

Osh and Jalalabat Uzbeks between Authoritarianism, Crisis of the State and Normalization of Violence

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Paper abstract submitted to the first annual international conference *“Twenty Years of Central Asian Independence: Shared Past, Separate Paths?”* at the AUCA, Bishkek, 14-16 October 2011.

2010 has been an especially violent year for Kyrgyzstan. Popular protests caused by the hikes in the heating and electricity prices, and an extremely coalition of elites have led to the second regime change in five years. Unlike in 2005, when Askar Akaev’s ousting occurred swiftly and was mostly devoid of bloodshed, in 2005 Kurmanbek Bakiev and loyalist factions mounted significant resistance, all across the country. Power transfer was accompanied by armed clashes in April which left some 80 people dead and hundreds of casualties. The struggle between old and new regime supporters escalated in May, especially in the southern Jalalabat province, and even further in June, when violence spiraled out of control, and organized violence and a void of state control culminated in the worst inter-communal atrocities of the past twenty-two years in Osh. About twenty years after the 1990 Osh conflict, the main city of southern Kyrgyzstan has been newly and tragically protagonist of one of the most violence clashes in contemporary Central Asian history.

The paper begins with a short overview on post-Soviet state-building in Kyrgyzstan. Next, it turns to the processes of mobilization and radicalization that led to the 2010 events, paying special attention to state-community and inter-ethnic dynamics. In the second part of the paper state weakening, the criminalization of politics, and the normalization of violence are discussed. The paper sheds light on Kyrgyzstan’s ethnopolitics, especially within the Uzbek community, aiming to unpack the notion of ‘ethnic community’ by looking at what actually goes on within Uzbeks and Uzbek ethnopolitics in the cities of Osh and Jalalabat. The conclusive section focuses on the authorities’ attempts to re-establish control in the country, and some policy efforts to set out a new vision for Kyrgyzstan.