Chapter 2

Values and Transformation in Central Asia

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2.1 Introduction

The rapid growth of the East- and South-Asian economies, foremost China, the shift in the geopolitical balance of powers between East and West, and the actualization of the Silk Road partnership agenda have brought the former five “stan” post-Soviet republics from the periphery of the post-Communist world into the very center of a vividly developing Asian continent. While all former Soviet republics proclaimed their independence simultaneously in 1991 and announced their departure from the authoritarian communist political system, Central Asian countries belong to the camp of a “delayed” democratization—as compared to their European “comrades.” As the post-communist world’s surge of new democratic states produced a massive and compact “fourth wave” of democratization (McFaul 2002), pro-democratic political change in Central Asia remains in a “proto-stage,” implicit and inconsistent.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, all former Soviet republics not only joined the group of transitional countries and prospective and potential democracies, but

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also became an object of an increased research interest for social scientists, political scientists, and academic survey researchers. During the Soviet era, the country remained mostly closed for foreign scholars, and those public opinion polls on political values and attitudes in all USSR member-states have been subject to heavy censorship from both the central government in Moscow and local rulers. After 1991, the situation started slowly to change. The impact of the Communist regime on the political culture and political values of the populations of newly independent states, social-psychological, and behavioral patterns of adaptation to the new political, economic and social order, dynamics of national state-building in countries with no prior experience as independent states (within their current borders), change of traditional values under the influence of globalization to which the new states have now been exposed—all these topics made Central Asian societies an object of exceptional scientific and research interest for both foreign and local scholars. The two research programs conducted under the leadership of the authors of this article are the World Values Survey (WVS)¹ and Eurasia Barometer (EAB).²

While all Central Asian countries have well-established survey research agencies and there are survey research programs (e.g., Central Asia Barometer), who study the opinion of the population in all five former Soviet Central Asian republics, censorship over the scope and nature of questions related to politics, and citizens' attitudes toward politics remain under strong state control and until recently have been under heavy censorship in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. In addition to political censorship (which in varying degrees is typical for all autocratic countries), all Central Asian societies remain predominantly Muslim, and thus the acceptable scope of questions on religious and ethical issues is also affected. These limitations are particularly relevant when studying and comparing values inside Central Asia and beyond. The most advanced and open countries for foreign research efforts remain Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have softened

¹World Values Survey is the world's largest social survey research program studying people's values and beliefs worldwide. WVS research program studies a broad scope of topics, including social, political, economic, religious, family, etc., values and norms. Data is available in free access at the WVS Web site (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>). The WVS is operating since 1981, though the implementation of surveys in post-Soviet Europe became possible in 1990s only and in 2000s countries of Central Asia has joined the WVS as well. The survey has been completed in Kyrgyzstan in 2004 and 2011, in Kazakhstan in 2011 and 2018, and in Uzbekistan in 2018. In 2018, the survey will be repeated once again in Kyrgyzstan and will involve—for the first time ever—Tajikistan. Turkmenistan remains the only country where implementation of the WVS is not possible.

²A study on social and political transformations the "Eurasia Barometer" (<http://office.eurasiabarometer.org/>) conducted in the post-Soviet region since the late 1990s covers countries of post-Communist central and Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus. In Central Asia, they study involved Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Data on political moods and participation of citizens of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were collected in 2000 and 2010. Survey findings from the two time-points represent public assessments of the political transformation process 10 and 20 years after the post-Soviet transition was initiated. Implementation of Eurasia Barometer program in other Central Asian countries was not possible due to political limitations. Data for the two countries is insufficient to estimate the overall situation in the region but gives a better understanding on how popular support for democracy, autocracy, and confidence in public institutions have been changing in the region during the post-Soviet transition.

their censorship over political studies during the last few years, while Turkmenistan remains the only country where inquiring about citizen's political values and attitudes remains almost impossible. As we will see later, the history of survey research in this region strongly corresponds with the dynamics of democratization (or further *autocratization*) of Central Asian countries.

From the mid-nineteenth century until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the territory of Central Asia constituted first a part of the Russian Empire and later the USSR. As separate administrative units, the Kazakh SSR, Kyrgyz SSR, Tajik SSR, Uzbek SSR, and Turkmen SSR—the predecessors of the modern independent Central Asian states—were founded via the administrative decrees of the central Soviet government as a part of the policy of national delimitation in the 1920s and in 1930s. This statehood, which was planted from above in those Central Asian Soviet republics, became the source of numerous inter-ethnic cleavages and territorial claims in the region after independence. Above-planted statehood is also an important factor to consider in the analysis of the paths of post-Soviet transition and potential causes of democratization failures in this part of the world (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2018b).

In 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union was pushed forward by the political leaders of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, the leadership of the new Central Asian states were presented with the challenges of nation formation and state- and peace-building, as well as the establishment of an autonomous, legitimate system of governance in societies which had no prior experience as independent states (Haerpfer 2002). In all Central Asian countries, political elites lacked the benefit of the political legitimacy that their “comrades” in European former Soviet republics had gained from their struggle for national independence. While in Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, and the Baltics, the leaders of anti-Soviet pro-independence movements have been seen as the natural leaders of the new independent states (and have been elected as the first presidents of the new republics), in Central Asia, for the old political elite, gaining the internal legitimacy in the new political setting became the foremost challenge (Matveeva 1999).

2.2 Post-Soviet Transition

Post-Soviet transformations should be considered as a complex process, which involve all spheres of the public, as well as the private life, of citizens (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2014a). The specific characteristics of post-Soviet political and economic change in comparison with other forms of democratization is that we are confronted with a trifold transformation: a political revolution from a communist one-party authoritarian state to a multi-party democratic system; an economic revolution from a centrally planned command economy to a free capitalist market economy; and finally, a social revolution from a communist and so-called classless society with a small political and administrative upper class (*nomenklatura*), to a modern and open society with a broad middle class. Essential transformations were also to be

made in relation to civil society: the collapse of the Soviet Union made the way free for voluntary associations, the freedom of speech, demonstrations, and other civil liberties and freedoms (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2018a).

The first free parliamentary elections—an important sign of the beginning of a democratic transition—took place in all countries in 1990, before the USSR was legally dissolved and ceased to exist. It is remarkable that in the countries which have since become electoral autocracies or consolidated autocracies—Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan—elections did not take place immediately and were postponed until several years after the end of the USSR. The timing and character of the first elections to be held in the country can be considered here as an important marker of the state of the polity and the civic consciousness of the population and an important precondition for the choice of a pro-democratic (or alternative) path of future political development (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2018b). Initially, the majority of political leaders represented a continuation of the previous Communist “party of power,” which was attractive to the population because of its perceived ability to preserve the inter-ethnic and inter-tribal equilibrium and the stability and peace in multi-ethnic fragmented society, where clan and tribal affiliations and sub-ethnic identities remained very strong. Political opposition that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, represented primarily by nationalist and Islamic-democratic movements with their sometimes radical and extremist statements, was viewed as a dangerous alternative to the old Soviet political elite.

The universal type of political system that emerged in Central Asia is a presidential republic with an extensive scope of power concentrated in the hands of the executive branch. Democratic *de-jure*, *de facto* these political systems comprise elements of authoritarian rule. Although the separation of powers into three branches (executive, legislative, and judicial) is formally present in all five Central Asian republics (which serves the purposes of establishing formal external legitimacy), legislative, and judicial institutions are heavily dependent and controlled by the executive bodies (Laumulin 2016). The significant empowerment of the president reflects the historical traditionalism in (patriarchal) Central Asian societies, where the head of state is perceived as the “father” of the nation. Differences between the five countries affect the scope of authority left for the legislative branch. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan national parliaments are (semi-)independent, but in other countries of Central Asia the power of the president is practically unlimited (Malysheva 2018). In addition to the hypertrophied role of the executive branch, political elites in Central Asia have merged with the business structures, giving them additional means of control over the economy, wealth, and natural resources. Another feature of post-Soviet politics—which is particularly relevant for Central Asia and which is both the legacy of the Soviet political system and the earlier monarchical period in the history in this region—is the malfunction of the democratic mechanism of power transfer and rotation of elites: in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, the same political leaders who were newly elected into the president’s office in the 1990s or who had held their position since the time of the USSR, remained in power for ten or more years, sometimes until their death. The absence of a clear mechanism of election of the Soviet leader

in the past and the lack of related democratic practices and experiences—both by the population and the political elite—turned the elections into a primarily confirmatory procedure in this region.

A transition toward the democratic multi-party system was initiated in most former Soviet Republics, including those in Central Asia, after the dissolution of the USSR. Some movements toward democracy have been made in all countries with the adoption of new constitutions, the creation of parliaments and political parties, and the holding of elections in all Central Asian countries. Consequently, the initial years following independence witnessed some progress and a shift away from the Soviet political system. However, this trend later weakened and most states in Central Asia moved to a more authoritarian system. In Kazakhstan, there were very modest attempts at democratization between 1992 and 1998. After Nursultan Nazarbayev, the Communist leader of Kazakhstan, became the first President of independent Kazakhstan, a number of reforms were introduced, aimed at transforming the economy into a free market one and to liberalize trade. While Nazarbayev was quite successful in re-building, Kazakhstan's economy (until the recent economic decline caused by the sharp drop in both oil prices and the Kazakh *Tenge*), an actual full democratic transition of the political system has never occurred and instead the consolidation of power and wealth around the "ruling family" took place. "Freedom House" defined Kazakhstan as a "not free" society (scoring "6" in 2018 with "7" being the lowest possible score). For the 2019 Presidential elections, where Kazakhstan elected their second new president for the first time since 1991, the OSCE concluded that "significant irregularities were observed on election day meant that an honest count could not be guaranteed" (OSCE 2019). This indicates a lack of democratic practices and weakness of those few that have been established. Nevertheless, former President Nazarbayev in his 2017 book "Era of Independence" states that Kazakhstan is a "democratic, secular, law-based state." In 2017, the President signed the Constitutional law on the redistribution of power between the branches of governance and the increase of the role of the executive branch (the Parliament). The actual political change associated with the greater role and independence of the Parliament and whether this will lead to the establishment of the rule of law and smooth mechanism of democratic power transfer is yet to be seen.

In Tajikistan, the post-Soviet transition started with a bloody civil war, which lasted from 1992 to 1997 and was linked with the confrontation between the old Soviet elite and the opposition Islamic-democratic and nationalist parties. The war led to over 100,000 deaths and over 1.2 million refugees and internally displaced persons. Emomali Rahmon, elected as President in 1994, agreed a ceasefire in 1997, and has remained President of the country ever since. The civil war, a lack of natural resources and the economic decline of the 1990s resulted in political instability and somewhat delayed both the political transformation and the typical—for the region—consolidation of executive power, which became explicit in the late 2000s. The 2016 referendum, which was passed in Tajikistan, introduced further amendments into the Constitution, with the most significant of them referring to the removal of restrictions on the number of terms for the presidency, which would allow President Rahmon to be re-elected again in the next Presidential elections planned for 2020. For the

most recent 2013 presidential elections, an ODIHR/OSCE international observation mission concluded that “the election in Tajikistan took place peacefully, but restrictive candidate registration requirements resulted in a lack of genuine choice and meaningful pluralism” (OSCE 2013). Similar to other autocratic post-Soviet leaders, Rahmon introduced censorship and the media now has no freedom in the country, while opposition leaders are heavily prosecuted. Implementation of all governmental policies was made while exploiting the fears of the population about the possibility of resuming the civil military confrontation, and thus the consolidation of autocracy received no opposition from the population. While Tajikistan has made efforts to improve its economy, the country remains highly dependent on Russia, which is the main receiving country for labor migration from Tajikistan.

In Turkmenistan, which is labeled as the most authoritarian and closed political regime in the region, the leader of the Turkmen Communist Party, Saparmurat Niyazov, was elected as the President in 1992 after proclaiming Turkmenistan’s independence in 1991. It is remarkable that Niyazov was the only candidate for the President’s post in 1991 and got 99.5% of votes. Niyazov later assumed the title “Turkmenbashi” (meaning “Father of the Turkmen”). All opposition parties were banned, and the government obtained full control over the media and other information channels. Niyazov also introduced the politics of neutrality, causing total international isolation of Turkmenistan and preventing the country from entering any international organization. After Niyazov’s death in 2006, his Vice-President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow was elected as the next (and current) President of Turkmenistan. Berdimuhamedow has undertaken small steps toward liberalization, initiating healthcare, pension system, and education reforms, and easing travel permit regulations for citizens. The cult of personality, which was developed under the previous president, was abolished. At the same time, Berdimuhamedow clearly showed that Western-style democracy was not a goal for Turkmenistan, and there was no substantial change to the autocratic, exclusive, monopoly power assumed by the President. Twenty-nine years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Turkmenistan remains one of the most authoritarian and closed regimes in the world.

Islam Karimov, the former leader of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, became President after the declaration of independence in 1991. He announced the country’s course toward becoming a free market economy and a secular democracy. In reality, the pro-democratic transition was never realized, having been prevented by the lack of democratic governance experience, old economic ties, and imbalances of the economic system, as well as the absence of democratic values and norms among both the political elite and the population. Shortly after independence, from 1992 to 1993, there were very modest attempts at introducing some minimalist form of democracy in Uzbekistan. However, those attempts were aborted very quickly and there was no democratization process in the country until the death of Karimov in 2016. Student protests of 1992 in Tashkent, as well as any further expressions of civil activities, were suppressed, meeting with a strong and brutal autocratic response. The newly elected President Shavkat Mirziyoyev had been Prime Minister under Karimov and was hence considered his successor. The institute of presidency in Uzbekistan—similar to other autocratic post-Soviet countries—is therefore reproduced not via the

democratic procedure of free and fair elections, but via nomination of the successor by the President from his close circle. After his inauguration, president Mirziyoyev initiated economic reforms aimed at the reduction of the isolationism of the Uzbek economy. Hence, Uzbekistan, after being “frozen” for over two decades in its economic and political internal and external development, obtained a new chance to change the vector of its development toward liberalization; though, it is too early yet to speak of any substantial progress (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2018b).

The only former Soviet Republic in Central Asia to attain the status of a democracy is Kyrgyzstan. Democratization in Kyrgyzstan began in the turbulent times of 1990/91, when Askar Akayev, the newly elected pro-democratic President, introduced new democratic institutions and replaced the Soviet *nomenklatura* with younger politicians. In the first years of democratization, comprehensive market reforms including liberalization of prices and foreign trade, privatization, and the freedoms of speech, religion, and participation were introduced (although these were slow to deliver economic outputs). Democratization in Kyrgyzstan was not a linear process and there were several backslides between 1995 and 2012. Over time, President Akayev became more authoritarian in his decision-making, causing significant dissatisfaction among the population. However, unlike other Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan did not consolidate into a full autocracy. As a result of the so-called Tulip Revolution, which took place in the spring of 2005, the president was forced to resign and flee to Russia. After the revolution, Kyrgyzstan experienced several years of political struggle and civil unrest when protestors blamed the government for failing to eradicate poverty and corruption. During the 2009 elections, the new president, Bakiyev, was accused of falsifying the election results and was forced to flee to Belarus. The next president, Almazbek Atambayev, elected in 2011, had—despite his pro-Russian alignment—undertaken significant steps to improve the foreign trade of Kyrgyzstan and to obtain greater energy independence for his country. Despite recurring ethnic strife in recent years, democratization in Kyrgyzstan has not yet come to a halt. Kyrgyzstan remains the only country in Central Asia which introduced a parliamentary republic as the form of governance. Kyrgyzstan is also the only country in the region recognized as “partly free” by “Freedom House” (the other four countries are classified as “not free”). The Tulip Revolution signaled the beginning of a new wave of democratization, which led to a steady and continuous increase of democratic rule. The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan had a similar historical function to the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine: To keep the process of democratization in those new independent states alive and to prevent those countries from sliding into autocracy. The former Soviet Republics of Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan form the group of emerging democracies which have the structures and the potential to develop over time into full democracies like Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the three Baltic states being earlier a part of the USSR and now holding membership in the European Union (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2018b).

2.3 Measuring Political Transformation

Most Western studies on political transformation tend to conclude that the optimal path of political change is described by the process of democratization that is from an autocratic, totalitarian Soviet Republic toward a “consolidated democracy” (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2018a). At the same time, local scholars and scholars from other post-Soviet countries (e.g., Russia) believe that the period of post-Soviet transition in the region is already complete and as a result the “emergence of albeit authoritarian, but generally consolidated new types of political regimes that form sovereign statehood and an independent foreign policy strategy” took place (Malysheva 2018). Others claim that due to objective reasons and the historical legacy, the democratization process in Central Asia belongs to the so-called Asian model, when the leadership symbolizes stability and is the source of internal and external policies (Kukeyeva and Shkapyak 2013). Others claim that political regimes in Central Asia do not “move along Tamerlane’s paths,” but they regress beyond the Soviet political system, without preserving its social benefits (Laumulin 2016). While we acknowledge the existence of other perspectives, in our further analysis, we use indexes of political change which define political change in the categories of “democracy” and “autocracy” as the side points of the scale. The process of political transformation can be measured by a variety of empirical indicators and indices. To analyze the progress of democratization in post-Soviet Central Asia at the macro-level of a political system, we will consider the Polity score from the Polity IV project at the Center for Systemic Peace in Vienna (VA, USA). The macro-level index is based on expert evaluations and is an aggregated measure of the elements of democratic and non-democratic regimes. The scale ranges from -10 to $+10$, with -10 to -6 corresponding to autocracies, -5 to 5 corresponding to anocracies, and 6 – 10 to democracies. The index, therefore, allows for tracking the dynamics of democratization processes at the macro-level of political systems and to categorize the studied political systems into three broad groups: democracies, autocracies, and hybrid regimes. For the countries of Central Asia, polity scores are available starting from 1991 when the five post-Soviet “stans” became independent republics and thus tracking their progress in political transition became possible.

Polity scores indicate significant variation in the paths, vectors, and dynamics of political transformations in the five countries (Fig. 2.1). The only country in the region with the clear positive dynamics of pro-democratic political change is Kyrgyzstan, which was categorized as a hybrid regime at the beginning of the transition and became a “democracy” after 2012. The democratization path in Kyrgyzstan features several recessions. However, the overall trend is clearly progressive. The first substantial breakthrough took place in 2005, when citizens’ protests against the corruption and authoritarianism of President Akayev and his family and supporters turned into the “Tulip Revolution,” which prevented further democratic backsliding and turned the political regime toward democratic liberties, a stronger role for the parliament and a greater accountability for political institutions. The pro-democratic gains of the Tulip Revolution have dwindled in the period 2005–2010 when the new

Fig. 2.1 Political regimes transformation in Central Asia. *Source* Polity research project (Polity IV data-set; <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html>)

government failed to meet the citizens' expectations and to deliver improvements in well-being, and a reduction of poverty and corruption, which in turn led to another round of political struggle and civil unrest. The lowest point on the democratization trajectory after the revolution was reached by Kyrgyzstan in 2009, when President Bakiyev was accused of falsifying the elections results. Kyrgyzstan returned to the democratization path with the new elections in 2011 and since then shows slow but positive dynamics. Inter-ethnic and inter-tribal cleavages are among the factors which prevent the political elite of the country to elaborate a solid and coherent democratization policy.

Compared to Kyrgyzstan, other Central Asian countries show much less dynamics in the change of their political regimes. Some uncertain positive dynamics could be observed in Tajikistan, where the country shifted from primarily autocratic rule in the 1990s to a hybrid regime—a regime combining elements of both autocracy and democracy—in the 2000s. The civil war caused a decline in the pro-democratic changes and an emergence of pro-democratic institutions in 1992–1997 with Tajikistan backsliding into autocracy for this period of time. A minor recovery of the regime in 1998–1999 was not sustainable or progressive and Tajikistan remains in the group of “hybrid regimes” or anocracies—political regimes that combine elements of both democratic and autocratic political systems. The smallest political change is observed in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, as both countries remained very high on the autocratic score through the whole period of their independence. Negative dynamics could be traced in Kazakhstan where the country moved from a hybrid political system in the 1990s to a primarily authoritarian state in the 2000s. Political transformations in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan can, therefore, be identified as the consolidation of autocracy—a form of government in which supreme and absolute power is utilized by a single person (or a group of people, often including the family members, close friends, and supporters of the political

leader) and power transfer does not occur through contested elections. Autocratic regimes feature such authoritarian elements as strong central power, limited political freedoms, restricted political pluralism, prosecuted or controlled opposition, low political mobilization of the population, and low political representation of minorities (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2014c).

Another powerful database that allows tracking the dynamics of political transition at the macro-level of political systems in the region back to 1990s is the “Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project” (see Fig. 2.2). Similar to Polity IV, also based on expert evaluations, V-Dem democracy scores are available for all five Central Asian states at the macro-level of political regimes, starting from 1991. Expert scores for regime transformation are particularly valuable for the region in conditions when studying the public opinion of the population on important political issues is still quite challenging and complicated by the strict internal censorship and political restrictions on free academic survey research. “V-Dem Index” measures the countries’ progress toward the achievement of ideal democratic principles of egalitarianism and liberalism, respect for human rights, free and fair elections, active participation of citizens in the political process, and common good as the motivation of political deliberations in the society. The aggregated democracy index which comprises all five of these components serves as the comprehensive measure of the transformation of political systems at the macro-level of comparative analysis.

Trajectories of political transformation, when measured by the aggregated macro-level democracy index based on the V-Dem data, are very similar to the patterns obtained from the Polity IV macro-level democracy measures. Democratization in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan is deficient; the U-shape suggests that a consolidation of authoritarian rule took place during 1991–2000. The recent minor and modest liberalization in Uzbekistan, which is noted by experts in 2016–2018, can be either

Fig. 2.2 V-Dem Aggregated Democracy Index in Central Asia. *Source* Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) research project (www.v-dem.net). Index varies from 0 to 1 and represents an average score of the electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian democracy indexes

Fig. 2.3 V-Dem Democracy Indexes in Central Asia (2018). *Source* Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) research project (www.v-dem.net). Indexes vary from 0 to 1

attributed to a short-term revival or mark the beginning of a long-term democratization trend. Recently, emerged elements of liberalization are too weak yet to serve an evidence of a steady democratization in the foreseeable future. Thus, for instance, a minor liberalization was observed in Tajikistan in 1998–2002, after the end of the civil war. However, this trend was not sustained, and the short-term revival was substituted by autocratic consolidation with the country reaching, in 2018, its lowest democracy score since the political transformation commenced in 1991. Another example of slow but steady consolidation of autocracy is observed in Kazakhstan. All four countries have higher scores for the electoral democracy as the component of the index, but liberal and participatory democracy components remain at their lowest (Fig. 2.3).

2.4 Identity and National Pride in Central Asia

In the second part of the article, we will use the micro-level data from the World Values Survey and Eurasia Barometer research programs to examine the key characteristics of the value systems of the Central Asian public at the micro-level of citizens and explore the associational links between the paths and vectors of the political transformation process and the values of citizens in a given society (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2016d, 2017). The first difficult task for the post-Soviet states both in Europe and Asia was to create a new political community by consolidating the process of nation-building. The dissolution of the Soviet Union evaporated the supra-national Soviet identity that to a large extent served as backbone of the social and political sustainability of the national Soviet republics. After the Soviet identity lost its relevance in 1991, the old-new political elites in independent Central Asian states have been challenged with the necessity of nation-building, state-building, and filling the political vacuum that emerged after the dissolution of the central government in Moscow, while searching for sources of legitimacy of their rule within the new political agenda of independence. This process of state- and nation-building included the rewriting

of a national history by post-communist historians, the creation of national symbols, and new narratives. While at the beginning of post-Soviet transition, the leadership practiced the civic concept of the nation (and all residents of the new independent states were offered citizenship), substantial nationalizing measures, and at the same time suppression of ethnic identity and political rights of the minorities have been the main tools for the creation of coherent national community. This resulted in the prevailing policy of suppression of identities and political rights of ethnic minorities aimed at avoiding segregation, separatist movements, and political opposition undermining the new government. Nationalist policy has eroded liberal democratic values, foremost pluralism, and inclusiveness.

The available survey data at the micro-level of citizens suggests that the process of nation-building has been accomplished in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan (Inglehart et al. 2014). The vast majority of respondents have the strongest feeling of belonging to their national community (Fig. 2.4). National identity is an important component of the value systems of citizens of newly established independent states and crucial for their coherent development. Support for the national community reflected via the feelings of national belonging and national pride represents the most encompassing and basic level of political support according to the framework of a regime support as developed by Easton (1965, 1975) noted that national identity is essential for the endurance and long-term sustainability of a nation state and could provide a reservoir of diffuse support in times of political stress. Similarly, Almond and Verba (1963, 1980) emphasized the importance of national pride as part of the civic culture, especially as it involves pride in the political accomplishments of the nation.

Local identities emphasize the differences among individuals as they appeal to the peculiarities of the settlement or region of origin, namely its specific culture, a particular ethnic or sub-ethnic belonging. Strong micro-level attachment to the unique local community can make individuals less accepting of diversity and thus contributes to lower levels of trust and higher xenophobia in society. In the survey of 2012–2014, in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, only 29% respondents suggested that

Fig. 2.4 Identity Structure in Central Asia (2011). *Source* World Values Survey (2010–2014) (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>). Data provided in percentages

they trust representatives of other nationalities and only 24 and 20% said they trust people of another religion. Kazakhstani society appears to be more inclusive and trusting: 57 and 46% said they trust other nationalities and other religions.

A very high significance for local, regional, tribal or ethnic identities was an important obstacle to overcome in the process of building national identities in Central Asia. Strong local, tribal affiliations, and low attachment to the national community could have been used as a powerful tool for mobilization of the population. In a newly established independent state, such a situation would favor regional leaders or the opposition as a potential driver of federalization and segregation of power—a scenario the central government wanted to avoid. Kazakhstan, the country with the smallest share of the titular nation (68% Kazakhs)—comparing to Kyrgyzstan (73% Kyrgyz people) and Uzbekistan (84% Uzbeks)—experienced the most repressive nation-building process which resulted in the lowest levels of local affiliations the citizens currently experience. Local identities (affiliation with your local community, settlement, neighborhood) remains relatively strong in Kyrgyzstan, where the pro-democratic vector of national development made the nation-building process less suppressive, and in Uzbekistan, where the country's lengthy international isolation contributed to society's unification and developed the feeling of national belonging while at the same time maintaining strong ties with the local communities. Correspondingly, Uzbekistan also has the biggest proportion of citizens willing to fight for their country in case of a war (94% comparing to 72 and 77% in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) and also the highest level of the feeling of national pride (88% of respondents feel “very proud” about their national belonging—comparing to 55–60% in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan). Citizens in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have also developed some forms of supra-national identities while the respondents in Kazakhstan feel greater alienation and less closeness to both the population of other Central Asian societies and the world as a whole.

2.5 Democratic Values and Pro-democratic Support

Among the various elements of a democratic culture, the idea that democracy is preferable to any of its authoritarian regime alternatives is considered fundamental to a stable democratic system (Rose et al. 1998; Diamond 2008; Linz and Stepan 1996). This is because a commitment to democracy as the preferred form of government implies the rejection of anti-democratic movements, whose proponents aim to undermine or overthrow a newly emerging democratic regime. Democracy is more deeply rooted when the citizenry embraces it as “the only game in town” (Diamond 2008; Linz and Stepan 1996). From the perspective of an assertive democratic culture, this domain of support for democracy is the key “battleground” on which the viability of a democratic culture is decided upon (Pye and Verba 1965, Haerpfer 2008).

Central Asian societies are characterized by a particularly strong support for strong authoritarian leaders (Fig. 2.5). This pattern is a consequence of the political transfor-

Fig. 2.5 Support for democratic and autocratic rule in Central Asia (2011). *Source* World Values Survey (2010–2014) (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>). Indexes vary from 1 to 4

mation process when both economic dislocation, ideological vacuum, and external vulnerability generated an existential crisis for the population at the beginning of the post-Soviet transition (Patnaik 2018). A strong leader, a “father of the nation,” was seen as a savior who could establish peace and stability in the new independent states. A strong leader, therefore, in the mass consciousness of Central Asian societies, is associated with the notions of “order” and “stability” rather than “despotism” and “tyranny”—as it would probably be seen in quite a few Western countries with an established system of liberal democracy. A rejection of the principles of liberal democracy by the “strong leaders” of the new Central republics causes little dissent in the population—because as we will see later on, there is overall little demand for the actual democratic freedoms and liberalism in the everyday life of Central Asian societies at the micro-level of the citizenry.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought very specific challenges to these countries; the reduction of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, and maintaining inter-ethnic peace and social stability were seen as the primary tasks for the new government. Surveys conducted in the 2000s and 2010s confirm that the highest level of political confidence and political support in the region is for those political regimes which deliver higher levels of well-being for their societies. It is also claimed that the experiences of “color revolutions” in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan were driven not so much by discontent with the authoritarianism practiced by the political elite, but by the failure of the state leadership to meet the socio-economic needs of the population (Patnaik 2018). In particular, despite the internationally acknowledged successful efforts of Kyrgyzstan in building a democratic political system, the low efficiency of the government in resolving socio-economic problems (which accompanied the transition process in more or less all former Soviet or Communist states) contributed to the citizens’ disappointment and disillusionment with democracy at the micro-level of post-Soviet societies. The ongoing inter-tribal cleavages, high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality caused the increased demand for a “strong leader” in Kyrgyzstan in 2011, when such a “strong leader” was seen as “a good way to govern this country” in various degrees by 82% of the respondents—compared to 55% in Uzbekistan and 64% in Kazakhstan, as well as 60% in

Kyrgyzstan back in 2004. As the 2011 survey in Kyrgyzstan was completed at a time when post-revolution turbulence was just finished, and the new president Atambayev was elected in fair and democratic elections, it will be essential to estimate the indicators of support for different political regimes in Kyrgyzstan at a later time once the micro-level data is available.

Paradoxically, support for democracy as the best system of governance is also quite high among the Central Asian public. In this context, it is important to stress the emerging discourse on the variety of notions of democracy (Welzel and Kirsch 2018). Scholars working in the field conclude that authoritarian societies are characterized by a widespread “authoritarian notion of democracy” when political leaders in Kazakhstan, Russia, and China claim their political regimes to be so-called managed or sovereign democracies. For example, in WVS-6 (2010–2014), when asked to estimate the democratic nature of their political system on a ten-point scale, citizens of Kyrgyzstan estimated it as 6.1, in Kazakhstan as 6.8, and in China as 6.4. The question was excluded from the survey in Uzbekistan though. While in Political Science terms, presenting autocratic rule as some form of a democracy would be a substitution of notions, promotion of this view has been quite successful in Central Asian countries (as well as China). While citizens in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan are generally familiar with the underlying principles of liberal democracy (see Fig. 2.6), both elements of autocratic governance and aspects characterizing wealth redistribution in the society in the minds of Central Asian citizens are very closely associated with the concept of a democracy as well. Central Asian citizens are aware of free and fair elections, civic rights, and equality being the cornerstones of a democratic political regime, yet they expand the concept of a democracy to the practices of authoritarianism, as well as loading this concept with substantial economic expectations. Strong support for a democratic political system, which was found in all Central Asian states (see Fig. 2.5 earlier), thus, refers not only to the citizen’s willingness to elect political leaders in free and fair elections and the establishment of rule of law, but also to have a system which delivers a certain level of societal and

Fig. 2.6 Notions of Democracy in Central Asia (2011). *Source* World Values Survey (2010–2014) (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>). Indexes vary from 1 to 10

economic well-being, and where authoritarian elements can be acceptable, as long as their government performance is at a satisfactory level in the eyes of the population. In these conditions, a regime which “delivers” good government “outputs” has a high chance of receiving strong support from the population, even if the political leaders will neglect to exercise liberal democratic procedures. Moreover, memories of the civil war in Tajikistan and the turbulence of the post-Soviet transition in the 1990s make the narratives of peace and stability at this stage more desired for the population as compared to the liberal democratic values.

Low levels of citizens’ participation in the political life of the country are another feature of Central Asian societies (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2016a, 2016c). Central Asia did not witness any substantial mass movements either for the greater autonomy within the USSR in the late 1980s or for the national independence in early 1990s. Consequently, there was little public accountability of the transition process for a long time. Contrary to Central Asia, in Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltics where popular pro-independence movements were strong, citizens came to play a more significant role in the public life of the country during the transition period (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2016b, 2014b). Uprisings and protests occurred from time to time in Kyrgyzstan (less frequently in Kazakhstan), and citizens used these means to express their displeasure with the government performance and articulate their demands. However, the lack of solidarity and cohesion as well as an absence of past experience with democratic participation in public affairs pre-defined a primarily weak and insignificant role for citizens in setting the dynamics and paths of post-Soviet political transitions in Central Asia (The Tulip Revolution is one exception from this pattern). A high interest in the political life of the society, according to the WVS-6 (2010–2014), was indicated by about 25% of the respondents in Kyrgyzstan and around 10% in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Central Asian countries whose economies were able to benefit from rich natural resources (primarily Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) were even less affected by citizens’ dissent and civil unrest. Similar to the modern Gulf monarchies, the relative economic well-being created a “cushion” for the population and a “safety bumper” for the national government when non-democratic elements in the governance style have been balanced by the high economic benefits delivered to the citizenry. With the economic troubles and decline of the national currency, which Kazakhstan experiences since 2012, civil unrests have become more frequent and issues of corruption of the state authorities, lack of transparency, suppression of the media, and the malfunctioning of political institutions have re-entered the public discourse in that country.

2.6 Post-Materialist Value Change in Central Asia

Values such as personal safety, economic progress, external security, and social stability are deeply embedded in both group culture and an individual’s conscious beliefs about the significance of the subjects or virtues. A powerful tool in explaining the

role of values for the social and political transformation of the societies has been proposed by the theory of post-materialism value change developed by Ronald (1977, 1997). In his book *Modernization and Postmodernization* (1997), Inglehart argued that economic, political and cultural development are interrelated and take place in a coherent way. Modernization, which is linked with urbanization, industrialization, and the spread of education, changes the social and economic environment, which in its turn affects the way how people view the world and the virtues that they prioritize. Postmodern values in their turn bring new societal changes and facilitate the establishment of democratic institutions and regimes. The postmodern values system, with its greater emphasis on the values of freedom, equality, self-expression, participation, and solidarity, has proven to be congruent with the flourishing of the liberal democratic political system. While the establishment of a democratic regime to a large extent requires the emergence of its structural pre-requisites (such as free and fair elections, democratic institutions), the flourishing of a democracy is subject to pro-democratic values being deeply embedded in the consciousness of the population and prioritized by them over values congruent with authoritarian regimes.

According to Inglehart, value change in society occurs via the process of inter-generational value shift. This theory suggests that the priority of survival (materialist), existential, and economic values under certain conditions is replaced by an emphasis on the new values of autonomy and self-expression (post-materialist). Inglehart found that the emerging abundance and existential security (first experienced by the post-war generations after 1945) encouraged them to take their material security and personal safety for granted and instead attach greater importance to intangible values such as self-expression, autonomy, freedom of speech, gender equality, tolerance, environmental, and ecological values. According to the theory, with the growth of economic well-being and security levels, such post-material values will gradually increase among the population in the process of generational replacement, especially among the young age cohorts who experience affluence and security during their childhood and youth. Actualization of the values of freedom, inclusiveness, and self-expression would prompt citizens to amend the ways in which society and political system are organized by discarding authoritarian systems which restricts liberties and limit the opportunities for citizens' empowerment.

Some increase of the post-materialist elements in the value systems of the new, younger generation, and post-Soviet age cohorts of the Central Asian public (Fig. 2.7) indicates a transformation of the value system of the Central Asian societies occurring since 1991 alongside the political transition of post-Soviet regimes in the region. Post-materialist values have their greatest score in Kyrgyzstan, which is the closest to the society with the predominantly "mixed" system of values (which combines elements of both materialist and post-materialist values and equals to the score 2 on the scale above) and which is the only country in the region to establish a democratic political regime. At the same time, despite Kyrgyzstan having the highest score in post-materialist values among the three studied countries, there was no significant increase in these types of values among the youngest generation born in the period 1984-1993. As Inglehart has proven, while the improvement of economic and existential security leads to the advancement of post-materialist values, a decline in living conditions can

Fig. 2.7 Post-Materialist Values Dynamics Across Age Cohorts in Central Asia (2011). *Source* World Values Survey (2010–2014) (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>). Indexes vary from 1 to 3 (1 = materialist; 2 = mixed; 3 = post-materialist value system). As WVS surveys adult population (18+) only, the youngest age cohort surveyed in 2010–2012 was those born in 1984–1993

also have the opposite effect and contribute to actualization of materialist or survival values, for example, the support for economic growth and improvement of the micro-economy of households and families. Existential survival values in their turn are associated with ethnocentrism, low levels of trust, intolerance of dissent, xenophobia, low assessment of freedom and human rights, acceptance of authoritarianism, as well as obedience. The relative economic, social, and political instability, and the clashes of political elites and political uprisings experienced by Kyrgyzstan during the first two decades of post-Soviet transition halted further advancement of the values of post-materialism and self-expression among the new generation. Presumably, further consolidation of democracy in Kyrgyzstan would be congruent with the establishment of peaceful social and political development and economic stability and growth which in their turn will trigger actualization of the values of freedom, liberty, participation, and self-expression.

Like most of the post-Soviet countries, Uzbek and Kazakh societies remain predominantly materialist (materialist values system equal to score 1 on the scale). As materialistic values are associated with higher security needs, societies with a predominant materialistic value system support authoritarian leadership styles, show strong sense of national pride, strongly advocate for the preservation of a large army and are more willing to sacrifice civil liberties in the name of law and order. However, the situation inside these two countries differs in the part which concerns the youngest age cohort, whose early socialization occurred in the time of the USSR's decline and after independence. In Uzbekistan, the ratio between materialist and post-materialist values remain without significant change over the generations suggesting that the consolidation of an authoritarian regime and the country's economic and cultural isolation during most of its independence (1991–2016) contributed to the maintenance of a unique stability of the value system with the new generations reproducing the same traditional and Soviet value system which is inherent to the older generations. In Kazakhstan, the opposite occurred. The rapid economic growth, the regime's

Fig. 2.8 Effect of Education and Income on Post-Materialist Values. *Source* World Values Survey (2010–2014) (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>). Indexes varies from 1 to 3

openness, and the social and political stability over the first 25 years of independence facilitated a change of values among the new generation of citizens and contributed to the significant increase in post-materialist values among the young age cohorts in Kazakhstan. As post-materialist values are associated with the rising demands for participation in decision-making in economic and political life, the initiated inter-generational value shift in Kazakhstan implies the potential for post-materialist values are associated with the rising demands for participation in decision-making in their economic and political life, while the initiated inter-generational value shift in Kazakhstan implies the potential for regime democratization in the future after the cohorts with prevailing post-materialist values reach their critical mass (Fig. 2.8).

Even in societies with very homogeneous value systems across generations, post-materialist values tend to be positively affected by education and urbanization (Fig. 2.8). In all three studied countries, the actualization of post-materialist values increases among those with higher level of economic well-being at the micro-level of the household economy, and with tertiary education. Both urbanization and higher education expose individuals to greater flows of knowledge and information, often reducing unemployment and inequality, while contributing to higher levels of economic and existential security, thus fostering a shift to post-materialist values. According to the World Bank, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan feature similar levels of urbanization at the moment with the share of rural population being around 64%; in Kyrgyzstan, this indicator is lower and constitutes 44%. The same World Bank database suggests that enrollment in tertiary education is the highest in Kazakhstan—54%, lower in Kyrgyzstan—41%, and the lowest in Uzbekistan—10%. The cumulative effect generated by discrepancies in access to education, income, and access to the labor markets explains the variation in post-materialist self-expression values both between the countries and within them (across the regions and in distinction between urban and rural populations).

2.7 Conclusion

The post-Soviet countries in Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—were, during the historical period of the Soviet Union, at the geographical periphery of the USSR and in the “Shadow of History and Geopolitics” in the course of the twentieth century, and before during the period of the Tsarist Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. The geopolitical tectonic shifts after the end of the so-called Second World of Communism in general and the Soviet Union in particular have moved Central Asia and those five post-Soviet countries toward the middle of the so-called New Silk Road between China and Europe on the one hand and located between the BRICS countries Russia in the North and India in the South, on the other. One main reason for the delay in political transformations in Central Asia in any direction was the absence of non-communist elites from non-communist religious groups, trade unions, music, literature, philosophy, arts, and sciences, who could take over the new political systems in post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe. The absence of alternative political and economic elites in Central Asia facilitated the unbroken continuity of the old Soviet elite taking over the top positions as presidents and prime ministers in the new political systems in Central Asia after the end of the Soviet Union in December 1991, without being challenged by new alternative and democratic elites. The main reason for the lack of successful democratization in the five studied countries in Central Asia was the structural weakness of the legal system, the legislative system and the media system in all countries, and the structural dominance of the executive system of the presidency and central government. The one and only country within Central Asia which achieved, at the macro-level (Polity 4 and Freedom House Indices) and the micro-level (World Values Survey and Eurasia Barometer Survey) of comparative analysis, the status of a “Democracy,” is Kyrgyzstan. The latter is the only country in Central Asia which underwent a “color revolution” after 1992, the so-called Tulip Revolution.

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