

Researching the Kyrgyz State: The Role of the First President in the State-Building Process

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This paper calls for attention to state-building processes in Central Asia. Two decades after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, state capacity and institutional set-up in post-Soviet countries are becoming more important, as economic, social and political problems continue to persist. Kyrgyzstan, which has experienced the toppling down of the president twice, deserves particular attention in the entire post-Soviet space. Inspired from March 2005 and June 2010 events, this paper puts forward several arguments. Firstly, it argues that the Kyrgyz experience indicates a deeper institutional problem, the weakness of the Kyrgyz state, rather than mere political and social disappointment with corrupt authoritarian regimes. Secondly, and most importantly it argues that the Kyrgyz state has been weak because the first president of the Kyrgyz Republic, Askar Akaev, was an outsider to the political system of the country. It examines four elements of state-building in newly-independent states; power sharing among the elite, institution building, reformation of state-society relations and finally re-distribution of wealth and building economic capacity. Akaev, as a president with very little experience in politics, remained a weak chief state-builder and failed to achieve the four above-mentioned goals. Moreover, the weakness of the Kyrgyz state was reinforced in time with the absence of a strong central leader, as divisions among the elite increased and institutional capacity remained low, societal cohesion could not be accomplished and economic resources have been inefficiently distributed between the regions. Inherent weaknesses were not overcome by the second incumbent Bakiev, due mainly to infrastructural legacy of the previous period. In conclusion, the paper tries to draw attention to studying the state in Central Asia as well as in the rest of the post-Soviet region in addition to regime trajectories. The argument that the roots for the weakness of the Kyrgyz state should be looked for in the initial president's role can pave the way for comparative studies with other post-Soviet countries.