

*Institutional Change and Political  
Continuity in Post-Soviet  
Central Asia*

---

POWER, PERCEPTIONS,  
AND PACTS

PAULINE JONES LUONG

*Yale University*



PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa  
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Pauline Jones Luong 2002

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeface* Janson Text 10/13 pt.    *System* QuarkXPress [BTS]

*A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Jones Luong, Pauline.

Institutional change and political continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: power,  
perceptions, and pacts/Pauline Jones Luong.

p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in comparative politics)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-80109-5 (hardback)

1. Representative government and representation – Kazakhstan. 2. Representative  
government and representation – Kyrgyzstan. 3. Representative government and  
representation – Uzbekistan. 4. Kazakhstan – Politics and government – 1991–  
5. Kyrgyzstan – Politics and government – 1991– 6. Uzbekistan – Politics and  
government – 1991– I. Title. II. Series.

JQ1090.A58 L86 2002

320.958–dc21      2001035663

ISBN 0 521 80109 5 hardback

# *Contents*

<i>Tables and Figures</i>	<i>page</i>	xi
<i>Note on Transliteration</i>		xiv
<i>Acronyms</i>		xv
<i>Acknowledgments</i>		xvii
<b>1</b>	THE CONTINUITY OF CHANGE: OLD FORMULAS AND NEW INSTITUTIONS	1
<b>2</b>	EXPLAINING INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN IN TRANSITIONAL STATES: BEYOND STRUCTURE VERSUS AGENCY	25
<b>3</b>	SOURCES OF CONTINUITY: THE SOVIET LEGACY IN CENTRAL ASIA	51
<b>4</b>	SOURCES OF CHANGE: THE TRANSITIONAL CONTEXT IN CENTRAL ASIA	102
<b>5</b>	ESTABLISHING AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN KYRGYZSTAN: RISE OF THE REGIONS	156
<b>6</b>	ESTABLISHING AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN: REVENGE OF THE CENTER	189
<b>7</b>	ESTABLISHING AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN KAZAKHSTAN: THE CENTER'S RISE AND THE REGIONS' REVENGE	213
<b>8</b>	INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE THROUGH CONTINUITY: SHIFTING POWER AND PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY	253
		ix

	<b>Contents</b>
<i>Appendix I Sample Interview Questions</i>	280
<i>Appendix II Career Patterns of Regional Leaders in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia</i>	283
<i>References</i>	295
<i>Index</i>	309

## *Tables and Figures*

### *Tables*

1.1	Variation in the design of electoral systems in Central Asia	<i>page</i> 9
1.2	Political liberalization and regime type in Central Asia	16
1.3	Selected regions ( <i>oblasti</i> ) in each country	22
2.1	General predictions of the model	36
3.1	Salience of regional political identities among Central Asian leaders and activists	57
3.2	The administrative-territorial structure of Kyrgyzstan	77
3.3	First party secretaries of the Kirghiz SSR, 1937–1991	79
3.4	Tenure of first party secretaries in Kyrgyzstan, 1950s–1990s	80
3.5	The administrative-territorial structure of Uzbekistan	85
3.6	First party secretaries of the Uzbek SSR, 1924–1991	89
3.7	Tenure of obkom first secretaries in Uzbekistan, 1950s–1990s	89
3.8	Ethnic composition of Kazakhstan by oblast	95
3.9	Tenure of obkom first secretaries in Kazakhstan, 1950s–1990s	99
4.1	Perceptions of change in relative power in Kyrgyzstan	107
4.2	Perceptions of change in relative power in Uzbekistan	122
4.3	Perceptions of change in relative power in Kazakhstan	138
5.1	The TBG's predictions in Kyrgyzstan	158
5.2	Salience of regional identities in Kyrgyzstan	160
5.3	Preferences of relevant actors over electoral rules by issue in Kyrgyzstan	162

## Tables and Figures

5.4	Final outcome of electoral rules by issue in Kyrgyzstan	186
6.1	The TBG's predictions in Uzbekistan	191
6.2	Saliency of regional identities in Uzbekistan	194
6.3	Preferences of relevant actors over electoral rules by issue in Uzbekistan	196
6.4	Key differences between draft and final versions of Uzbekistan's electoral law	208
6.5	Number of seats per region in Uzbekistan	209
6.6	Final outcome of electoral rules by issue in Uzbekistan	211
7.1	The TBG's predictions in Kazakhstan	215
7.2	Saliency of regional identities in Kazakhstan	217
7.3	Preferences of relevant actors over electoral rules by issue in Kazakhstan	220
7.4	Final outcome of electoral rules by issue in Kazakhstan	221
8.1	Structural approaches to institutional origin and change: predictions versus actual findings	259
8.2	GNP per capita in Central Asia	260
8.3	Change in GDP in Central Asia by country, 1989–1999	262
8.4	Average annual inflation rates in Central Asia, 1989–1999	263
8.5	Agency-based approaches to institutional origin and change: predictions versus actual findings	264
8.6	Degree of elite turnover in Central Asia	266
8.7	Objective measures of relative bargaining power in Central Asia	268
8.8	The TBG's predicted and actual outcomes in Central Asia	271

## *Figures*

	Map of Central Asia	xxi
2.1	Transitional bargaining game	32
3.1	Soviet administrative-territorial divisions	66
3.2	Kyrgyz tribes	75
3.3	Uzbek regions	84

## Tables and Figures

5.1	Basic strategies in Kyrgyzstan's bargaining game	168
6.1	Basic strategies in Uzbekistan's bargaining game	198
7.1	Basic strategies in Kazakhstan's first bargaining game	226
7.2	Basic strategies in Kazakhstan's second bargaining game	227

# 1

---

## *The Continuity of Change*

### OLD FORMULAS AND NEW INSTITUTIONS

The collapse of the Soviet Union was widely welcomed in the West as a clear sign that democracy and capitalism had “won.” For scholars and policy makers alike, it presented a long-awaited opportunity for the peoples of this once vast multinational state to embark on a more desirable path of political and economic development. As part of the euphoria surrounding the recent “third wave” of democratization, the rejection of the Soviet system in favor of Western political and economic institutions was thus expected, and indeed, seemed certain.<sup>1</sup> Yet, a decade after the Soviet Union’s celebrated demise, the transitions across its successor states have failed to produce institutional forms that are consistent with these expectations. Throughout the former Soviet Union, there are countless examples of presidents who rule by decree; elections that fail to meet international standards of competitiveness and transparency; and privatized enterprises that continue to receive state subsidies as well as directives.

The conventional wisdom led us to expect a decisive break with the Soviet past in the newly independent Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, both scholars and policy makers predicted the rejection of Soviet institutions throughout Central Asia, either through the reemergence of pre-Soviet tribal divisions and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism; the violent outbreak of nationalism and ethnic conflict; or the

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Huntington, Samuel P. 1991. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press; Fukuyama, Francis. 1989. The End of History? *The National Interest* 16, and Timetable to Democracy, *The Economist* June 22, 1991: 49–51.



## Institutional Change and Political Continuity

adoption of democratic and market-oriented reforms.<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, the establishment of Western-style, multiparty electoral systems in three of these former Soviet republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan – during the first few years of independence was indicative of the “democratic impulse” sweeping across the Soviet successor states.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, these electoral systems contain a great deal of institutional innovation and conform only minimally to the preceding (i.e., Soviet) electoral law and procedures. Thus, for many, they signaled the mere beginning of Central Asia’s wholesale retreat from undesirable Soviet political and economic institutions.

On closer examination, however, these electoral systems represent a much greater degree of continuity with the Soviet past than was either expected or immediately apparent. Indeed, the entire process by which the Central Asian states adopted new political institutions indicates the enduring strength of the Soviet system, rather than its impending demise. Negotiations surrounding the establishment of electoral laws in each state included an identical set of core actors who used the same criterion for determining both their preferences over institutional outcomes and assessing their relative bargaining power. In short, all three were characterized by regionally based actors, preferences, and conceptualizations of power and power relations. These striking similarities in the negotiating process are not mere coincidence, but rather, stem from the predominance of regional political identities (or regionalism) among political leaders and activists within each state as a result of their shared Soviet institutional legacy.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, they produced electoral systems that differed in significant ways – both from the Soviet electoral system and from one another’s. These differences, moreover, mirrored their respective levels of

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Haghayegdi, Mehrdad. 1994. Islam and Democratic Politics in Central Asia. *World Affairs* 156, 3; Naumkin, Vitaly V. 1994. *Central Asia and Transcaucasia: Ethnicity and Conflict*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press; and Olcott, Martha Brill. 1994. Central Asia’s Islamic Awakening. *Current History* April. Others claimed that Soviet rule had left Central Asia virtually untransformed from its pre-Soviet state. See, Fierman, William K., ed. 1991. *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

<sup>3</sup> The outbreak of civil war in Tajikistan in the spring of 1992 thwarted the political reform process there. In Turkmenistan, there was not even the pretense of undertaking political reform.

<sup>4</sup> These regional identities correspond to the internal administrative-territorial subdivisions, or *oblasts*, within each former Soviet republic. At the time this study was conducted, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were subdivided into six *oblasts* and nineteen *oblasts*, respectively, and Uzbekistan was comprised of twelve *oblasts* and the Karakalpak ASSR.

## **The Continuity of Change**

commitment to democratization following independence. For example, the state that adopted the most inclusive electoral system – Kyrgyzstan – also instituted the greatest amount of democratic political reforms.

The story of establishing electoral systems in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, then, is one in which the persistence of old formulas produced new institutions. How are we to understand this paradox of such strikingly similar negotiation processes and yet divergent institutional outcomes? This is the central empirical puzzle that I pose in this book. Due to the broad empirical and theoretical significance of electoral systems, the approach I develop to explain it makes substantive and theoretical contributions that reach far beyond both this particular institution and these three Central Asian states.

In sum, I highlight the role that elites' *perceptions* of power shifts during the transition play in shaping both the degree of institutional change versus continuity and the direction of regime change. Because elites are primarily concerned with either augmenting or preserving their own power, perceived shifts in relative power motivate institutional innovation. Those who believe that the balance of power has shifted in their favor, for example, will seek to design new institutions that redistribute goods and/or benefits accordingly, while those who believe that their relative power has declined will prefer institutions that retain as much of their previous distributional advantage as possible. Yet, unless a dramatic shift in power is widely perceived to have taken place, established elites will continue to dominate the process by which institutions are designed, and hence, reduce the likelihood for institutional innovation and political liberalization. Thus, in contrast to other approaches that focus on either structural conditions or the contingent choices of individual agents to explain regime change, I argue that what motivates elites to adopt political reform is their desire to acquire or retain as much power as possible given their perceptions of how present changing circumstances are affecting their previous ability to influence the distribution of goods and/or benefits.

### ***Electoral Systems; Institutional Origin and Change; and Regime Transition***

The simultaneous political and economic transitions occurring across the former Soviet Union provide us with both a unique opportunity and pressing need to study institutional origin and change. Institutions established under such circumstances are known to have a long-term impact on

## Institutional Change and Political Continuity

subsequent political and economic development because they inaugurate a cycle of “increasing returns” whereby “the probability of further steps along the same path increases with each move down that path” or, simply stated, the costs of exit continue to rise.<sup>5</sup> Yet, at this critical juncture, theory in comparative politics remains limited in its ability to help us understand and explain these phenomena. Until very recently, scholars engaged in the study of institutions directed their attention and research toward illuminating the *effects* of various institutional structures rather than their *causes*. As a result, we know far more about the consequences of certain types of institutions than we do about how they originate and change.

This is particularly true of electoral systems. While volumes of research in comparative politics have been dedicated to elucidating their psychological and mechanical effects on voters, politicians, and hence, the development of political party systems around the world, the study of their origin has been largely neglected.<sup>6</sup> Yet, ironically, electoral systems are a central feature of both institutional analysis and the study of democratic transitions. Indeed, the struggle to define the nature of electoral systems is at the very heart of transitional politics. Particularly in a new state, they are the “rules of the game” that matter most because they determine who will set future “rules of the game.” Thus, they determine not only who will govern, but also the manner in which they will govern. The establishment of electoral systems, moreover, serves as a window into the soul of power relations and the political process in a transitional state; it gives us insight into the key political battles and/or power struggles as the transition unfolds. Electoral systems are also an important institution for gauging political change, because they serve as a crucial benchmark for assessing the level of a country’s commitment to democra-

<sup>5</sup> Pierson, Paul. 2000. Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics. *American Political Science Review* 94, 2: 252.

<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive overview, see Lijphart, Arendt. 1985. The Field of Electoral Systems Research: A Critical Survey. *Electoral Studies* 4, 1: 3–14; and Lijphart, Arendt. 1990. The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws, 1945–85. *American Political Science Review* 84: 481–96. The few studies that do focus explicitly on the origin of electoral systems include Bawn, Kathleen. 1993. The Logic of Institutional Preferences: German Electoral Law as a Social Choice Outcome. *American Journal of Political Science* 37, 4: 965–89; Boix, Carles. 1999. Setting the Rules of the Game: The Choice of Electoral Systems in Advanced Democracies. *American Political Science Review* 93, 3: 609–24; and Brady, David and Jongryn Mo. 1992. Electoral Systems and Institutional Choice: A Case Study of the 1988 Korean Elections. *Comparative Political Studies* 24, 4: 405–29.

## The Continuity of Change

tization.<sup>7</sup> In sum, they are an important first step toward establishing independent statehood as well as winning the approval of the international community. It is not surprising, then, that electoral systems are often the first institution that political actors in new states, or states undergoing transition, seek to design – both to gain internal recognition and to bolster external legitimacy.

Accordingly, all three Central Asian states established a set of rules governing the election of national legislatures within the first few years of their newfound independence. The intense debates surrounding the adoption of new electoral laws in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan reflected the degree of importance that political leaders and activists across these three states placed on this institution. Whether or not they were directly involved in the process of designing electoral laws, most believed that there was a significant distributional advantage to be gained by influencing the outcome. Indeed, when they began drafting new electoral rules in the spring of 1993, all three nascent states had yet to settle several basic foundational issues, including those concerning the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government. Thus, these electoral systems had the potential to determine both the composition of the new parliament and its role in making subsequent constitutional decisions. Moreover, in addition to their international significance, electoral systems occupy a central place in the domestic politics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan due to both the historical and contemporary role that elections, electoral rules, and national legislatures play in these former Soviet Central Asian republics.

During the Soviet period, elections and the electoral system on which they were based played a crucial political role. They served as a vehicle for both limited contestation among political elites to achieve consensus and fully mobilized participation among the population to popularly legitimate decisions made undemocratically.<sup>8</sup> Elections were one of the primary

<sup>7</sup> As Samuel P. Huntington writes in *The Third Wave* (1991), “[e]lections, open, free and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non.” Electoral systems are the basis on which “founding elections” in transitional states occur.

<sup>8</sup> On the role of elections and participation in the Soviet Union, see Friedgut, Theodore H. 1979. *Political Participation in the USSR*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. This pattern is also consistent with the role of elections in other semi- or noncompetitive electoral contexts. See, for example, Heredia, Blanca. 1993. Making Economic Reform Politically Viable: The Mexican Experience. In William C. Smith, Carlos H. Acuna, Eduardo A. Gamarra, eds. *Democracy, Markets, and Structural Reform in Latin America: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 280.

## Institutional Change and Political Continuity

mechanisms through which the Soviet government distributed political rewards to loyal elites as well as checked their performance. The elected officials were essentially handpicked by the Soviet leadership and incumbents at all levels were expected to “bring out the vote” or lose their positions. The electoral law allocated responsibility for both supervising the nomination of candidates and conducting the elections, and therefore, determined a crucial basis of power relations among the political elite. Moreover, under Soviet rule the republic-level legislature in each Central Asian republic served as an instrument for regional leaders to exert influence on republican affairs.<sup>9</sup> While these legislative bodies did not engage in the same law-making activities as national parliaments in Western democracies, they exercised authority over other fundamental matters in their respective republics such as the territorial allocation of material and financial resources.

Following independence, the republican legislature automatically became the national legislature in each state and acquired added significance. Not only did members of parliament retain their privileged access to scarce political and economic resources and continue to influence the distribution of these resources through the budget-making process, they also gained some authority to draft and discuss legislation. This greatly increased their influence on crucial issue-areas including the direction of economic reform as well as state- and nation-building, while reinforcing their prior status. In all three Central Asian states, for example, national legislatures confronted legal and social questions associated with the privatization of land, the establishment of a state language, and the definition of citizenship. Members of parliament also had the potential to play a crucial role in determining the fate of the country’s natural and strategic resources, which were previously controlled by Moscow. Moreover, in light of international pressures to democratize, national legislatures became the “testing ground” for the newly independent states’ commitment to political liberalization, and hence, the focal point of both international and domestic political reform efforts. Indeed, one of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev’s last concrete steps toward realizing his radical political and economic reform programs (*glasnost* and *perestroika*) in the latter years of the Soviet Union was holding competitive elections to a new national legislative body (the Congress of People’s Deputies

<sup>9</sup> The legislature at both the all-Union and republican levels was called the “Supreme Soviet.”

## The Continuity of Change

[CPD]), and then subsequently to the republic-level legislatures.<sup>10</sup> These elections raised similar expectations regarding the degree of political competition for parliamentary seats and the role of parliaments throughout the Soviet successor states following the USSR's collapse.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, while the establishment of electoral systems did not launch a full-fledged transition to democracy in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, or Uzbekistan, both the process by which these new electoral systems were designed and the outcome of that process provide several crucial insights into the nature of power and political change in Central Asia after independence. As demonstrated previously, elections are intimately connected to power relations in Central Asia – that is, who has access to power as well as how power is understood and allocated. In the context of a transition from Soviet rule, negotiations over electoral systems are also well positioned to reveal the underlying sources of power. Just as the cycle of increasing returns makes power asymmetries less apparent over time, so too does the initiation of this cycle serve to uncover asymmetrical power relations by literally forcing them out of hiding and onto the bargaining table.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the respective electoral systems that these negotiations produced are a proxy for gauging not only the extent to which political change has actually occurred since independence, but also prospects for future political change. According to the logic of “increasing returns,” even if one were to conclude that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan’s new electoral systems amounted to only incremental or minor changes, because of their capacity to restructure power relations these changes nonetheless have profound consequences for subsequent institutional, and hence, regime change in each state.<sup>13</sup>

In sum, due to their broad empirical and theoretical significance, electoral systems serve as an especially appropriate vantage point from which to assess Central Asia’s transition from Soviet rule since independence and to improve our understanding of both institutional design and regime change, particularly in dynamic settings.

<sup>10</sup> In March 1989, two-thirds of the CPD deputies were elected by popular vote. The following year, all fifteen Soviet republics elected new legislative bodies under more competitive conditions.

<sup>11</sup> For an example of how the 1990 elections raised expectations for parliamentary power in Ukraine, see Hale, Henry E. 1999. *The Strange Death of the Soviet Union: Nationalism, Democratization and Leadership*. *PONARS Working Paper Series No. 12*, 20–2. <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~ponars>.

<sup>12</sup> Pierson, 2000, 259.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

*The Establishment of Electoral Systems in Central Asia:  
Populist, Centralist, and Dualistic*

The negotiation processes in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan shared some striking similarities. If one could actually take a visual scan of the individuals seated around the proverbial bargaining tables and peruse the official transcripts, it would immediately become apparent that, in each of these three states, two core sets of actors negotiated the same four core issues. The four core issues that framed the negotiations included (1) the structure of parliament, (2) the nomination of candidates, (3) supervision over the elections, and (4) the determination of seats. The main actors were divided into essentially two groups – regional leaders (i.e., governors and their deputies) and central leaders (i.e., the president and his advisors). These actors, moreover, universally preferred electoral systems that would maintain and/or increase the status of the regional versus central level of government, respectively. Yet, because central and regional leaders alike considered themselves representatives of the region (*oblast*) in which they most recently served, they also viewed their own interests as commensurate with maintaining and/or increasing the status of that particular region. Preferences over specific aspects of the “new” electoral system, therefore, were based on the actors’ expectations of how that particular aspect would affect, first, the overall regional balance of power vis-à-vis the center, and second, their own region’s position of strength or weakness within it. Central leaders, for example, wanted electoral laws that would give them more discretion over the composition of the new parliament and the conduct of its deputies, while regional leaders wanted electoral laws that would guarantee them a seat in the new parliament as well as greater independence from the center. This points to another key similarity across these three states’ negotiation processes. All the actors involved viewed asymmetrical power relations in terms of the distribution of authority and decision-making influence between regional-level and central-level governments, on the one hand, and between regions, on the other.

The universal dominance of regionally based actors, preferences, and power asymmetries in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan’s electoral design processes, however, did not preclude a significant degree of variation in their respective electoral systems. As Table 1.1 illustrates, negotiations among the same core set of actors over the same four core issues in each state nonetheless produced different institutional outcomes. Kyrgyzstan’s electoral system, for example, might be characterized as “populist,” or

Table 1.1. *Variation in the design of electoral systems in Central Asia*

Country	Main Issues			
	Structure of Parliament	Nomination of Candidates	Supervision of the Elections	Determination of Seats
Kyrgyzstan “Populist”	<b>Part-time</b> Bicameral	<b>Local workers’ collectives and residential committees</b> Political parties	DECs	Both chambers: SMDs based on total population
Uzbekistan “Centralist”	<b>Part-time</b> <b>Unicameral</b>	Regional councils Political parties	CEC	<b>SMDs based on voting population</b>
Kazakhstan “Dualistic”	Full-time Bicameral	Senat: President and regional heads Majilis: Political parties	CEC and TECs	Senat: Equal number per region Majilis: <b>SMDs based on voting population</b>

*Note:* Bold type indicates those features of the Soviet electoral system that were retained.



## **Institutional Change and Political Continuity**

relatively inclusive, because it allows local workers' collectives and residential committees, as well as newly formed political parties, to nominate an unlimited number of candidates for office and includes the total population in determining the number of electoral districts. In contrast, Uzbekistan's electoral system is more accurately described as "centralist" and more restrictive than either Kyrgyzstan's or Kazakhstan's because it limits the right to nominate candidates to one per electoral district for each officially sanctioned political party and regional-level legislature and concentrates the supervision of all electoral procedures and outcomes in the president-appointed Central Electoral Commission (CEC). The electoral system in Kazakhstan takes on a hybrid form in comparison to both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. I refer to it as "dualistic" because it divides supervision over the election between electoral commissions at the central and regional levels, and the nominations of candidates between the president and regional governors for the parliament's upper house (Senat) and registered political parties for its lower house (Majilis).

Moreover, these new electoral systems contain several areas of institutional innovation and only a minimal amount of continuity with the previous (i.e., Soviet) electoral law. Uzbekistan's electoral law has the most in common with its Soviet predecessor, while both Kyrgyzstan's and Kazakhstan's represent significant departures from the Soviet law. For example, only in Uzbekistan did the new parliament (Olii Majlis) retain both the Supreme Soviet's part-time and unicameral structure. In Kyrgyzstan, the new parliament (Jogorku Kenesh) retained only the Supreme Soviet's part-time feature. The full-time, bicameral parliament (Olii Kenges) in Kazakhstan retained neither Soviet feature. Similarly, regarding the determination of seats, Uzbekistan alone maintained the Soviet practice of basing single-member districts on voting population, whereas Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan both introduced alternatives – seats based on total population and an even number of seats per *oblast* (or region) regardless of population size, respectively.

### ***Perceptions of Power: Strategic Bargaining and Institutional Design***

The similarity in process and yet variation in outcome that characterized the establishment of electoral systems in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan thus presents a complex set of integrally related empirical puzzles. Why did three states with very similar historical and structural

## The Continuity of Change

legacies produce distinct institutional outcomes? What accounts for the similarities in their institutional design processes? How did such diverse outcomes result from such strikingly similar processes?

In order to fully address these puzzles, I develop a dynamic approach to explaining institutional origin and change. My approach both builds on the key insights of the dominant approaches to explaining institutional origin and change and transcends these approaches by moving beyond the structure versus agency debate that forms the basis for the intellectual divide between them. In particular, I emphasize the role that both structural and contingent factors play in shaping elites' *perceptions* of shifts in their relative power, particularly the degree to and direction in which they believe their relative power is changing due to the instability and uncertainty generated by the transition they face. I capture this dynamic by modeling institutional design as a transitional bargaining game (TBG) in which elites interact strategically to design institutions such that they attain as large a share of the distribution of goods and/or benefits as possible, given their perceived change in power relative to the other relevant actors – both established and emergent. In short, those who believe that their relative power is increasing with the transition will seek to alter or create institutions such that they receive additional goods and/or benefits, while those who believe that their relative power is decreasing with the transition will seek to retain as much of the distributional advantage accorded to them by previous institutions as possible. A perceived shift in relative power, therefore, motivates institutional innovation. The extent of institutional change versus continuity, however, depends on the overall degree and direction of this perceived power shift.

Where the general perception is that the transition has produced only minor shifts in relative power – that is, within the preceding balance of power – established elites will not only continue to dominate the process of institutional design, they will also continue to approach this process with the same set of “beliefs, principles, and commitments” that framed their understanding of their role in politics and their political interests under the preceding system.<sup>14</sup> In other words, in their negotiations over new institutions, established elites will rely on the political identities they

<sup>14</sup> This is based on my definition of political identity as the set of “beliefs, principles, and commitments” that frame one’s understanding of his/her role in politics and political interests, which I borrow in part from David Laitin. See Laitin, David. 1998. *Identities in Formation: The Russian Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 11, esp. fn. 8.

## **Institutional Change and Political Continuity**

developed in response to the asymmetrical distribution of political and economic resources in the past to interpret their role and interests in the present. It is these identities that serve as the conduit through which institutional legacies are transmitted from the past into the present, and hence, the mechanism for institutional continuity. Thus, we can expect a greater degree of institutional continuity than change essentially because the elites designing institutions continue to view politics in much the same manner as they did in the previous institutional setting.

Under such circumstances, institutional design is best understood as an attempt by old leaders to encode a preexisting system or understanding of the basis for power distribution onto seemingly new structures. Perceived shifts in power during the transition can contribute to the reordering of power within this system, such that institutional innovation is possible as long as it retains key elements of the preceding system. Institutional change measured in terms of outcomes alone, then, does not necessarily indicate a fundamental alteration in the institutional design process, but rather, a transformation of it in light of transitional circumstances. This is clearly demonstrated in Central Asia's electoral systems, which, although distinct in form, are the product of very similar and long-standing regional power struggles being played out under dynamic and uncertain conditions. That Central Asian elites continued to view politics and political decision making through a regional lens after independence is evident in the striking similarities that characterized the process of electoral system design in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Nonetheless, the institutional outcomes vary because the transition from Soviet rule produced different perceptions of shifts in the balance of power between regional leaders and central leaders in each state. Established elites could thus reformulate the division of political influence in light of these power shifts without disrupting the widely recognized basis for distributing power and privilege.

The perception that the shift in power is only minor, then, has significant consequences for regime change. In short, it enables, and indeed encourages, established elites to engage in a form of "pacting" that solidifies their exclusive role in decision making, rather than one that inaugurates political liberalization by expanding the political process to include new and/or previously excluded interests. Similar to the "pacted transitions" that characterized democratization in Latin America and Southern Europe, the purpose of these elite-level agreements is to establish mutual guarantees. Yet, unlike the pacted transitions that have occurred elsewhere, they involve an explicit pledge to maintain "rules governing the exercise

## The Continuity of Change

of power” rather than to redefine them so as to accommodate new political interests.<sup>15</sup> A second, and directly related, distinction is the fact that the elites involved in making such agreements are bargaining from a position of mutual strength rather than mutual weakness. As incumbents whose rule has not been effectively challenged, these elites are not compelled to include the opposition in order to establish their authority and/or to gain legitimacy.<sup>16</sup> Instead, they are united in their desire to preserve the features of the preceding regime that created and reinforced their previous status. Elite-level agreements made under these conditions, therefore, are more accurately described as “pacted stability.” Due to the distinctiveness of both the pact and the nature of “pacting,” they are likely to inhibit rather than facilitate democratization.

Only where the transition is widely perceived to have significantly altered the preexisting balance of power – that is, where it seriously threatens or destroys the underlying basis for political power in the previous setting – is a unilateral change in institutions, and hence, a regime transition likely to occur. Whether it takes the form of economic collapse, military invasion, or popular mobilization, once elites perceive that they can no longer depend on their former political support base, they will appeal to new constituencies. Thus, the destruction of the preceding basis for political power facilitates a greater degree of institutional innovation and increases the prospects for regime change because it provides an impetus for established elites to adopt new political identities in order to ensure their own political survival. The East Central European elites of Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland, for example, have driven their respective countries down a much faster and successful road to democracy than any of the Soviet successor states precisely because they interpreted sustained mass protest as a clear signal that their future political support was contingent on their present role in enacting substantive democratic reforms.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the Central Asian states experienced the lowest

<sup>15</sup> O'Donnell, Guillermo and Philippe Schmitter. 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 37.

<sup>16</sup> According to O'Donnell and Schmitter, “pacting” requires mutual dependence between governing elites and the opposition. See O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Ekiert, Grzegorz and Jan Kubrik. 1998. Contentious Politics in New Democracies: East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, 1989–1993. *World Politics* 50: 547–81; Fish, M. Steven. The Determinants of Economic Reform in the Post-Communist World. *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 12: 31–79; Grzymala-Busse, Anna. 2000. “Communist Continuities and Democratic Innovations: Political Party Systems in East Central Europe after 1989.” Unpublished manuscript; and Milada, Anna Vachudova and Timothy Snyder.

## Institutional Change and Political Continuity

degree of popular mobilization in the former Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup> The incentives facing elites thus worked in the opposite direction. Instead of motivating them to reject their previous political identities, the transition signaled the necessity and desirability of reinvesting in the regionally based patronage networks that undergirded their political power. It thus served to secure, rather than to sever, elite attachments to regionalism.

### *The Power of Perceptions: Theoretical Contributions*

By placing elite *perceptions* of shifts in relative power at the center of analysis, my approach advances the study of institutional origin and change as well as regime transition beyond the conventional wisdom. First, it illuminates the way in which both structural factors and human agency affect institutional design and regime change. Individuals engaged in the *process* of designing new institutions utilize both the previous institutional setting (or the structural-historical context) and present dynamic circumstances (or the immediate-strategic context) in order to assess the degree and direction in which their relative power is changing, and then to develop strategies of action based on what they expect their influence over the *outcome* to be vis-à-vis other actors. Whereas current approaches emphasize either structure or agency, and hence, give greater weight to illuminating either the institutional design process or its outcome, respectively, the implication here is that a complete explanation must account for both the institutional design process and its outcome because each provides important “clues” regarding the extent of institutional continuity versus change.

Second, in offering such an explanation, my approach explicitly identifies the sources of institutional continuity and change. A close examination of the institutional design process reveals that political identities are the means through which the past is transmitted into the present. The

1997. Are Transitions Transitory? Two Types of Political Change in Eastern Europe since 1989. *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 11: 1–35. Mass mobilization played a critical role in influencing elites’ “willingness and capacity” to democratize in Southern Europe as well. See, for example, Fishman, Robert M. 1990. Rethinking State and Regime: Southern Europe’s Transition to Democracy. *World Politics* 42: 422–40.

<sup>18</sup> Beissinger, Mark R. In press. *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State: A Tidal Approach to the Study of Nationalism*. Cambridge, U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press. Not coincidentally, they also experienced the lowest levels of elite turnover. See Suny, Ronald Grigor. 1995. Elite Transformation in Transcaucasia. In Timothy J. Colton and Robert C. Tucker, eds. *Patterns in Post-Soviet Leadership*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

## The Continuity of Change

source of institutional continuity, however, is the structural-historical context that created and reinforced the power asymmetries on which these identities are based. In the Central Asian states, therefore, regional political identities served as the conduit through which their past continued to influence their subsequent development, yet the generator behind this continuity was the Soviet institutional legacy that all three states shared. Conversely, the source of institutional change lies in the transitional context. In short, the transition represents an exogenous shock to status quo asymmetrical power relations. State and societal actors then interpret the extent of this shock's impact on both the overall balance of power and their relative power within it. The greater, or more disruptive, they perceive this shock to be, the more institutional change we can expect because established elites will find less utility in clinging to their previous political identities.

Third, this approach provides an internally consistent explanation for both institutional design and regime change. It is thus able to explain not only the specific set of empirical puzzles presented by electoral systems design in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, but also several broader questions related to the nature of these three Central Asia states' transition from Soviet rule. First, while most expected the outbreak of violence following the Soviet collapse, the first ten years of Central Asia's transition from Soviet rule have been relatively peaceful. The only exception is Tajikistan, where violent civil war erupted soon after independence. Why, then have Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan experienced a relatively peaceful transition from Soviet rule, both despite expectations to the contrary and in contrast to neighboring Tajikistan? Second, despite their similar institutional legacies and modes of extrication from Soviet rule, we have witnessed the emergence of different regime types among the Central Asian states. (See Table 1.2 for details.) According to most observers, Kyrgyzstan embarked on a rapid transition to democracy immediately after independence. As a result, during its first five years of independent statehood Kyrgyzstan made more progress toward political liberalization than any of its regional neighbors, with Kazakhstan a close second and Uzbekistan far behind in third place – just ahead of unreformed and unrepentant Turkmenistan.<sup>19</sup> Why, then, did Kyrgyzstan adopt more

<sup>19</sup> Refer to Table 1.2 for details. See also, for example, Brown, Bess. 1992. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on the Road to Democracy. *RFE/RL Research Report* 1, 48: 20–2, and Olcott, Martha Brill. 1993. Central Asia on its Own. *Journal of Democracy* 4, 1: 92–103.

Table 1.2. *Political liberalization and regime type in Central Asia*

Year	Freedom House Scores									
	Kazakhstan		Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan		Turkmenistan		Uzbekistan	
	Rating	Regime Type	Rating	Regime Type	Rating	Regime Type	Rating	Regime Type	Rating	Regime Type
1991–2	5,4 PF	Soft autocracy	5,4 PF	Soft autocracy	3,3 PF	Electoral democracy	6,5 PF	Soft autocracy	6,5 PF	Soft autocracy
1992–3	5,5 PF	Soft autocracy	4,2 PF	Electoral democracy	6,6 NF	Hard autocracy	7,6 NF	Hard autocracy	6,6 NF	Hard autocracy
1993–4	6,4 PF	Soft autocracy	4,3 PF	Electoral democracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy
1994–5	6,5 NF	Soft autocracy	4,3 PF	Electoral democracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy
1995–6	6,5 NF	Soft autocracy	4,4 PF	Electoral democracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy
1996–7	6,5 NF	Soft autocracy	4,4 PF	Electoral democracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy	7,6 NF	Hard autocracy
1997–8	6,5 NF	Soft autocracy	4,4 PF	Electoral democracy	6,6 NF	Hard autocracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy	7,6 NF	Hard autocracy
1998–9	6,5 NF	Soft autocracy	5,5 PF	Soft autocracy	6,6 NF	Hard autocracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy	7,6 NF	Hard autocracy
1999–2000	6,5 NF	Soft autocracy	5,5 PF	Soft autocracy	6,6 NF	Hard autocracy	7,7 NF	Hard autocracy	7,6 NF	Hard autocracy

*Note:* The characters representing scores for each year are, from left to right, political rights, civil liberties, and freedom status. Each of the first two is measured on a one-to-seven scale, with one representing the highest degree of freedom and seven the lowest. “F,” “PF,” and “NF” respectively stand for “free,” “partly free,” and “not free.” Countries whose combined averages for political rights and for civil liberties fall between 1.0 and 2.5 are designated “free” between 3.0 and 5.5 “partly free”; and between 5.5 and 7.0 “not free.” These scores are available online at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>. Regime types are classified as follows: liberal democracy = political freedoms 1–2, civil liberties 1–2; electoral democracy = political freedoms 2–4, civil liberties 2–4; soft autocracy = political freedoms 5–6, civil liberties 5; hard autocracy = political freedoms 6–7, civil liberties 6–7.

## The Continuity of Change

far-reaching political reforms than the other Central Asian states, including Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan? Why did both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan make greater advances toward democratization than Uzbekistan? Finally, there is also evidence to suggest that since the mid-1990s both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have retreated from their earlier democratic reform paths and moved instead toward a more restrictive political system similar to Uzbekistan's (and the preceding Soviet one).<sup>20</sup> Why have these states subsequently converged toward authoritarianism?

The explanations it offers, moreover, challenge the conventional wisdom. Predictions of widespread ethnic conflict in Central Asia, for example, are based on the erroneous assumption that pre-Soviet identities (i.e., tribe, clan, or religion) would emerge as the most salient sociopolitical identity in the aftermath of Soviet rule. In contrast, I argue that stability was possible in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan precisely because, during the transition, elites embraced the very political identity they adopted under Soviet rule – regionalism. Thus, they were able to maintain the primary system for both distributing political and economic resources and settling political disagreements. Two competing approaches suggest alternative explanations for the peculiar pattern of regime change in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Structural approaches, for example, would invoke either Central Asia's shared Soviet legacy or varying levels of economic crisis after independence to explain regime convergence and divergence, respectively.<sup>21</sup> According to agency-based approaches, regime divergence in Central Asia can be explained, for example, in terms of elite attitudes toward democracy or as a calculated elite response to an ideological fissure that developed within the existing regime.<sup>22</sup> I argue instead that what motivated Central Asian elites to adopt democratic

<sup>20</sup> Refer to Table 1.2 for details. See also, for example, Fish, M. Steven. 1998. "Reversal and Erosion of Democracy in the Post-Communist World." Unpublished manuscript; and Kubicek, Paul. 1998. Authoritarianism in Central Asia: Cause or Cure? *Third World Quarterly* 19, 1: 29–43.

<sup>21</sup> Examples include Haggard, Stephan and Robert R. Kaufman. 1997. The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions. *Comparative Politics*: 262–83; Jowitt, Kenneth. 1992. The Leninist Legacy in Eastern Europe. In Ivo Banac, ed. *Eastern Europe in Revolution*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; and Widener, Jennifer. 1994. Political Reform in Anglophone and Francophone African countries. In Jennifer Widener, ed. *Economic Reform and Political Liberalization in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press.

<sup>22</sup> Examples include DiPalma, Guiseppe. 1990. *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; O'Donnell and Schmitter.



## Institutional Change and Political Continuity

reforms was the desire to augment their own bargaining power, and hence, their ability to capture distributive gains during the transition.

Finally, my approach offers a different framework for comparing regime transitions across time and space. In short, regime transitions require a large enough shock to precipitate either a change in the composition of governing elites or in their political identities. Absent such a change, elites have a greater incentive to negotiate pacts that maintain stability and solidify authoritarian regimes than those that promote change and democratization. Thus, negotiated transitions are neither an appropriate nor a likely path to democracy in the Soviet successor states.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, the post-communist world shares important similarities with postcolonial Africa. In both contexts, intraelite competition was insufficient to bring about a transition to democracy; it had to involve sustained mass mobilization and popular protest.<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that the behavior of mass publics did not play an important role in inducing elites to negotiate democratic transitions in several other parts of the world, but that it becomes a necessary condition rather than merely a facilitating factor for democratization in single-party or patronage-based systems.<sup>25</sup> The extreme personalization and concentration of power that characterized Central Asia's political regimes at independence, therefore, made transition from above all the more unlikely there.

### *Methodological Considerations*

#### *Why Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan?*

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan provide a natural laboratory for both developing and testing competing explanations of institutional origin and change as well as regime transition. As a result of the former Soviet

1986; and Przeworski, Adam. 1991. *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge, U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press; and Fish, 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Valerie Bunce has also observed that the "pacted transitions" that occurred in Latin America and Southern Europe are an inappropriate model for Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. See Bunce, Valerie. 2000. Comparative Democratization: Big and Bounded Generalizations. *Comparative Political Studies* 33, 6/7: 716–7.

<sup>24</sup> Bratton, Michael and Nicholas van de Walle. 1992. Popular Protest and Political Reform in Africa. *Comparative Politics* 24: 419–42.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle make this argument in reference to Africa. See Bratton and van de Walle. 1994. Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa. *World Politics* 46, 4: 453–89, esp. 475–6. For a discussion of the role of mass

## The Continuity of Change

Union's collapse in 1991, all three became independent states and embarked on a political and economic transition from state socialism. Thus, to consolidate their newfound statehood, they began designing several new state institutions, including electoral systems, simultaneously. Moreover, they did so in an identical international context, in which each faced equal pressure from international organizations to institute democratic and market reforms.<sup>26</sup> This allows us to hold several exogenous factors constant, not least of which is the effect of the international environment on the timing and outcome of their respective negotiations over electoral systems.<sup>27</sup>

In particular, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan provide a fertile testing ground for structural versus agency-based approaches. First, all three have similar historical, sociocultural, political, and economic backgrounds due to their shared legacies of tribal and clan divisions, Islamic conquest, Russian colonization, and Soviet rule. Yet, despite these fundamental historical and structural similarities, the electoral laws they designed after independence vary in significant ways. This allows us to hold constant their common features in order to isolate other explanatory factors, such as elite bargaining, which recent studies of both democratic transitions and electoral systems have consistently emphasized over historical and structural legacies in explaining institutional outcomes.<sup>28</sup> Because their electoral systems differ along two dimensions – that is, in

mobilization in democratic transitions, see, for example, Bunce, 2000, 708–9; and Collier, Ruth Berins. 1999. *Paths Toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America*. Cambridge, U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>26</sup> This international context can be described as a “post Cold War context” in which the international community has played a more direct and interventionist role than in any preceding period. For details, see Weinthal, Erika. 1998. *Making or Breaking the State?: Building Institutions for Regional Cooperation in the Aral Sea Basin*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Columbia University.

<sup>27</sup> Several explanations of institutional and regime change invoke the role of the international context. For an overview of this literature, see Bratton, Michael and Nicholas Van de Walle. 1997. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transition in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge, U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 27–30.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Przeworski. 1991; Colomer, Josep M. 1994. The Polish Games of Transition. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 27, 3: 275–94; Colomer, Josep M. 1995. Strategies and Outcomes in Eastern Europe. *Journal of Democracy* 6, 2: 74–85; Geddes, Barbara. 1995. A Comparative Perspective on the Leninist Legacy in Eastern Europe. *Comparative Political Studies* 28, 2: 239–74; and Geddes, Barbara. 1996. Initiation of New Democratic Institutions in Eastern Europe and Latin America. In Arend Lijphart and Carlos H. Waisman, eds. *Institutional Design in New Democracies: Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press; and Frye, Timothy. 1997. A Politics of Institutional Choice: Post-Communist Presidencies. *Comparative Political Studies* 30, 5: 523–52.

## Institutional Change and Political Continuity

both the degree to which they depart from the Soviet electoral system and the way in which they differ from one another – these three Central Asian cases also allow us to maximize variation on the dependent variable. Second, while scholarly accounts led us to expect a decisive break with the Soviet past in Central Asia, a close examination of the process by which Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan each established new electoral systems indicates the continued strength of political preferences and practices inherited from the Soviet period. Thus, the experience of these three states also calls into question agency-based models of institutional design that focus exclusively on elite bargaining to explain outcomes.

### *Why Interviews and How Were They Conducted?*

My main method of inquiry was multiple interviews, which I conducted with 152 political leaders and activists in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan at all administrative levels (central, regional, and local) over the course of eighteen months during 1994–5.<sup>29</sup> These interviews served two purposes. First, I sought to determine how electoral laws were being designed in each country, particularly who were the main actors involved, and what were their preferences over electoral laws, the origin of these preferences, and their strategies to attain them. Second, I sought to ascertain political leaders' and activists' assessments of the nature of the political and economic transition in their respective countries, including how much had changed and to what degree, as well as how these changes were affecting their own status and authority. The interviews thus involved a combination of specific factual questions regarding the process by which new electoral laws were drafted, discussed, and ultimately adopted and a set of more general questions aimed at revealing political leaders' and activists' political orientation, including their beliefs, what they viewed as their primary set of responsibilities vis-à-vis other key players in politics, and what they perceived to be the main lines of political cleavage.<sup>30</sup>

My sample included the majority of those who participated in drafting the electoral law in each state, officially and unofficially. In order to assess which, if any, actors and preferences were excluded from the institutional

<sup>29</sup> In addition to interviews, I conducted original archival research in Uzbekistan's National Archives to trace the links between contemporary regional political identities and the historical administrative divisions constructed by the Soviet regime. This data is presented in Chapter 3.

<sup>30</sup> Refer to Appendix I for a summary of interview questions.

## The Continuity of Change

design process, I also interviewed those individuals and representatives of sociopolitical organizations in each state who submitted drafts or made proposals to the official body responsible for drafting the electoral law even if these drafts were not considered by the official body, as well as a large number of political party leaders. My interviews also took me to several regions of each country to ascertain the involvement of regional and local actors. Because it was neither physically nor financially possible to interview leaders and activists in all of the regions, particularly in a country as large as Kazakhstan, I selected several regions in each country – eight out of nineteen in Kazakhstan, five out of six in Kyrgyzstan, and six out of twelve in Uzbekistan – in order to attain as representative a national sample as possible. My method of selection was to include at least one *oblast* from each geographical part of the country and to include regions that varied by size, income level, and ethnic composition. (See Table 1.3 for details.)

A common criticism of the interview method, particularly in post- or neo-authoritarian states, is that the responses from elites are unreliable because elites have the propensity to present a false picture in order to please their superiors – or, put more crudely, to lie in order to stay out of trouble. This is an important problem, and one of which I was acutely aware while conducting my research. In order to mitigate against false data from my interviews, I interviewed each individual in various settings: in a formal setting alone (e.g., in his/her office), in a more casual setting (e.g., his/her home or mine), and with a large group or in a public place where we might have been overheard (e.g., a cafe, bar, or restaurant). I asked the same series of questions in the same order in each setting and then reviewed my notes to detect any changes in their responses. Thus, if the elites in my study did “misrepresent the truth,” they would have to have done so systematically. At the same time, I was careful to word my open-ended questions such that I did not deliberately elicit negative or critical appraisals of their respective governments, and to guarantee my interviewees’ anonymity in order to increase the reliability of their responses. A close survey of the local press in each country provided me with yet another mechanism to ascertain the reliability of my interviewees’ responses.

This interviewing technique also enabled me to avoid any situational bias in my interviewees’ responses.<sup>31</sup> Data from interviews can be distorted

<sup>31</sup> On the problem of situational bias in interviewing, see Hyman, Herbert H. 1954. *Interviewing in Social Research*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 5.

Table 1.3. *Selected regions (oblasti) in each country*

Country	Selected Region	Geographical Divide	Per Capita Income Level <sup>a</sup>	Ethnic Composition	Population Density (people/sq. km)
Kazakhstan	Almaty	South	High	Kazakh-dominated	5.09–8.07
	Kyzylorda	South	Low	Kazakh-dominated	2.1–5.08
	South Kazakhstan	South	Low	Kazakh-dominated	14.06–17.03
	Karaganda	North	High	Russian-dominated	2.1–5.08
	Pavlodar	North	High	Russian-dominated	5.09–8.07
	Semipalatinsk	East	Low	Kazakh-dominated	5.09–8.07
	East Kazakhstan	East	Low	Russian-dominated	5.09–8.07
	Uralsk	West	High	Kazakh-dominated	2.1–5.08
Kyrgyzstan	Chui	North	High	Mixed	37.2
	Issyk-Kul	North	High	Mixed	9.8
	Talas	North	Low	Kyrgyz-dominated	17.9
	Osh	South	Low	Kyrgyz-dominated	24.5
	Jalal-Abad	South	Low	Kyrgyz-dominated	30.7
Uzbekistan	Tashkent	Northeast	High	Mixed	147.0
	Fergana	East	High	Uzbek-dominated	452.1
	Andijan	East	High	Uzbek-dominated	382.0
	Namangan	East	Low	Uzbek-dominated	235.7
	Samarkand	Central	Low	Mixed	142.0
	Khorezm	Northwest	Low	Uzbek-dominated	190.5

<sup>a</sup> Relative to the national average for each country.

## The Continuity of Change

due to the way in which interviewees react to certain social situations or environmental conditions. Varying these situations or conditions is one way to overcome the bias that a certain context may inflict on both the interviewer's and interviewee's behavior.

### *Why Focus on Political Elites?*

I opted to focus primarily on interviewing elites to analyze the establishment of electoral systems in Central Asia, in short, because they are in a unique position to influence institutional design and to shape the political and economic reform agenda in a country undergoing transition.<sup>32</sup> Under such conditions, institutions are discussed and designed at the level of elites, not of the mass public. In Central Asia in particular it was political elites who comprised the main actors involved in drafting, discussing, and ultimately, adopting new electoral systems in each of the three states under investigation. Thus, it is much more useful to uncover whom elites believe to be the “relevant masses” and what are the level and nature of their commitment to this particular group or set of groups, than it is to solicit preferences at the societal level. At the same time, because elites are the greatest source for the emergence of “ethnic entrepreneurs,” interviewing political leaders and activists across Central Asia enabled me to gauge their potential role in fostering conflict along ethnic lines, and ultimately, to address the question of why other political entrepreneurs did not emerge to challenge regionalism.

### *A Road Map*

This study is primarily concerned with identifying the sources of institutional continuity and change in transitional states, and developing a systematic framework with which to evaluate and understand them. Chapter 2 presents my dynamic approach to institutional origin and change in the form of a transitional bargaining game (TBG). I use this heuristic model to generate several hypotheses – both generally and for Central Asia in

<sup>32</sup> I define elites as “persons who are able, by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations, to affect national political outcomes regularly and substantially.” See Burton, Michael, John Higley, and Richard Gunther. 1992. Introduction: Elite Transformations and Democratic Regimes. In John Higley and Richard Gunther, eds. *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe*. Cambridge, U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 10.

## **Institutional Change and Political Continuity**

particular – which I then test based on the empirical evidence provided in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 takes a step back to examine the underlying causes behind the strikingly similar institutional design process in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Through a combination of interviews and original archival research, it substantiates that Central Asian elites continued to view politics and political decision making through a regional lens after independence due to their shared experience under Soviet rule. In doing so, it identifies regional political identities as the mechanism for institutional continuity in Central Asia and the particular nature and effects of the Soviet institutional legacy in Central Asia as the underlying source of that continuity.

Chapter 4 jumps ahead to the last few years of Mikhail Gorbachev and the first few years of the transition from Soviet rule in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. It demonstrates not only that the transitional contexts varied in each state exactly as the TBG predicts, but also that this variation directly influenced both central and regional leaders' perceptions of shifts in their relative power. It also substantiates that, while central and regional leaders in each state interpreted the “shock” to their relative power differently, none believed that it had severely disrupted the underlying basis for power, and thus, they all continued to rely on their regional political identities to guide them through the transition.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are detailed case studies that serve to test the central hypotheses laid out in Chapter 2, based on empirical data from the systematic interviews with political elites and local media surveys described previously.

Chapter 8 concludes by weighing the empirical evidence in support of my explanation for institutional design and regime change in Central Asia against several competing explanations, and then exploring further the relationship between perceptions of power shifts, institutional continuity and change, and prospects for democratization in transitional states.