

Identity Salience, Political Involvement and Cross-Cutting Cooperation in Kyrgyzstan

Konstantin Ash (University of Central Florida)

The project I aim to conduct in Kyrgyzstan asks a fundamental question regarding identity: does the salience of overlapping identity-based ties increase or reduce cooperation between ethnic groups? I aim to evaluate this question in Kyrgyzstan using a survey experiment that establishes the extent to which ethnic, religious and national identity matters to individuals and then the effect of overlapping salience of ethnic, religious and national identities on cooperation between members of divergent ethnic groups. I expect to see a more nuanced effect, where apolitical individuals to whom religious and national identity are relatively more important are more likely to express support for interethnic cooperation.

The question of the role of identity in political outcomes has extensively been studied extensively by scholars of public service provision (i.e. Alesina, Baqir and Easterly 1999), electoral behavior (i.e. Chandra 2004) and conflict (i.e. Horowitz 1985), to name a few outcomes. The underlying findings are that diversity, especially when exacerbated by political factors, leads to less optimal outcomes, from increased clientelism and vote buying in elections, decreased quality of public service provision and more propensity for conflict, were groups unequally positioned in society. However daunting, other forms of diversity may mitigate the effects of the first. It is thought that cross-cutting divisions of identity - shared characteristics among members of otherwise divides societies - can make for cooperation between those that share characteristics, but otherwise belong to divided groups (Dahrendorf 1959, Dunning and Harrison 2010).

I postulate that it is too simplistic to assume that all cross-cutting cleavages will increase cooperation. Specifically, I believe that political involvement will dull the effect of cross-cutting cleavages and . Kyrgyzstan presents an ideal test case for this hypothesis, as the country's South has highly relevant identity-based cleavage in the form of ethnicity, which divides its residents along ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek lines. However, the region's residents also share many identity characteristics: nearly all are Sunni Muslims, from the same region of the country and hold a national identity as Kyrgyzstanis. Through a survey experiment, I aim to test whether those individuals that are more religious and identify more with the Kyrgyz Republic as a nation than their ethnic group are more likely to embrace interethnic cooperation and whether this effect is strongest among those that are not politically involved.

I plan to field the survey in Batken, Osh and Jalal-abad oblasts and Osh city in July and August of 2017, sampling 1,000 individuals over the age of 18, stratified across two major ethnic groups in the region: Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and utilizing enumerators from both communities. While the survey will be conducted through a survey firm, I aim to hire research assistants to monitor all survey teams as they carry out the survey and to train those assistants in the appropriate conduct of survey research and survey research methods.