic markers that go against the national norm. In the previous discussion of the regulations and bans regarding the wearing of the *hijabs* in public schools, *madrasas*, and HT, the ethnic identity of the Uzbeks is pitted against the imagined community of the Kyrgyz state. Often inconsistent, these policies work to favour the dominant Kyrgyz and solidify control over the most personal aspects of the ethnic Uzbeks. Indeed, the Islamic religious practices that are exemplified by the Uzbeks have no space in the imagined community of the Kyrgyz. Rather, the Kyrgyz seek to repress any expression of ideology that does not coincide with their beliefs. This runs contrary to the protections offered to all citizens through the Constitution. It also calls into question the state's ability to protect any of its citizens from violence and persecution.

Towards autonomy?

Will the marginalized ethnic Uzbek community revolt against the dominant Kyrgyz and demand regional autonomy? The presidential administration's reluctance to grant concessions of

proportional political representation and freedom of religious expression could facilitate minority demands for autonomy (Khamidov, 2002). In regards to the conflict between nationalism and ethnic identity, “resistance takes place under conditions of inequality that limit the power of subordinated subjects to redefine their status and their place in and contributions to the imagined national community” (Alonso, 1994: 398). This situation within Kyrgyzstan’s national borders is fertile grounds for the formation of a resistance identity within the ethnic Uzbek group. Such an identity is concurrent with the Uzbek view that self-categorizes the ethnic Uzbeks as part of a “historical nation” rather than a “diaspora/diasporic community” of Kyrgyzstan. As part of a historical nation, ethnic Uzbek views and concerns contrast with nationalist elements of the state administration, especially those expressed by the office of the president (Fumagalli, 2007: 581). Therefore, the increased constriction of the multicultural space of the ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan can lead to a resistance identity for ethnic minorities.

Indeed, continued political differentiation, ethnicization, and reification undertaken by the Kyrgyz against the Uzbeks has the potential to maintain the cycle of seemingly spontaneous and violent ethnic clashes throughout Southern Kyrgyzstan. Such discord may undermine any attempts at future nation building in Kyrgyzstan. Economic and political development will suffer as a consequence, taxing the nation as a whole. Such continuing conflict and social problems increase the likelihood that Kyrgyzstan will follow the path that neighboring countries, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, have taken to establishing authoritarian regimes.

The future is uncertain and the end is always near

Kyrgyzstan may not have to wait too long for an authoritarian regime of its own. President Bakiev’s efforts to consolidate and maintain control have come to a head. Bakiev has received support from the current parliament and Constitutional Court to schedule snap elections for July 23,

2009, instead of waiting for the constitutionally defined presidential election date of October 2010. Prior to announcing the election date, the parliament, dominated by the pro-Bakiev party, *Ak Jol*, passed legislation that increases government control over mass media and NGOs and that allows security forces to intervene in internal affairs. Further legislation may limit the rights of local NGOs to participate in political affairs. If passed, NGOs will not be allowed to monitor future elections (Marat, 2009). The parties in the opposition are faced with the task of how to unite before the elections and whether or not to unanimously support one candidate.

Again, issues of division between north and south will be at the forefront as the nation struggles against endemic corruption in its economic and political institutions and the strong-arm tactics of its gangster-in-chief. As in previous elections, ethnic Uzbeks will either have their representatives further relegated to the fringes of politics or forthrightly decline to participate. The lack of civic nationalist discourse throughout Bakiev's presidency has imprinted itself on the minds of 15 percent of the population who now know what it means to be have limited citizenship, to be different, and to be dismissed. Through their future redress of grievances, ethnic Uzbeks may bring true revolution, rather than middling regime change, to Kyrgyzstan.

Understanding the conflict between the nationalism and ethnic identity is pertinent because these tensions have the ability to influence the future of Kyrgyzstan as a functioning multi-ethnic, multicultural nation-state. Most certainly, the creation (and maintenance) of an ethnically-based limited citizenship may have deleterious impacts on the development of democracy, economic stability, and ethnic harmony in the Kyrgyz Republic. Such impacts may doom the Kyrgyz Republic to a future of totalitarian governance and ethnic conflict that plague its neighbors and leads to state sponsored human rights violations of minority groups.

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