Authoritarian Regime Stability in Uzbekistan under Patronal President Islam Karimov

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Abstract

This paper investigates the nature of Uzbekistan's political system under President Islam Karimov through the lenses of patronal presidentialism to explain the factors conducive to the durability of the current regime. The paper argues that the longevity of the authoritarian regime in Uzbekistan can be best understood by a methodology that reconciles the propositions of institutional analysis of authoritarian rule with conventional methods of maintaining power such as coercion and patronage. Revealing the limitation of mainstream literature that overemphasizes neopatrimonialism and informality to understand domestic politics, the paper asserts that patronal president Islam Karimov assumed multiple instruments of power at the intersection of state and economy, which ensured regime stability in Uzbekistan until his death in 2016.

Keywords

Uzbekistan – Islam Karimov – patronal presidentialism – patronage politics – authoritarian regime stability

This article is concerned with understanding the durability of the political system that emerged in Uzbekistan through the course of its independence under its first president, Islam Karimov. I argue that the concept of *patronal presidentialism* developed by Henry Hale can be used to explain the stability of the Uzbek regime under Islam Karimov. In a nutshell, patronal presidentialism describes the focal political institutions which surrounds an autocrat's

authority and shape politics in an authoritarian regime.[1] Central to the patronal president is the presidential office which enhances the autocrat's ability to concentrate different instruments of power (political, economic, and ideological) at the intersection of state and economy. The use of patronal presidentialism as an explanatory framework can illuminate the study of authoritarian regime stability in post-Soviet countries. Unlike informality-based accounts, the concept allows us to reconcile the institutional analysis of authoritarian rule with informal mechanisms of maintaining power, such as the informal patronage that dictators avail. In other words, patronal presidentialism accounts for the importance of formal institutional underpinnings that dictators rely on to exercise power and structure the interactions between the elite and the general public.

Islam Karimov, the first president of Uzbekistan after independence in 1991, was one of the world's longest-reigning dictators. Building a super-presidential system of authoritarian rule after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Karimov maintained a repressive rule that crushed any ounce of societal opposition until he died in 2016. The puzzle of why autocracies[2] like Uzbekistan under Karimov emerged following the Soviet collapse and how they maintained stability over time triggered much research.[3] In explaining the emergence of authoritarian politics after the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars first analyzed how the legacies of the Soviet regime enabled leaders to establish strong presidential power.[4] Yet, the particular features of the presidential institution in Central Asia highlighted the power of informal personalism over formal political institutions. This nuanced dichotomy between formal and informal politics brought increased attention to such concepts as clan politics and neopatrimonialism.[5] Using the concept, scholars argued that the skillful use of informal practices on top of formal ones that rulers utilize to monopolize power and resources makes these regimes resilient to challenges.[6] Yet, scholars

1 Henry E. Hale, *Patronal politics: Eurasian regime dynamics in comparative perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 82–83.

2 I use autocracy, dictatorship, and authoritarian regimes interchangeably throughout the paper.

3 Michael McFaul, "The fourth wave of democracy and dictatorship: noncooperative transitions in the postcommunist world," *World politics* (2002): 212–244.

4 Sally Cummings, *Power and change in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2004), 5–10.

5 Rico Isaacs, "Neopatrimonialism and beyond: reassessing the formal and informal in the study of Central Asian politics," *Contemporary Politics* 20, no. 2 (2014): 229–245; Laruelle, Marlene. "Discussing neopatrimonialism and patronal presidentialism in the Central Asian contexts" *Demokratizatsiya* 20, no. 4 (2012): 301.

6 Alisher Ilkhamov, "Neopatrimonialism, interest groups and patronage networks: the impasses of the governance system in Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 1 (2007): 80–84.

have paid relatively little attention to the issue that arises when linking informal politics to regime stability.[7]

This article proposes revisions to this long-held assumption that reduces the politics of post-Soviet Central Asia to the informal domain by developing an alternative framework that incorporates an analysis of formal political institutions. Although limited to a single case, it makes a modest theoretical contribution to the literature of comparative authoritarian regimes in post-Soviet countries. A thorough understanding of political-economic structures in post-Soviet terrain is crucial for analyzing the dynamics of regime change.[8] While previous studies focused on how informal patronage networks and personal loyalties supersede formal institutions, this article demonstrates that regime stability hinged on the dynamic interaction between the formal and informal. If formal institutions did not matter, leaders would not have expended "vast resources to alter them."[9]

1 Institutional Analysis and the Stability of Personalist Authoritarianism

The persistence of authoritarian regimes has prompted a diverse group of scholars to advance theories about what counts as an authoritarian regime and the nature of the politics that play out in such regimes.[10] An authoritarian regime is usually defined as a political system with limited pluralism, political ideology, and mobilization, in which a ruler or small group "exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones."[11] Over the years, however, a growing heterogeneity of the authoritarian world has defied a single definition and challenged comparative politics scholars to find new typologies that allow for internal differences. This has led to a swath of studies on authoritarian regime typologies based on either how such regimes fare along the continuum of the democracy-vs-autocracy spectrum or how

7 Anne Pitcher, Mary H. Moran, and Michael Johnston, "Rethinking patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism in Africa," *African Studies Review* (2009): 125–156.

8 Scott Radnitz, "The color of money: privatization, economic dispersion, and the post-Soviet 'revolutions'," *Comparative Politics* 42, no. 2 (2010): 127–146.

9 Timothy Frye, "A politics of institutional choice: post-communist presidencies," *Comparative political studies* 30, no. 5 (1997): 527.

10 Richard Snyder, "Beyond electoral authoritarianism: the spectrum of nondemocratic regimes," *Electoral authoritarianism: The dynamics of unfree competition* (2006): 219–231.

11 Juan J. Linz, *An authoritarian regime: Spain* (Tidnings och Tryckeri Aktiebolag, 1964), 159.

they vary from one another.[12] While the former categorization simply disaggregates the regime by the degree of "autocracy," the latter explains the variations in authoritarian regimes based on how institutional differences within authoritarian regimes structure elites' political behavior on such matters as decision-making, leadership selection or succession, and ways of handling the opposition. These specific characteristics of regime types produce different political and economic outcomes which then affect their longevity.[13]

The study of personalist authoritarian regimes has a long tradition in comparative politics. In many parts of the world, including Central Asia, personalist authoritarian regimes have become the defining feature of political life.[14] Although there is hardly a scholarly consensus about what counts as personal rule, a personalist regime can be defined as a polity in which power stems from a single ruler who in turn utilizes patronage networks to distribute the material benefits and access to the public office to his entourage in exchange for their loyalty.[15] In this type of authoritarian regime, the repressive social order is set by an unconstrained individual, "in which, whether social or political structures are pro forma retained or not, all policy dictates derive from him, and all of society is viewed as his personal fief."[16]

A personalist regime is different from other authoritarian regimes in terms of access to key political positions, the perks of office, patterns of elite interaction, and decision-making patterns in important areas.[17] The features of a personalist regime can be observed in a myriad of crucial regime dimensions such as who rules, how the ruler rules, whom the ruler rules, and why the ruler rules.[18] However, a mere personalist character of the regime does not explain

12 Natasha M. Ezrow and Erica Frantz, *Dictators and dictatorships: Understanding authoritarian regimes and their leaders* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2011), 15–20.

13 Barbara Geddes, "What do we know about democratization after twenty years?" *Annual review of political science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 115–144; Gandhi, Jennifer, and Adam Przeworski. "Cooperation, cooptation, and rebellion under dictatorships," *Economics & politics* 18, no. 1 (2006): 1–26; Magaloni, Beatriz. "Credible power-sharing and the longevity of authoritarian rule." *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 4–5 (2008): 715–741.

14 Luca Anceschi, "After Personalism: Rethinking Power Transfers in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* (2020): 1–21.

15 Barbara Geddes, "What do we know about democratization after twenty years?" *Annual review of political science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 115–144.

16 Samuel Decalo, "African personal dictatorships," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 23, no. 2 (1985): 209–237.

17 Natasha M. Ezrow and Erica Frantz, *Dictators and dictatorships: Understanding authoritarian regimes and their leaders* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2011), 134.

18 Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder, "Mapping political regimes: How the concepts we use and the way we measure them shape the world we see," *Trabajo presentado en la Reunión Anual de la American Political Science Association, Chicago* (2004): 15–18.

the peculiarities of power dynamics or the stability of the regime. To shed more light on the nature of power exercise and the strategies of power maintenance that ensue continuous stability in the case of the personalist authoritarian regime of Uzbekistan, I utilize the concept of patronal presidentialism.[19]

2 Patronal Presidentialism and Instruments of Power

Patronal presidentialism refers to the focal political institutions around an autocrat's political authority that shape politics. The fundamental feature of patronal presidentialism is the executive institution—the presidential office—through which a ruler can systematically concentrate power at the expense of the other institutions.[20] Patronal presidents utilize three instruments of power that are vital for maintaining regime stability: political power, economic control, and ideological domination. Equipped with these, they are in an ideal position to counter threats that challenge their regime, direct the actions of the elite, and manage popular demands.[21]

A patronal president's political power consists of two important components; "first, the president is invested with great formal powers relative to other state organs and second, the president also wields a high degree of informal power based on widespread patron-client relationships at the intersection of the state and the economy."[22] The president's formal power is located within political institutions such as constitutions, elections, and parties, which can be manipulated to gain the upper hand vis-a-vis other institutions. These institutions are not merely designed as democratic veneers, as in the early independence years, but rather serve specific purposes.[23] While elections were used to legitimize the presidents' rule and establish a strong image of their

19 Henry E. Hale, "Democracy or autocracy on the march? The colored revolutions as normal dynamics of patronal presidentialism," *Communist and post-communist studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 305–329.; Henry E. Hale *Patronal politics: Eurasian regime dynamics in comparative perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

20 Ildar Gabdrafikov and Henry E. Hale, "Bashkortostan's Democratic Moment? Patronal Presidentialism, Regional Regime Change, and Identity in Russia," in Osamu Ieda and Tomohiko Uyama (eds), *Reconstruction and Interaction of Slavic Eurasia and Its Neighboring Worlds* (2006): 75–102.

21 Milan W. Svolik, *The politics of authoritarian rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

22 Henry E. Hale, "Regime cycles: democracy, autocracy, and revolution in post-Soviet Eurasia," *World Pol.* 58 (2005): 133.

23 Gerrit Krol, "Amending legislatures in authoritarian regimes: power sharing in post-Soviet Eurasia," *Democratization* (2020): 1–21.

invincibility, presidential parties became an important mechanism for co-opting the elite.[24] The choice for presidentialism, as Easter argues, was careful planned by the elites who wanted to have access to the state's power resources while resisting the encroachments of political and economic changes.[25] For this, Central Asian presidents frequently manipulated the constitutions to consolidate and centralize power under the executive. Fish defines such constitutional order which allows a single authority to create an extensive concentration of power as super-presidentialism.[26] Central Asian super-presidents acquired different kinds of formal powers, including both specific and residual in the constitution that involved appointments and dismissals, which were used to influence officials based in state and government institutions.[27]

The second component of political power that presidents relied upon to bolster their authority comes from the informal mechanism, as denoted by the term *patronal*. The informal component of political power refers to the personalized nature of decision-making, where presidents wield political power through selective transfers of resources outside formal institutions.[28] Such a personalist system involves patronage practices and networks that co-opt elites and officials into the regime, coercing them to declare personal loyalty and shy away from using their position to challenge the president. This is because patronal presidents such as Islam Karimov preside over a political system in which access to appointments and economic resources are linked to access to their person.[29] What is important is not the formal office of the presidency, but the personal *authority* of the president.[30] In patronal presidentialism, the presence of informal rules does not necessarily replace formal institutions; rather, the formal and informal interact.[31] While formal institutions create political

24 Beatriz Magaloni and Ruth Kricheli, "Political order and one-party rule," *Annual review of political science* 13 (2010): 123–143.

25 Gerald M. Easter, "Preference for presidentialism: Postcommunist regime change in Russia and the NIS," *World Politics* 49, no. 2 (1997): 196.

26 Steven M. Fish, "The dynamics of democratic erosion," *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy* (2001): 69.

27 Sally Cummings, "Introduction: power and change in Central Asia," in Sally Cummings (ed.) *Power and change in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2002) 11–33.

28 Henry E. Hale, "Regime cycles: democracy, autocracy, and revolution in post-Soviet Eurasia," *World Pol.* 58 (2005): 133.

29 Nurbulat Masanov, "Political elite in Kazakhstan: The changes of Kazakhstani political elite during the period of sovereignty," *International Eurasian Institute for Economic and Political Research* (2000).

30 Rico Isaacs, "Nur Otan, informal networks and the countering of elite instability in Kazakhstan: Bringing the 'formal' back in," *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 6 (2013): 1055–1079.

31 Ibid.

boundaries, informal relations provide content. The mingling of formal and informal power gives the president an advantage in defusing elite collective action by employing divide and rule tactics.

The second instrument of power that strengthens the rule of patronal presidents comes from their control over the economy. Presiding over a political environment similar to what Bates describes in African countries, Central Asian presidents brought state control over economic resources to consolidate their rule, facilitate control over the political process, and secure personal gains.[32] Even though state control produced inefficient economic policies, such control perpetuated personalist regimes by facilitating political patronage and repression whereby "any group that became politically mobilized against the rulers could be punished, while those that remained loyal were rewarded."[33] Thus, access to the state became an important, if not the only, channel for the circulation of economic rents which different interest groups could tap into. Similar to the logic in rentier states which monopolize the distribution of rents, state control over the economy creates an incentive for groups to show loyalty to the system and patron in chief instead of challenging them. By taking firm control over vital economic sectors, this kind of political leadership also ensured that economic wealth would not be used to create alternative power centers or challenge the president.[34] The reasoning behind this was that it is only the state, not independent oligarchs or business leaders, that should remain as the prime avenue for people to depend upon for job and economic opportunities. As neighboring Kyrgyzstan can testify, people become more demanding of political freedom when the private sector takes over the state's economic role through economic liberalization and privatization.[35]

The final instrument of power at the discretion of the patronal president is ideology and the symbolic politics. As multiple studies show, a certain amount of legitimacy is essential for fostering compliance and maintaining regime stability.[36] Briefly put, after the independence of their country, presidents

32 Paulina L. Jones, *The transformation of Central Asia: States and societies from Soviet rule to independence* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 5–15.

33 Daron Acemoglu, Thierry Verdier, and James A. Robinson, "Kleptocracy and divide-and-rule: A model of personal rule," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 2, no. 2–3 (2004): 162–192.

34 Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the wealthy: Predatory regimes and elite-led protests in Central Asia* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 8.

35 Kelly M. McMann, *Economic autonomy and democracy: Hybrid regimes in Russia and Kyrgyzstan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1–28.

36 Martin Brusis, "The politics of legitimation in post-soviet Eurasia," in Martin Brusis, Joachim Ahrens, and Martin Schulze Wessel (ed.) *Politics and legitimacy in post-soviet Eurasia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1–17.

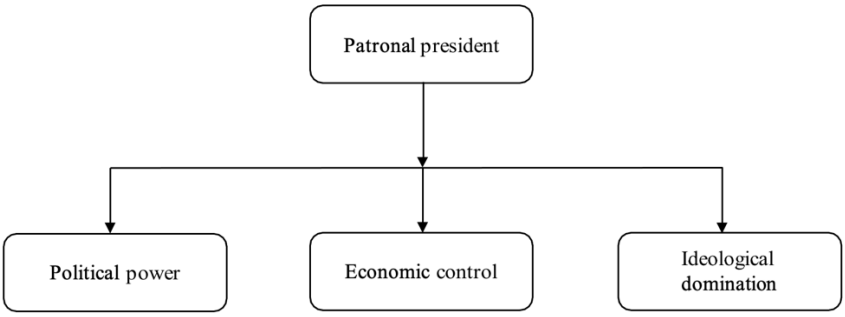

Figure 1 The instruments of power under the control of patronal presidents
Source: Author

urgently needed to demonstrate that their rule and design of political institutions were not a crude usurpation of power that relied on repression but were rather legitimate, reflecting societal interests and realizing broader social purposes. As demonstrated by Cummings, such legitimization usually stems from the symbolic mechanisms, discourses, and ideological signification through which the domination was constructed and stability was established.[37] The use of such "rhetoric paternalism" and symbolic discourse was evident in the nation-building narrative closely linked to the president's personality as the father of nations. Such rhetoric and symbolism were used to bolster the presidents' charismatic authority and domination, taking the form of pervasive portraits of presidents displayed in public places, famous slogans, and mass spectacles.[38] As in the case of Uzbekistan under Karimov, the presidents' unique features and qualities were "emphasized along with their proclivity to deliver state security and prosperity."[39] In short, the mixture of multiple sources of power helped the patronal presidents in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, maintain their grip on power.

3 The Political Legacy of Soviet Rule in Uzbekistan

Before delving into my analysis of Uzbek's regime after independence, it is important to examine the deeply entrenched institutional legacies that the

37 Sally Cummings, "Inscapes, landscapes and greyscapes: the politics of signification in Central Asia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1083–1084.
38 Laura L. Adams, and Assel Rustemova, "Mass spectacle and styles of governmentality in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1249–1276.
39 Anna Matveeva, "Legitimising Central Asian authoritarianism: political manipulation and symbolic power," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1109.

Soviet Union bequeathed to the region. In many ways, these legacies contributed to the formation of present-day political and economic governance, as the new leadership had to employ the proven old techniques, institutions, and habits to navigate the political uncertainty that followed the Soviet collapse.[40] Scholars have advanced the idea that specific Soviet policies which aimed to change traditional society produced the opposite result of reinforcing clan identities that dominates present politics.[41] In reality, however, like cultural transformation, the Soviet nation-building established new political institutions that reconfigured power relations and fostered new political identities, changing the nature of old societal patterns.[42]

Uzbekistan was subject to diverging treatment under different Soviet periods. Advancing the idea of giving people territory along ethnic lines, Bolsheviks gained authority by giving the locals a say in their daily governance.[43] Yet, regionalism was not pervasive in local politics; it was rather the formal party structures which provided an institutional arrangement for the new polity.[44] After Lenin's death, Stalin established ruthless dictatorial rule by way of coercion in an attempt to consolidate power. Stalin needed to rely on the native cadres to permeate the peasant masses as they opposed the collectivization of agriculture.[45] For this, regional elites were "fully incorporated into the Soviet Communist Party structure and, as such, could be dismissed or demoted for failing to follow Moscow's directives."[46] As a result, the structure of the party hierarchy took a "institutionalized form by the 1940s and remained essentially the same thereafter."[47] Subsequent leaders, including Khrushchev and Brezhnev, started to deemphasize repression and instead worked toward building a more benign if still highly corrupt social contract with Soviet society. Witnessing the disruptions that Khrushchev's turnover of cadres caused,

40 Kangas D. Roger, "Uzbekistan: The Karimov Presidency—Amir Timur Revisited," in Sally Cummings (ed.) *Power and change in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2002), 140–159.

41 Kathleen Collins, *Clan politics and regime transition in Central Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 65.

42 Paulina L. Jones, *The transformation of Central Asia: States and societies from Soviet rule to independence* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 5–20.

43 Eric McGlinchey, *Chaos, violence, dynasty: politics and Islam in Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 53–54.

44 Nicklas K. Norling, "Myth and Reality: Politics in Soviet Uzbekistan." PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2014, 145.

45 James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan: a Soviet republic's road to sovereignty* (London: Routledge, 2018), 13.

46 Eric McGlinchey, *Chaos, violence, dynasty: politics and Islam in Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Pre, 2011), 61.

47 Nicklas K. Norling, *Party Problems and Factionalism in Soviet Uzbekistan: Evidence from the Communist Party Archives* (Washington DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University, 2017), 44.

Brezhnev promoted instead cadre stability and the devolution of both power and control of appointments to republic-level elites.[48] Such changes were manifested in Uzbekistan in the form of loosening the party's grip on cadre affairs, leaving significant room for local elites to maneuver the affairs of the Republic that would later, after independence, facilitate the power of certain patronage networks.[49]

Over time, the powerhouses in Soviet Uzbekistan became converged around the party and state apparatus's three main posts: the first secretary of the Communist Party, the president of the Supreme Soviet who was the head of state, and the prime minister. The secretaries acted as republican clients to the patron, who took care of the region's production and investment.[50] The result of patronage-based coalition-building politics led republican level first secretaries to gain tremendous power, access, and control over resources.[51] However, their political appointments and promotions in the state were not solely based on kin or clan-based affiliations. Instead, as Norling documents, Uzbekistan's patronage politics usually involved "group politics" consisting of those who shared similar careers and regions to the leader.[52] This can be seen through the prime example of Sharof Rashidov, first secretary (1959–83) who, hailing from Jizzakh/Samarkand network, became not only Brezhnev's "paladin" in Central Asia but also the candidate member of the Politburo.[53] Rashidov's power reflected the political changes in the Soviet Union during Brezhnev; although politically weak against the central command, Rashidov acquired enough autonomy in appointing his own republican-level cadres. However, with the onset of the "cotton scandal," Rashidov and his clients' deep

48 Henry, E. Hale, *Patronal politics: Eurasian regime dynamics in comparative perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 53.

49 James Critchlow, "Prelude to "Independence": How the Uzbek Party Apparatus Broke Moscow's Grip on Elite Recruitment," in William Fierman (ed.) *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2019), 134–138.

50 Nicklas K. Norling, "Myth and Reality: Politics in Soviet Uzbekistan," PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2014, 109.

51 Alexander Cooley, *Great games, local rules: the new power contest in Central Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25–26.

52 Nicklas K. Norling, *Party Problems and Factionalism in Soviet Uzbekistan: Evidence from the Communist Party Archives* (Washington DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University, 2017), 10.

53 William A. Clark, *Crime and Punishment in Soviet Officialdom: Combating Corruption in the Political Elite, 1965–1990* (London: Routledge, 2016), 188.

entrenchment in the party and state apparatus experienced a political purge under Mikhail Gorbachev.[54]

4 Independence and Power Consolidation

A new page in the history of Uzbekistan's politics started with the new Secretary, Islam Karimov, in 1989, then the first Secretary of the Kashkadarya region. Karimov served as the minister of finance and economics and headed the Gosplan during the Rashidov era.[55] Many scholars saw the Uzbek regime under Karimov as a simple continuity of communist rule under a different name.[56] Even before independence, Karimov took control of security services and high-level appointments. Despite destroying the party's institutional underpinnings, he retained the support of most of Uzbekistan's pre-independence elite, whose informal power base remained intact.[57]

Although Karimov was connected to the Rashidov network in his birthplace of Samarkand, his rise to power did not exclusively come as a result of his regional network's support.[58] The story behind his rise begins with the key elites and power brokers of various networks who stayed unchallenged and emerged emboldened after Gorbachev's purges; namely, Timur Alimov, Ismail Jurabekov, and Shukrullo Mirsaidov.[59] These three figures were "principal power brokers behind Karimov's rise to power in 1989."[60] For these elites, Karimov was an ideal candidate to be the first secretary who, not being deeply embedded in the factions, would maintain a balance between competing

54 Riccardo M. Cucciolla, "The Crisis of Soviet Power in Central Asia: The 'Uzbek cotton affair' (1975–1991)," PhD diss., IMT School for Advanced Studies, Lucca (2017), 165–200.

55 Shahram Akbarzadeh, *Uzbekistan and the United States: Authoritarianism, Islamism and Washington's new security agenda* (Zed Books, 2005), 8.

56 Martha B. Olcott, *Central Asia's second chance* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010).

57 Barbara Geddes, Joseph George Wright, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. *How dictatorships work: Power, personalization, and collapse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 61–64.

58 Donald S. Carlisle, "Power and politics in Soviet Uzbekistan: from Stalin to Gorbachev," in William Fierman (ed.) *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2019), 117.

59 Kathleen Collins, *Clan politics and regime transition in Central Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 122.

60 Nicklas K. Norling, "Myth and Reality: Politics in Soviet Uzbekistan," PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2014, 251.

factions.[61,62] From his early days in office, he performed this task by sharing his power with the new government's key elites.[63] In other words, the new political environment featured multiple competing networks, as Hale describes, each independent of Karimov's power.[64]

Although Karimov seemingly emerged as a powerful political figure after independence, his power was precarious in the face of potential challengers and emerging political movements.[65] Karimov also knew that he needed to eliminate other influential power brokers and build up a single pyramid network with himself as a top patron if he wanted to wield real power. Thus, his main concern was the question of consolidating his political power while also loosening his dependence on former allies, which he managed to do within a short period.[66] His first move in this direction was the gradual elimination of powerful elites, especially then Vice-President Shukrulla Mirsaidov, "gray cardinal" of the economy, and Ismail Jurabekov and Timur Alimov, who tied Karimov's hands until the 2000s.[67] Because of influence, the clients of their networks dominated both the state apparatus and key economic sectors. The elimination of Mirsaidov came very soon after his allergic reaction to the increasing power of Karimov.[68] Mirsaidov was demoted to the post of State Secretary after abolishing the post of Vice-President and later marginalized from the political scene with an accusation of financial misconduct. The elimination of Jurabekov proved more difficult given his deep entrenchment of power and network, but he too withered away from the political scene in 2004.

61 Kangas D. Roger, "Uzbekistan: The Karimov Presidency—Amir Timur Revisited," in Sally Cummings (ed.) *Power and change in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2002), 150–159.

62 Robert L. Canfield and Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek, *Ethnicity, Authority and Power in Central Asia: New Games Great and Small* (London: Routledge, 2010), 30.

63 Yury Fedorov, "Uzbekistan: clans, succession, and stability," *Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security* 18, no. 2 (2012): 46–48.

64 Henry E. Hale, *Patronal politics: Eurasian regime dynamics in comparative perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 64–65.

65 Neil Melvin, *Uzbekistan: transition to authoritarianism on the silk road* (Psychology Press, 2000), 30.

66 Donald S. Carlisle, "Islam Karimov and Uzbekistan: back to the future?" in William Fierman (ed.) *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2019), 112–115.

67 Nicklas K. Norling, "Myth and Reality: Politics in Soviet Uzbekistan." PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2014, 279.

68 William Fierman, "Political development in Uzbekistan: democratization?" in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot (ed.) *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 378.

5 Concentrating the Political, Economic, and Ideological Levers of Power

Through purges that were completed by the early 2000s, the Karimov regime completed its political transformation from communism to personalist autocracy with a high concentration of political, economic, and ideological levers of power under a single person.[69]

5.1 *Institutionalization of Formal Power and Bolstering of Informal Ties*

Following the victory in the presidential election of December 1991, Karimov's first decisive move to concentrate power was to subordinate the important centers of power through administrative and institutional means.[70] The institutionalization of formal presidential power was bolstered under the new constitution of December 1992, though it maintained a veneer of democratic separation of power.[71] Clearing a path for a hyper-centralized political system, the constitution carefully crafted a super-presidentialism. Moreover, the executive informally colonized the powers and prerogatives reserved for other components of the state.[72] In the new constitutional order, the presidency was regarded as the *custodian* for emerging institutions, reminiscent of the omnipresent Communist Party in the Soviet constitution. Thanks to the constitution, the president enjoyed far greater formal power than the legislative branch; he could wield significant power to dissolve parliament without the risk of being impeached, rule by presidential decrees without oversight, and appoint and dismiss prime ministers, judiciaries, and national and regional officials, including the security service.[73]

69 Neil Melvin, "Authoritarian pathways in Central Asia: A comparison of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz republic and Uzbekistan." in Roi Yaacov (ed.) *Democracy and Pluralism in Muslim Eurasia, London* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 127–128.

70 Roger D. Kangas, "Uzbekistan: The Karimov Presidency—Amir Timur Revisited," in Sally Cummings (ed.) *Power and change in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2002), 150–157.

71 Christian W. Haerpfer and Kseniya Kizilova, "Values and Transformation in Central Asia," in Anja Mihr (ed.) *Transformation and Development*, pp. 7–28. (Switzerland: Springer, 2020), 7–12.

72 Scott Newton, *The constitutional systems of the independent Central Asian states: a contextual analysis* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 127.

73 Steven M. Fish, "The dynamics of democratic erosion," in Richard D. Anderson, et al. (ed) *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 54–95.

Karimov's formal presidential power helped strip the autonomy of Oliy Majlis (the country's legislative body), with 250 seats from 1994 to 1999.[74] Oliy Majlis remained an essential venue for opposition groups to challenge Karimov's authoritarian policies.[75] First, Karimov had to concede the regional leaders seats in parliament to garner policy support.[76] However, over time, he carefully crafted an institutional design to control Oliy Majlis with the help of electoral rules and new parties, and thus diluted the power of regional leaders with varying interests. Following the de-legitimization of religious movements and nationalism by early 2000, Karimov formed five avowedly pro-government parties, each designed to represent different social sectors to reinforce an image of a multiple party system.[77] Finally, in 2004, Karimov managed to turn parliament into a bicameral system with an upper house dominated by presidential appointees, rendering it a rubber stamp for the president's programs.[78] This formal power also enabled Karimov to exert extensive influence and expand his political authority over the regional governors and coercive organs.

In 1992 he reformed the country's administrative divisions by establishing provincial governments (*viloyat*) with provincial-level administrative organs (*hokimiyat*), headed by provincial governors (*hokim*).[79] Rejecting direct election and using his prerogative to appoint and dismiss *hokim* as he saw fit based on his personal loyalties, Karimov established his central supervision over local affairs.[80] Through legal and structural changes, he weakened the traditional sphere of *hokims* by appointing heads of city-level administration and building a robust political machine based on political patronage.[81] The regular

74 William Fierman, "Political development in Uzbekistan: democratization?" in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot (ed.) *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 378–380.

75 Interview with former member of Oliy Majlis in Washington DC in 2020.

76 Alisher Ilkhamov, "The limits of centralization: regional challenges in Uzbekistan," in Paulina L. Jones (ed.) *The Transformation of Central Asia. States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University, 2004): 159–181.

77 Sirojjon Berdikulov, "Formation of Multiparty System in Uzbekistan, 1985–2014," *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* 19, no. 3/4 (2015): 150.

78 Rico Isaacs, "Charismatic Routinization and problems of post-charisma succession in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan," *Studies of Transition States and Societies* 7, no. 1 (2015): 69.

79 Philip G. Roeder, "Varieties of post-Soviet authoritarian regimes," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 10, no. 1 (1994): 37; Gregory Gleason, *Markets and politics in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2003), 131.

80 Paulina L. Jones, *Institutional change and political continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: power, perceptions, and pacts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 123.

81 Lawrence Markowitz, "The Sub-national Roots of Authoritarianism: Neopatrimonialism and Territorial Administration in Uzbekistan," *Demokratizatsiya* 20, no. 4 (2012), 392–394.

reshuffling and rotation of governors every three years on average—an important legacy from Soviet politics—helped him prevent the deep entrenchment of elites in office and regularly cleanse corrupt practices.[82]

Using his formal presidential power, Karimov managed to bring the state's coercive apparatus under his control and effectively repress any sign of political opposition. Uzbekistan inherited fairly substantial military infrastructure from the Soviet Union.[83] A monopoly over forces resulted in the establishment of powerful security institutions under the president's control, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), and the National Security Service (SNB), which all became decisive factors in maintaining power and repressing any dissidence.[84] These institutions' strength and magnitude have been continuously increasing since their establishment; they account for the largest employed labor force throughout the country and exert influence on a range of other ministries.[85] Initially, the MVD, headed by a Karimov clique member, Zakir Almatov, from 1991 to 2005, was the regime's main force to maintain political stability.[86] Under Almatov's supervision, the special division of MVD provided a lifeline to Karimov's regime when the protests over growing government repression erupted in violence in Andijan in 2005.[87] Thanks to the repressive capacity, the regime weathered the storm of color revolutions that engulfed post-Soviet territories without elite defection.[88]

However, the fact that Almatov maintained power over a large police force and built the patronage network around the ministry made Karimov anxious about the possibility of an internal challenger. Soon, Karimov brought in a new member, Rustam Inoyatov, a former KGB agent, as the head of SNB and provided him with money and power to counterweight Almatov's increasing

82 Roger D. Kangas, "Uzbekistan: The Karimov Presidency—Amir Timur Revisited," in Sally Cummings (ed.) *Power and change in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2002), 137.

83 Erica Marat, "Soviet Military Legacy and Regional Security Cooperation in Central Asia," in *China & Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 1. (2007), 84–85.

84 Kathleen Collins, *Clan politics and regime transition in Central Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 253.

85 Dina R. Spechler, and Martin C. Spechler. "The foreign policy of Uzbekistan: Sources, objectives and outcomes: 1991–2009," *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 2 (2010): 159–170.

86 Bruce Pannier, Analysis: Amid Reform Talk, Zakir Almatov, At Center Of Andijon Bloodshed, Is Back, March 1, 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-zakir-almatov-andijon-violence-returnss-to-government/29068297.html.

87 David Lewis, *The temptations of tyranny in Central Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

88 Lawrence Markowitz, "Beyond Kompromat: Coercion, Corruption, and Deterred Defection in Uzbekistan," *Comparative Politics* 50, no. 1 (2017): 103–121.

influence.[89] Since then, SNB has emerged as a powerful political body that puts its surveillance hand in every aspect of government and society, monitoring any signs of dissent and arresting religious followers. Of course, the formal power and institutions of the president's authority were not meant to be inviolable. Although the institutional pillars such as constitution, parties, and electoral procedures were important to project an image of legitimacy and address external critics, Karimov ensured ways that he was not becoming beholden to institutional constraints by using various manipulations.[90] The most famous examples include using referendums on multiples occasions to bypass presidential term limits and the rigging of both parliamentary and presidential elections.

The other important instrument that bolstered the president's power came from informal channels, mainly patron-client relations, patronage networks, and personal loyalties.[91] Karimov effectively used his political patronage in the form of formal appointments in lucrative positions of government and economy to further entrench his personal authority.[92] Due to the legacy of weak political structures, the historical baggage of patronage structures made its way into the new system. However, unlike the old system, the new regime's political patronage did not entail only regional ties, kinship relations, or clan-based loyalties.[93] Instead, Karimov made a deliberate attempt to construct a new elite coalition around him based only on personal loyalties which revolved around a set of incentives regarding reward and punishment.[94] In this system, pledging complete allegiance to the president ensured rewards in the forms of administrative posts and political functions at the intersection of government and economy, which provided material benefits that officials could leverage for personal gain.[95] Yet, failing to comply with the orders or attempting to challenge the status quo drew strict punishment.

89 Alexander 2013, "Rustam Inoyatov: SNB vs MVD", Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, http://en.hrsu.org/archives/1947.

90 Donnacha Ó. Beacháin and Rob Kevlihan. "Menus of manipulation: authoritarian continuities in Central Asian elections," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 25, no. 4 (2017): 419.

91 Henry E. Hale, *Patronal politics: Eurasian regime dynamics in comparative perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 20–22.

92 Frederick S. Starr, *Clans, authoritarian rulers, and parliaments in Central Asia* (Silk Road Studies Program, Johns Hopkins University, 2006).

93 İdil Tunçer-Kılavuz, "Political and social networks in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: 'clan', region and beyond," *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 3 (2009): 323–334.

94 Roger D. Kangas, "Uzbekistan: The Karimov Presidency—Amir Timur Revisited," in Sally Cummings (ed.) *Power and change in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2002), 140.

95 Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the wealthy: Predatory regimes and elite-led protests in Central Asia* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 58.

With a solid strategy for incorporating all the corners of the Republic into the government, Karimov sought to bolster his attempt to build a new state while preventing its capture by certain elite networks and avoiding the emergence of rival powerbrokers.[96] The non-discriminatory distribution of power among his different supporters through political cooptation was a means to stave off political instability and animosity. The representation of almost all regions at key posts can be seen from the examples of the head of the Security Service, Rustam Inoyatov, from Surkhandarya, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Abdulaziz Komilov, from Tashkent and Chairman of Senate, Ilgizar Sobirov, from Khorezm.[97] Although the new elites utilized their positions to gain personal wealth and establish their network with sub-clients, they showed unquestioned loyalty and allegiance to their ultimate patron, Karimov.

Karimov's new ruling coalition bred several important political figures who, in occupying various positions, constructed loosely aligned networks composed of followers based on not regional but political and economic ties.[98] One of the most important figures was Rustam Inoyatov, who, heading SNB, emerged as the second most influential political figure after Karimov. While then internal minister Zakir Almatov balanced the power of Inovatov, the latter became utterly unopposed, since Almatov was ousted following his handling of the Andijan riots in 2005.[99] With his extensive KGB experience, Inoyatov ensured that SNB agents penetrated every corner of Uzbek society. In addition to the oversight of state institutions, SNB also controlled lucrative sectors, including banks and enterprises.[100] Some sources claimed that the "president had complete confidence in Inoyatov and entrusted him with the most complex and delicate assignments."[101] The two other prominent representatives of networks were Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who assumed his position in 2003, and Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Rustam Azimov. During his posts in Jizzakh and Samarkand and in ministry,

96 Frederick S. Starr and Svante E. Cornell, *Uzbekistan's New Face* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 21–22.

97 Lawrence Markowitz, "The Sub-national Roots of Authoritarianism: Neopatrimonialism and Territorial Administration in Uzbekistan," *Demokratizatsiya* 20, no. 4 (2012), 392–394.

98 Frederick S. Starr, *Clans, authoritarian rulers, and parliaments in Central Asia* (Silk Road Studies Program, Johns Hopkins University, 2006), 7–10.

99 Erica Marat, "Policing public protest in Central Asia," *Central Asian Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2014): 16.

100 Lawrence Markowitz, "Beyond Kompromat: Coercion, Corruption, and Deterred Defection in Uzbekistan," *Comparative Politics* 50, no. 1 (2017): 103–121.

101 Alexey Malashenko, "Exploring Uzbekistan's Potential Political Transition", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2014, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Brief_Uzbekistan_Eng2014.pdf, 5.

Mirziyoyev cultivated his network, composed of regional governors and business oligarchs.[102] Johannes Dell argues that apart from his links with powerful businesses, he was "in charge of the country's key agricultural sector including the cotton industry."[103] Because of his ruthless disposition of "getting things done" over the years and his assistance in discrediting Jurabekov and Alimov's networks, Mirziyoyev was deeply entrenched in various regions and sectors of the economy.[104]

Lastly, the other prominent network, which controlled the regime's financial sector, belonged to the patronage of Rustam Azimov, Minister of Finance. Azimov's rise to the post was seen as an intention of Karimov to appoint technocrats who had few network ties.[105] By building his patronage from the resources of the National Bank of Uzbekistan, Azimov came to head the Ministry of Finance and simultaneously became first deputy prime minister while still holding the title of "father of the economy."[106] Of course, Karimov's informal power did not merely rely on a complete sense of trust in the regime elite; he used other means to shore up his support while controlling the ambitions of the elite. As mentioned above, intra-regional and personal competition became an important factor in elite placement since Karimov attempted to balance out the competing interests vying for influence. As Kangas points out, personal loyalty and patronage uphold an environment in which the president can act. Yet, by placing the informal power "in the specific public context of formal institutions, President Karimov can channel the effectiveness of these groupings and, if necessary, thwart efforts by them to unseat him. This is where the value of creating public political institutions became so important to Karimov's success."[107]

102 Lawrence Markowitz, "The Sub-national Roots of Authoritarianism: Neopatrimonialism and Territorial Administration in Uzbekistan," *Demokratizatsiya* 20, no. 4 (2012), 398.

103 Johannes Dell, "Lifeless Uzbek Election Hides Power Struggle", BBC, March 27, 2015. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-31798756.

104 Kathleen Collins, *Clan politics and regime transition in Central Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 264.

105 Snow Shawn, "After Islam Karimov, What Next? Uzbekistan's Succession Question", The Diplomat, August 30, 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/after-islam-karimov-what-next-uzbekistans-succession-question/.

106 Yury Fedorov, "Uzbekistan: clans, succession, and stability," *Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security* 18, no. 2 (2012): 50.

107 Roger D. Kangas, "Uzbekistan: The Karimov Presidency—Amir Timur Revisited," in Sally Cummings (ed.) *Power and change in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2002), 138.

5.2 *Establishing Control over the Economy*

The second instrument behind the power consolidation under Karimov and his subsequent regime stability sprang from the state capture of economic resources. The control over wealth is crucially important for regime durability as it provides autocrats political power "over an overriding share of a society's wealth that they may use to monopolize resource distribution."[108]

After independence, the strategies designed to capture economic resources were orchestrated carefully by adopting selective market institutions that legalized the seizure of resources while avoiding the disrupting powers of market forces.[109] The early days of economic transition were characterized by purposeful attempts to concentrate all economic activities under the central government's control.[110] Unlike neighboring countries, Karimov did not rush to root out the old command economy for the sake of political stability.[111] Observing the socioeconomic repercussions of shock therapy in Russia, Karimov introduced the long exalted "Uzbek model" of economic self-reliance, in which the state, as chief reformer, gradually inserted liberal market principles into the command economy while assuring subsidized employment, controlling prices, and ignoring mass privatization.[112] While the reform package included small-scale privatization that assumed an appropriation of state property from the nomenklatura—communist-turned businessmen—for political support, the leadership maintained large-scale enterprises in the energy and financial sectors under the state's control.[113] Conservative land reform gave the state complete control over land distribution, 37 percent of which was used for cotton with procurement prices set by the government.[114]

108 Lucan Way, "Resistance to Contagion." in Valerie Bunce, Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, (ed.) *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Postcommunist World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 234.

109 Marlene Laruelle, "Discussing neopatrimonialism and patronal presidentialism in the Central Asian context," *Demokratizatsiya* 20, no. 4 (2012): 312.

110 Martha B. Olcott, *Central Asia's second chance* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 48.

111 Boris Rumer, *Central Asia in transition: dilemmas of political and economic development* (Aakar Books, 2003), 23–27.

112 Martin C. Spechler, "Uzbekistan: the silk road to nowhere?" *Contemporary Economic Policy* 18, no. 3 (2000): 295–303; Gregory Gleason, *Markets and politics in Central Asia* (London Routledge, 2003), 119.

113 Richard W. Pomfret, *The Central Asian economies since independence* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

114 Bakhodyr Muradov and Alisher Ilkhamov, "Uzbekistan's Cotton Sector: Financial Flows and Distribution of Resources," *Open Society Foundations* (2014): 3–64.

The availability of mineral reserves, cotton export, and energy resources that generated steady currency revenues to the state budget created a favorable condition for "statist hegemony" over the economy and authoritarian stability after independence.[115] Over half of Uzbekistan's GDP was produced by the core sectors, mainly those still controlled by state institutions.[116] The agricultural sector generated the most revenue for Uzbekistan, averaging 32 and 22 percent of the GDP in 1995 and 2010, respectively.[117] With independence, Uzbekistan became the fourth largest cotton producer globally, which accounted for 25 percent of foreign exchange revenues in early 2010.[118] State structures became dominant stakeholders with multiples state agencies mandated to perform separate tasks, including planning, harvest, and distribution.[119]

Another revenue source for the regime was the export of gold and energy resources. Uzbekistan was a substantial producer of gold and natural gas during the Soviet era; apart from producing about one-third of the entire gold production in the Union, the Republic was the Union's third-largest producer of natural gas.[120] Immediately following independence, the new government acquired ownership of substantial natural resources, including minerals, nonferrous metals, and hydrocarbon reserves. Although the government limited foreign involvement in these sectors, it increased gold and natural gas production by 22 and 35 percent, respectively, through 2005, when it secured energy independence from neighboring countries for domestic consumption.[121] In

115 Pamela Blackmon, "Back to the USSR: why the past does matter in explaining differences in the economic reform processes of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan." *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 4 (2005): 391–404; Paolo Sorbello, "Oil and Gas Political Economy in Central Asia: The International Perspective," in Slawomir Raszewski, *The International Political Economy of Oil and Gas* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 117.

116 Martin C. Spechler, Joachim Ahrens, and Herman W. Hoen, *State capitalism in Eurasia* (World Scientific, 2017), 85.

117 Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, *Globalizing Central Asia: Geopolitics and the challenges of economic development* (ME Sharpe, 2013), 145.

118 Nodir Djanibekov, Inna Rudenko, John Lamers, and Ihtiyor Bobojonov, "Pros and cons of cotton production in Uzbekistan," Cornell University (2010), 8; Assel Rustemova, "Consolidation in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan," in Rachel Vanderhill, *International dimensions of authoritarian persistence: Lessons from Post-Soviet States* (UK: Lexington Books, 2013): 66–67.

119 Alisher Ilkhamov, "Divided economy: Kolkhoz system vs. peasant subsistence economy in Uzbekistan," *Central Asia Monitor* 4 (2000): 5–14.

120 Pamela Blackmon, "Following through on reforms: Comparing market liberalization in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan," in Amanda E. Wooden and Christoph H. Stefes, (eds.) *The Politics of Transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Enduring Legacies and Emerging Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2009), 150–152.

121 Paulina L. Jones and Erika Weinthal, *Oil is not a curse: Ownership structure and institutions in Soviet successor states* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 85–90.

2010, gold accounted for more than 20 percent of the country's total export revenue, accruing about US$2.9 billion. Further, natural gas makes up over 15 percent of the state budget and 14 percent of export earnings.[122]

The state's centralized control of the economy became crucial for regime stability. It helped Karimov redefine the center-periphery relations since the central monopoly over cotton through the state commodity board took away the regional elite's authority over its revenue share.[123] In addition to charging the state coffers and pumping Karimov's family pocket, the state sector provided a source of rents and patronage for the regime to bind the elites and garner their support while assuaging popular demand through social spending.[124] The state sector, including wholesale trade, banking, machinery, and energy which accounted for almost half of the country's economy and workforce, were subordinated to the interests of state bureaucrats and officials in ministries and security apparatus who ran them as personal property, extracting available rents.[125] Economic policies designed to expand the state sector, such as subsidies, input provision, and preferential loans, created further spoils for political patronage. Moreover, the provision of rent-seeking opportunities and the share of spoils given to officials were a complement to the coercive threats made to prevent elite defections, especially during times of crisis. As Lawrence demonstrated, the security apparatus' control of the Uzbek economy deterred the defection during the Andijan uprising.[126]

The Uzbek government heavily relied upon the rents from cotton exports and energy to channel public spending and social policies. Social policy has been a useful instrument for controlling a population in personalist dictatorships.[127] After independence, famous policies included a land privatization scheme

122 Dina R. Spechler and Martin C. Spechler, "The foreign policy of Uzbekistan: Sources, objectives and outcomes: 1991–2009," *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 2 (2010): 159–170; Dina R. Spechler and Martin C. Spechler. "Uzbekistan among the great powers." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 42, no. 3 (2009): 353–373; Uzbekistan—Commercial Guide, International Trade Administration | Trade.gov, accessed November 6, 2020, https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/uzbekistan-oil-and-gas.

123 Martin C. Spechler, Joachim Ahrens, and Herman W. Hoen. *State capitalism in Eurasia* (World Scientific, 2017), 75.

124 Schmitz Andrea, "Uzbekistan's Transformation: Strategies and Perspectives," *SWP Research Paper*, (2020), 9.

125 Eshref Trushin and Eskender Trushin, "Institutional barriers to the economic development of Uzbekistan," in Boris Z. Rumer (ed.) *Central Asia at the End of the Transition* (London: Routledge, 2005) 350.

126 Lawrence Markowitz, "Beyond Kompromat: Coercion, Corruption, and Deterred Defection in Uzbekistan," *Comparative Politics* 50, no. 1 (2017): 103–121.

127 Milan Svolik, *The politics of authoritarian rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 18.

that allocated over 10% of irrigated land controlled by the state to individual families.[128] What is more, the government provided a handful of social welfare transfers, including pensions, child payments, and unemployment benefits to citizens and financial aids to low-income families through the *mahalla*, a traditional neighborhood association. Uzbekistan spent 11 percent of the government budget on welfare expenditures in 2009.[129] Also, the increase in wages and social payments was always accompanied by increased consumer prices to prevent social unrest. As a result of continuous social policies, the regime maintained the lowest income inequality level in Central Asia, an important factor for evading the color revolutions which toppled authoritarian leaders in several post-Soviet countries.[130]

5.3 *The Formulation of State Ideology*

The final pillar of political stability under Karimov came from the ideology and symbolism used to support the legitimization of his political authority. Attaining a certain degree of legitimacy to ensure people's trust in the fairness of political institutions is an important means to secure compliance and maintain political stability without resorting to repression.[131] Unlike legitimization based on democratic processes and constitutional order or economic performance, Karimov's ideological power stemmed from the effective nation-building discourse that appealed to political stability, social harmony, economic prosperity, and the symbolic nature of political participation.[132] The process of turning communist ideology into Uzbek nationalism after independence was closely associated with Karimov's personality. Exploiting a mixture of tradition and modernity in his rhetoric and actions, including emotional symbols, monuments, and national pride, Karimov used nation-building as a legitimization strategy to assert his personal power as a benevolent despot

128 Jennifer Murtazashvili, "Coloured by revolution: the political economy of autocratic stability in Uzbekistan," *Democratization* 19, no. 1 (2012): 78–97.

129 Ulugber Olimov and Yadgar Fayzullaev, "Assessing development strategies to achieve the MDG s in the Republic of Uzbekistan," *United Nations Department for Social and Economic Affairs* (2011): 1–55.

130 Jennifer Murtazashvili, "Coloured by revolution: the political economy of autocratic stability in Uzbekistan," *Democratization* 19, no. 1 (2012): 78–97.

131 Martin Brusis, "The politics of legitimation in post-soviet Eurasia," in Martin Brusis, Joachim Ahrens, and Martin Schulze Wessel (ed.) *Politics and legitimacy in post-soviet Eurasia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 10–17.

132 Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Authoritarian legitimation: assessing discourses of legitimacy in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey* 35, no. 4 (2016): 492–493.

and shield his emerging form of authoritarian rule.[133] As an Uzbek nation-state founder, Karimov's personality dominated the public sphere with books, displays, catchphrases, and TV appearances in every corner of the country.[134] Newly constructed symbols and a political landscape of nationhood exhibited an apparent disconnect to the Soviet past, re-invented local history and invoked images of heroic figures such as Amir Temur, and emphasized the country's greatness.[135] Deliberate manipulation of new nation-building and identities came as a supplement to the threat of coercion. It helped the regime achieve popular consent to authoritarian rule even in a context of declining economic prosperity.

In addition to founding role and superior experience in statecraft, Karimov's claim to authority was rooted in his formulation of state ideology. The collapse of communism created an ideological vacuum that engendered competition for alternatives such as liberalism, pan-Turkism, and radical Islamists. In the face of these alien ideological threats that could prove destabilizing, Karimov urgently called to establish "ideological immunity" based on an authentically national ideology that would legitimize the new authoritarian political order.[136] The new state ideology appealed to a strong desire for political stability, security, and social welfare that the people, who witnessed an abyss of economic collapse and conflicts in neighboring countries, longed for. Propaganda efforts advanced Karimov's image as an indispensable figure of peace and prosperity at any cost, promoting further deference to his authority. The Uzbek regime never stopped to claim its democracy through regular elections, though with predetermined outcomes. Under democracy claims, the regime promoted symbolic politics in the form of youth mobilization. As McGlinchey demonstrated, the Kamolot youth organization's carefully designed activities and events channeled nascent political activism of the young generation in support of Karimov's rule after the Andijan tragedy in 2005.[137]

133 Andrew F. March, "State ideology and the legitimation of authoritarianism: The case of post-Soviet Uzbekistan," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 8, no. 2 (2003): 209–232.

134 Anna Matveeva, "Legitimising Central Asian authoritarianism: political manipulation and symbolic power," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1095–1121.

135 Martha B. Olcott, *Central Asia's second chance* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 48.

136 Andrew F. March, "From Leninism to Karimovism: hegemony, ideology, and authoritarian legitimation," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19, no. 4 (2003): 307–336.

137 Eric M. McGlinchey, "Searching for Kamalot: political patronage and youth politics in Uzbekistan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1137–1150.

6 Conclusion

How authoritarian regimes can prove durable for long periods without leaders being challenged by outsiders or insiders has become a perplexing conundrum for authoritarian regime studies scholars. Focusing on this puzzle, I argue that the institutional framework of patronal presidentialism can act as a key theoretical tool to make sense of the bigger picture of authoritarian stability. As the patronal president in independent Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov was constitutionally established as the country's dominant political figure whose authority and power base came from the amalgam of instruments such as formal and informal institutions, economic control, and ideological domination. While institutions such as the constitution, parties, and elections, provided formal legitimacy to the president, informal patronage ensured the entrenched relationship between the elites and the president, in which the president relied on economic spoils in the form of administrative posts and economic rents to garner elite loyalty. At the same time, state control of the economy and ideological domination further strengthened the president's political authority and power base.