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Authoritarianism, Ethnic Management and Non-Securitisation: The Kyrgyz Minority in Uzbekistan

NICK MEGORAN & SHAVKAT RAKHMATULLAEV

Abstract

Why was there no ethnicity-based violence in Uzbekistan in June 2010? That month there was widespread violence against ethnically Uzbek citizens of southern Kyrgyzstan. Although its occurrence might have been expected, there was no retaliation against the sizeable Kyrgyz minority of Uzbekistan. Following an overview of the relatively sparse research on this minority, the essay explores how authoritarian conflict management by the Uzbek government reanimated 'people's friendship' discourses, preventing both active mobilisation and the demonisation of a minority. It concludes with some reflections on the prospects for the future of ethnic minorities in Central Asia's nationalising republics.

In June 2010 ethno-nationalist violence shattered communities in southern Kyrgyzstan, causing massive loss of life and property, with the minority Uzbek community suffering disproportionately both during and after the violence. As well as various investigative reports, there has been extensive scholarly work on both the violence itself and its aftermath, which was marked by high levels of hostility and discrimination against Uzbeks, who took various self-protection measures such as early marriage (Ismailbekova 2020), changing their use of public space (Atakhanov & Asankanov 2020), and reaching a new informal political and economic settlement with Kyrgyz powerbrokers (Lewis & Sagnayeva 2020). However, although Uzbekistan's foreign policy response to the violence has been explored, there has been no scholarly research on the impact of the June 2010 events on Uzbekistan's Kyrgyz population and on nationalism and ethnic relations in Uzbekistan.

This essay asks a simple question: why was there no retaliatory violence against the Kyrgyz minority of Uzbekistan at this time? Such violence might have been expected, as

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a precedent existed. Uncannily, 20 years earlier to the week, in June 1990, when anti-Uzbek violence erupted in the same parts of the then Kyrgyz SSR (Tishkov 1995; Asankanov 1996), it quickly spread to the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in small-scale retaliatory attacks on ethnic Kyrgyz who often lived in distinct and thus targetable neighbourhoods and villages. As Gaziyev reports, drawing on Soviet security services archives, 'incidents of assault and battery of people of Kyrgyz nationality were reported in several towns in neighbouring Uzbekistan. This caused the flight of Kyrgyz refugees from Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan' (Gaziyev 2010). In 2010 this might have been even more likely, as social media and the internet allowed for the more rapid spread of (mis)information. Many Uzbekistanis have relatives in Kyrgyzstan: rumours and reports of atrocities by ethnic Kyrgyz against ethnic Uzbeks—often accompanied by grisly pictures and films taken on smartphones—circulated widely. The world's media was quickly on the scene, broadcasting images of up to 100,000 Kyrgyzstani Uzbek women and children fleeing across the fields to Uzbekistan. Anger was palpable in Uzbekistan. Spontaneous acts of retaliatory violence might have been expected but—so far as we are aware—none occurred. The purpose of this essay is to ask why. Based on interviews with policymakers in Tashkent, analysis of the Uzbek press and field research in Kyrgyz communities, the essay argues that the absence of retaliatory violence was in part due to actions taken by the Uzbekistani government, which approached ethnic management by seeking to resist the securitisation of ethnic minorities.

The essay uses the concept of authoritarian conflict management (ACM) (Lewis *et al.* 2018) to understand Uzbekistan's approach to the management of inter-ethnic relations. This is in contrast to liberal peace-building models that espouse negotiation, international mediation and constraints on the use of state force, addressing the underlying structural causes of conflict and advocating for the creation of pluralistic spheres of civil society and democratic politics. Instead, ACM describes the prevention, de-escalation or termination of armed rebellion or inter-communal riots through coercive and hierarchical practices that attempt to construct sustained hegemonic control over society on behalf of a single patron, usually the state (Lewis *et al.* 2018).

Owen and her colleagues argue that the existing literature in conflict studies is inadequate to understand Central Asia because it overlooks the importance of 70 years of Soviet rule (Owen *et al.* 2018). Bonacker and Lottholtz, in the Introduction to this special issue, argue that, despite attempting to distance itself from the Soviet 'coloniser', post-Soviet Uzbekistan has been significantly shaped by and, in many ways, perpetuates the Soviet legacy. Therefore this essay grounds its analysis of 2010 in a discussion of the Soviet legacy.

In a field that has often been overly fascinated by so-called 'ethnic violence' (Megoran 2007), this research contributes towards understanding how peace comes about—albeit a negative, authoritarian peace. There is also a secondary, political reason why research on the contemporary socio-economic situation of Kyrgyz people in Uzbekistan is important. Discrimination against the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan is often justified by claims of the supposedly dire relative condition of the Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan. Therefore, a proper scholarly understanding of the situation of both minorities is crucial to combat the type of xenophobia in Kyrgyzstan that culminated in the 2010 violence.

It is a common perception in Kyrgyzstan that Uzbek communities in Osh, the second largest city in Kyrgyzstan, are more privileged than the Kyrgyz over the border in Uzbekistan. A Kyrgyz Osh academic, speaking to one of the authors at the end of 2010,

blamed the violence that year on 'Uzbek separatism'. Although in the past he had been an admirer of the liberalism of former president, Askar Akaev, who had promoted a more inclusive civic nationalism, he said that Akaev had 'made one mistake: he gave schools, universities and the like to Uzbeks. This happens nowhere else in the world—least of all for the Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan'.[1] Such views were promulgated freely by the populist press in Kyrgyzstan, who often railed against organisations, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), that focused on the rights of the country's Uzbek minority. In a provocative article entitled 'Kyrgyzstan's Unity: Do Minority Groups Want Autonomy?', the newspaper *Aalam* denounced the attention paid by foreign organisations to ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan and accused the OSCE of stirring up trouble where it did not exist. The article claimed that the Kyrgyz people were actually worse off than the minorities, who threatened the very unity of Kyrgyzstan.[2] Such articles were part of a wider discourse making comparisons with the Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan. In 2006 the Kyrgyz newspaper *Agïm* criticised the head of the OSCE office in Kyrgyzstan, Marcus Muller, for a statement that was seemingly sympathetic to Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks demonstrating in favour of language rights. Whereas the Uzbeks occupied 'a large financial and economic niche in the southern region', the paper wrote caustically, 'it is known that ethnic Kyrgyz people in Uzbekistan have ten times more problems with their culture and language than the Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan'.[3] *Agïm* concluded that the only reason that an organisation like the OSCE could support 'separatist and extremist' elements of the Kyrgyzstani Uzbek population was because the Kyrgyz government was too weak to silence them; such interference would not be tolerated in Uzbekistan. Megoran frequently encountered this opinion during ethnographic research in Osh. For example, in the aftermath of the 2010 violence, one Osh Kyrgyz told him, 'here Uzbeks are free, they have every opportunity—universities, schools, television channels, and supermarkets—but Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan have nothing'.[4] Or, as a senior figure in the Kyrgyz government said to him, in contrast to the wealth and privilege of Osh Uzbeks, 'the wretched Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan have absolutely nothing'.[5]

The claim that the Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan face far worse discrimination than the Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan is used to justify discrimination against the latter in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, ascertaining the actual condition of Kyrgyz minorities in Uzbekistan is important in addressing xenophobia in Kyrgyzstan, because the destinies of the two minorities are linked.

This essay aims to answer the core question of why there was no retaliatory violence against the Kyrgyz minority of Uzbekistan in June 2010, and in so doing address the ancillary question of how a dearth of understanding of this minority justifies discrimination in Kyrgyzstan. For this research, undertaken between 2015 and 2019, four methods were used. First, a detailed study of the reporting in the Uzbekistan press of ethnic issues in Kyrgyzstan between April 2010 and August 2011 was conducted, looking at *Halq So'zi* nationally and regional Ferghana Valley papers. This was contrasted with a study of the Kyrgyz press between April 2010 and June 2011. Second, four interviews

[1]Interview with anonymous academic, Bishkek, 2 December 2010.
[2]'Kïrgïzstandïn birimdigi: Mayda uluttarga avtonomiya kerekpi?', *Aalam*, 14–20 April 1999, 13 (265).
[3]'Kyrgyz Paper Blasts OSCE for Meddling in Internal Affairs', *BBC Monitoring*, 23 June 2006.
[4]Interview with anonymous academic, Osh, 7 December 2010.
[5]Interview with anonymous senior Kyrgyz government figure, Osh, 9 December 2010.

were conducted, on condition of anonymity, with officials in Tashkent in various government ministries and state advisory bodies who had responsibility for responding to the 2010 violence. Third, field visits to five Kyrgyz villages were undertaken by Nick Megoran in 2015, 2016 and 2017 and Shavkat Rakhmatallaev in 2018, to ascertain general socio-economic conditions and minority-language educational provision and, indirectly and where possible, to ask about people's experiences in 2010. Finally, 30 interviews were conducted by our research associate Saniya Sagnaeva with ethnic Kyrgyz from Uzbekistan who had emigrated to Kyrgyzstan after 2010. These people were contacted *via* a gatekeeper, an official working to provide for their care in their new homes. These different sources were used to triangulate what happened in 2010, and also to paint a basic picture of Kyrgyz life in Uzbekistan to enable a preliminary assessment of claims about the deprivation of Uzbekistan's Kyrgyz.

The essay begins by setting out an overview of ethnic management in Soviet Central Asia or, to use the language of the time, how 'the national question' was addressed. Second, it considers 'the national question' in the Soviet successor state of Uzbekistan. Third, it overviews the very limited research on the Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan and sketches out basic aspects of their demography and socio-economic conditions. Fourth, using the concept of authoritarian conflict management, it looks in detail at what happened to Kyrgyz communities in Uzbekistan in June 2010 and how the government handled the crisis. In contrast with the other contributions to this special issue, which demonstrate the regressive effects of a post-imperial politics of security, this essay shows how such politics, conceived of through the concept of authoritarian conflict management, can also have the positive effect of preventing violent conflict and containing the discursive processes leading up to it. As this research was largely conducted during the leadership of Islam Karimov (1989–2016), fifth, it looks to the future of the Kyrgyz minority in Uzbekistan under the current president, Shavkat Mirziyoev, before finally concluding with some larger questions about the place of ethnic minorities in Central Asia's nationalising states.

Ethnic management in Soviet Uzbekistan

Under modernity, ethnicity can be mobilised as a powerful force for the building or dissolution of states (Hobsbawm 1990). The founders of the USSR sought to create a union of multiple nation-states as the building blocks of a non-national, socialist ideal. The USSR therefore institutionalised ethnicity in a unique and paradoxical way that determined access to scarce resources and life chances and allowed 'titular' groups to use ethnicity to assert themselves over minorities. Kandiyoti has succinctly observed that the central paradox of Soviet nationalities policy was that 'while officially espousing the goal of merging nationalities and transcending ethnic particularisms, it institutionalised, codified and ossified them' (Kandiyoti 1996, p. 524). For Brubaker, the USSR was a multinational state not merely in ethno-demographic terms (consisting of a heterogeneous population) but in institutional terms: 'The Soviet state not only passively tolerated but actively institutionalized the existence of multiple nations and nationalities as fundamental constituents of the state and its citizenry' (Brubaker 1996, p. 23)—and, in so doing, prepared the way for its own demise.

Models of nationalism often distinguish between ethnic nationalism, which defines belonging to the state on the basis of membership of an exclusive ethnic group, and civic nationalism, whereby belonging is defined in terms of common citizenship (Geertz 1994, p. 124). For Brubaker, the Soviet Union combined both of these models in a unique way. On the state scale, Soviet leaders elaborated the civic idea of a Soviet nation that was supra-national, the fusion of peoples of all ethnic backgrounds. Yet, on the scale of union republics, the USSR codified and institutionalised nationality through the organisation of republics based on single, dominant ethnic groups with distinct identities, where distinctive national intelligentsias and cadres were cultivated and promoted. Thus, whilst the Soviet Union was not organised as a nation-state, it defined its component parts in national terms (Brubaker 1996, p. 28).

Political geographer Graham Smith saw this federal structure of the Soviet Union as a pragmatic and short-term solution to problems of state-building and the assertion of centralised authority following the Bolshevik revolution. Classical Marxism had little to say about 'the national question', considering ethnic divisions as contingent and either reactionary or progressive according to their social location (Smith 1996). The Bolsheviks adopted the federal model because they saw it as useful for the organisation of large territorial units and adopted the policy of *korenizatsiya*[6] at the level of the union republics as a way to obtain the support of non-Russians in building the nascent socialist state. This nationalism was the product of social engineering, a formal construct and an institutional form: however, unlike 'Sovietologists' who saw it as an empty fiction,[7] Brubaker argues that it powerfully shaped Soviet society (Brubaker 1994).

Certainly, the rulers of the Uzbek SSR were bullish about its success in harnessing ethnic and national sentiment regarding the building of a peaceful socialist society. In his 1959 book *The History of the Ending of the Past Inequalities Between the Nations of Uzbekistan*, Abdullaev claimed that the 1924–1925 'delimitation of national states' (that is, the creation of the individual Soviet Socialist Republics) was a key plank of the 'elimination of the inequality of the national groups' (Abdullaev 1959, p. 237). The Soviet Union had, it was claimed, established 'friendship of the peoples' (Manley 2009, pp. 220–36), and although the titular majorities were meant to dominate in each republic, the linguistic and cultural rights of minorities were to be respected and preserved in certain forms. In these accounts, the national territorial delimitation had eliminated any conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnic groups. For example, in his 1960 book *The Friendship of the Uzbek and Kyrgyz Kin Nations*, Rudzyansky sought to demonstrate, through a series of photographs and descriptions, how this friendship was substantiated and embodied in the cooperation of Uzbek and Kyrgyz scholars, engineers and others engaged in shared labour. İğmen is sceptical of such discourse, arguing that in their eagerness to show how they were overcoming Uzbek–Kyrgyz antagonisms, 'Soviet authorities exaggerated the collaboration in their reports to higher authorities' (İğmen 2012, p. 121). Nonetheless, Tuzmuhamedov (1973) went so far as to claim that 'the national question' in Central Asia

[6]'Nativisation', the policy of creating and promoting national cadres of the titular minority in non-Russian union republics.

[7]See for example, D'Encausse (1979).

had been 'solved'. The Kyrgyz–Uzbek violence of 1990 in the Ferghana Valley and other places, however, shows this claim in Central Asia was premature.

If the USSR did not 'solve the national question', how have independent Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan attempted to do so? This essay addresses this question by using the little-researched topic of the Kyrgyz minority of Uzbekistan, looking in particular at the impacts of inter-ethnic violence in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan in 2010. It is based primarily on four sources of data. First, a comprehensive analysis of local (Ferghana Valley) print media in Uzbekistan for the period June 2010–June 2011. Second, interviews with seven sets of Uzbekistan government officials were conducted between 2015 and 2019. Third, 30 interviews were conducted in Kyrgyzstan with ethnic Kyrgyz who emigrated from Uzbekistan after 2010. Finally, from 2015 to 2018 repeat field visits were taken to ethnically-Kyrgyz villages in the Tashkent and Ferghana Valley regions of Uzbekistan, where informal interviews and ethnographic observations were made. Due to the sensitivity of the topics discussed, informants (including their jobs and places of work and residence) have been anonymised.

Ethnic management in post-Soviet Uzbekistan

The preceding discussion of Soviet Uzbekistan is necessary because the coercive and sometimes fragile nature of the peace sustained in post-Soviet Central Asia is something that runs through the Soviet period (see Bonacker & Lottholz, this issue). The tension between civic and ethnic models of Soviet nationalities policy was a paradox that was never resolved, and the eventual break-up of the Soviet Union along the lines of its constituent republics was shaped by the territorial-political crystallisation of nationhood. With independence coming in the wake of a series of violent incidents in the Ferghana Valley (Abdullaev *et al*. 2019), managing ethnic relations within the republic was a priority for the Karimov government. It essentially adopted a Soviet version of 'friendship of the peoples', advancing the language and culture of, and political and economic opportunities for, the Uzbek titular majority whilst maintaining the cultural and linguistic rights of some minorities in protected spheres. These were represented by formal 'cultural centres' in Tashkent and across the regions, brought together under the *Baynalmilal Madaniyat Markazi* (International Cultural Centre), established in January 1992 (Jabborov 2019, p. 4). The Kyrgyz were one such minority, represented by cultural centres in main *viloyats* (administrative region; plural: *viloyatlar*) where Kyrgyz populations lived in the Ferghana Valley, Tashkent and Jizzakh, with Tashkent's Kyrgyz centre established in 1995. In the conclusion to his ethnographic study of the Arab minority of Uzbekistan, Radjabov argues that the formation of national cultural centres since independence has allowed minority ethnic groups the opportunity to develop their own identities, which in turn promotes inter-ethnic peace and harmony (Radjabov 2012). This approach to minorities is summarised in a 2012 speech by President Karimov to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the *Baynalmilal Madaniyat Markazi*:

> Today in our country over 130 national and ethnic groups [Uzbek: *millat* and *elatlar*] who have equal rights and opportunities to develop and enrich their language, traditions and customs in the ways appropriate for them, are living as one family in friendship and amity. (Karimov 2012, p. iv)

He continued by saying that the government was 'protecting peace and calm' [Uzbek: *tinchlik va osoyishtalik*], under the guiding principle that 'Uzbekistan is our common home'. He emphasised the centre's role helping to ensure that Uzbekistan was 'a place of true friendship' (Karimov 2012, p. iv).

Karimov's words demonstrate that the Uzbek government saw this arrangement as a specific political framework designed to secure peace—the type of peace that the Soviet Union failed to achieve. This conception of peace is repeated in the work of numerous academics. Ahmadjonov claims that Uzbekistan's 'nationality/ethnic policy' means that 'the representatives of various nations in our country have been given wide opportunities to conduct social, cultural, educational, economic and diplomatic activities' (Ahmadjonov & Karimov 2012a). This is clearly the heir to the Soviet approach to nationalities. For example, in a discussion of the place of ethnic policy in Uzbekistan's constitution, A. Mannonov, Rector of Tashkent's Oriental Studies Institute, noting that Uzbekistan makes provision for newspapers in eight languages, broadcast media in 11 and schooling in seven, said, 'the concept of national independence is the foundation of the creation of opportunities for national languages, traditions and customs to be respected and to develop' (Mannonov 2012, p. 63). 'National independence' has replaced Marxism–Leninism as the state's organising principle, a principle which guarantees peace between different ethnic groups. Indeed, the book in which Karimov's speech was reprinted has a series of photographs of Karimov meeting Uzbekistani ethnic Russians, Tajiks, Greeks, Germans, Turks, Arabs and Kyrgyz (Ahmadjonov & Karimov 2012b). He embodies the supposed solution of the 'national question' in a manner reprising the photographs in Rudzyansky's 1960 book *The Friendship of the Uzbek and Kyrgyz Kin Nations*.

Uzbekistani academic Valerii Khan is critical of such ethnic policies furthered by all the Central Asian states, which he terms 'titular ethnicisation', enshrining the rights of the titular majority as dominant, with the rights of the minorities preserved in distinct spheres. Khan defines titular ethnicisation as:

> the conception and policy of the unconditional right of titular ethnic groups for dominance in a given state. Although Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Turkmens, Tajiks and Kyrgyz lived together in Central Asia for centuries, today the new state ideology in all new Central Asian states is based on the above-mentioned idea of the 'historical right' of each titular ethnos over a given territory. (Khan 2009, p. 76).

This is marked by five characteristics: a denunciation of Soviet ideology; a revival of the past to glorify the present; an emphasis on supra-level nationalism in state-making; the priority development of the titular nation; and the legalisation of titular languages as state languages (Khan 2010). Whereas the titular majority dominates political, economic and cultural life, the activities of national minorities have been heavily circumscribed to the spheres demarcated by the national cultural centres, 'reduced to mechanistic productions of ethnographic pictures' such as dances, costumes, music and folklore (Khan 2010, p. 19). In short, Khan argues, minorities' substantive interests have been marginalised through this policy of titular ethnicisation.

The Kyrgyz minority in Uzbekistan

In contrast to the extensive work on Uzbek communities in Kyrgyzstan (Fumagalli 2007; Hierman 2010; Liu 2012), and some detailed research about Kyrgyz communities in

China (Baitur 1992; Asankanov 2010), there has been relatively little research on the Kyrgyz of Uzbekistan. There have been comparative studies of Uzbek and Kyrgyz legends (Ishniyozova 1996) and proverbs (Temirova 2018). Dushanov has explored the ethno-psychological characteristics of Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan, identifying practices such as *olib qochishi* (bride kidnapping) as marking out Kyrgyz from the majority Uzbek population (Dushanov 2006). Two recent ethnographic books are of particular importance in that they include discussions of Uzbekistan's Kyrgyz population in their analysis of broader processes of ethnic identity formation in the republic's Ferghana Valley territory. Firstly, Abdullaev's research on ethnic processes in what he calls the 'polyethnic' Ferghana Valley argues that although the Kyrgyz and other semi-nomadic peoples of the Ferghana Valley maintain certain distinct characteristics, they are taking on the practices of the Uzbek and Tajik peoples who, demographically, dominate the Uzbekistani part of the Ferghana Valley. For example, he found that Kyrgyz male and female dress had increasingly adopted elements of Uzbek and Tajik clothing; that culinary differences are disappearing; and that 'the family traditions' of the Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz and other local ethnic groups (Uzbek: *millat*) 'are almost identical now in practice' (Abdullaev 2005, p. 201). He argues that there are still observable differences between settled and semi-settled populations such as the Kyrgyz, Kypchak and Kurama, who consume more milk and meat, but because these groups are increasingly switching to farming then this is changing too (Abdullaev 2005, p. 209). Questions of politics and power are outside the remit that Abdullaev set himself in his work on observable ethno-cultural characteristics. However, although we know that Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are culturally very similar (Murzakmetov 2020), and that identities are fluid and have no essential or predetermined causal link to conflict (Heathershaw & Megoran 2011), we also know, from repeated examples in the region and around the world, that even apparently minor differences in a culture where ethnicities appear to be coalescing can be politicised by ethnic entrepreneurs with very harmful effects. Political questions, the study of which is especially sensitive in Uzbekistan as elsewhere in the region, do matter.

Secondly, and in contrast, Peter Finke's comments on the Kyrgyz in the Uzbekistani Ferghana Valley are more attentive to issues of power. Like Abdullaev, he highlights the valley's polyethnic nature (Finke 2014) but argues that relationships of complementarity between Uzbek and Kyrgyz were disturbed by the Soviet Union's forced sedentarisation of the Kyrgyz (Finke 2014, p. 177). On the present situation, he claims that in Uzbekistan 'the few Kyrgyz schools equally do not correspond to the number of native speakers' (Finke 2014, p. 168). Focusing in particular on communities around the town of Marhamat, he compares Kyrgyz villages with and without Kyrgyz-language schools and finds, unsurprisingly, that without such schools the young people mostly speak Uzbek. However, he reports that this distinction does not affect marriage patterns, as there remains an Uzbek–Tajik reluctance to marry Kyrgyz, and Kyrgyz populations are more likely to seek brides from neighbouring Kyrgyzstan (Finke 2014, pp. 168–71). Similarly, he notes that Kyrgyz are more likely to be excluded from political power (Finke 2014, p. 173).

FIGURE 1. KYRGYZ POPULATIONS AND SCHOOLS IN UZBEKISTAN
Source: Map designed by Nick Megoran; data from *Gozkomzemgeodezkadastr. O'beistonning Etno-Konfessional Atlasi* (Tashkent, Gozkomzemgeodezkadastr, 2005).

According to the Uzbekistan State Statistics Committee, in 1991 there were 182,600 ethnic Kyrgyz living in Uzbekistan; by 2017 that had risen to 274,000.[8] Within this period the Kyrgyz minority's percentage of the overall population remained unchanged at 0.9%. It is important to note the geographical breakdown of these figures. The 2005 *Ethno-Confessional Atlas of Uzbekistan* recorded 230,000 Kyrgyz in the country, the majority living in the Ferghana Valley with Andijon *Oblast'* home to the highest number, 98,000.[9] Outside the valley, the only significant concentrations of Kyrgyz were found in Jizzakh *viloyat* (31,000) and Tashkent *viloyat* (12,800) (see Figure 1).

Uzbekistan claims that it provides for the educational and cultural welfare of the minority. The *Ethno-Confessional Atlas of Uzbekistan* records 59 Kyrgyz-language schools in the republic, some of which teach only in Kyrgyz and others offering

[8]'O'zbekiston Respublikasida Qirgiz Millatiga Mansub Oxolining Soni', Uzbekistan State Statistical Committee, 1 January 2017, available at: https://stat.uz/uz/432-analiticheskie-materialy-uz/2033-o-zbekiston-respublikasining-demografik-holati, accessed 5 March 2020.
[9]*O'beistonning Etno-Konfessional Atlasi* (Tashkent, Gozkomzemgeodezkadastr, 2005).

FIGURE 2. KYRGYZ SCHOOL, TASHKENT *VILOYAT*
Source: Nick Megoran.

bilingual instruction in Kyrgyz along with either Uzbek or Kazakh (see Figure 2 as an example of one of these schools). Andijon State University has a Kyrgyz philology department where students can be trained to return to Kyrgyz villages as teachers; the opening of a similar department is being planned for Jizzakh.[10] The Turon-Iqbol publishing house produces Kyrgyz-language textbooks for use in these schools (for examples, see Figures 3 and 4).

The way in which the government of Uzbekistan has sought to relate to Kyrgyz minorities and frame their place in Uzbekistan in ethnic policy and official discourse is a quintessential demonstration of Khan's definition of titular ethnicisation. The above-mentioned series of photographs included in Ahmadjonov's book includes two elderly respected Kyrgyz men, in ethnic hats and robes, offering a prayer that 'the evil eye may never strike our peace and harmony!' (Ahmadjonov & Karimov 2012b, centre pages). The greatest number of ethnic Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan live in Andijon *viloyat* and are mentioned in Shamsutdinov and Ishoqov's 2013 history of the city and its environs. In a chapter entitled 'Unity and Co-Struggle: The Factors behind Development', they discuss the 100-plus ethnic groups living in the *viloyat*, identifying 3.8% of the population as Kyrgyz, benefitting from the provision of nine Kyrgyz-language-only and 24 Uzbek–Kyrgyz mixed-language schools, Kyrgyz-language radio

[10]Interview with anonymous official, Tashkent, 6 November 2019.

FIGURE 3. EDUCATION MINISTRY OF UZBEKISTAN, KYRGYZ-LANGUAGE HISTORY TEXTBOOK
Source: Ergashev and Xoljaev (2017); reproduced with permission.

broadcasts and a national cultural centre (Shamsutdinov & Ishoqov 2013). According to the authors, Kyrgyz, Korean, Armenian, Russian and Uyghur cultural centres 'play an important role in our society in strengthening friendship, peace and harmony'. This includes participation in general celebrations such as Navruz, Independence Day and Constitution Day (Shamsutdinov & Ishoqov 2013, p. 563).

FIGURE 4. EDUCATION MINISTRY OF UZBEKISTAN, KYRGYZ-LANGUAGE MATHEMATICS TEXTBOOK
Source: Axmedov (2017, p. 81); reproduced with permission.

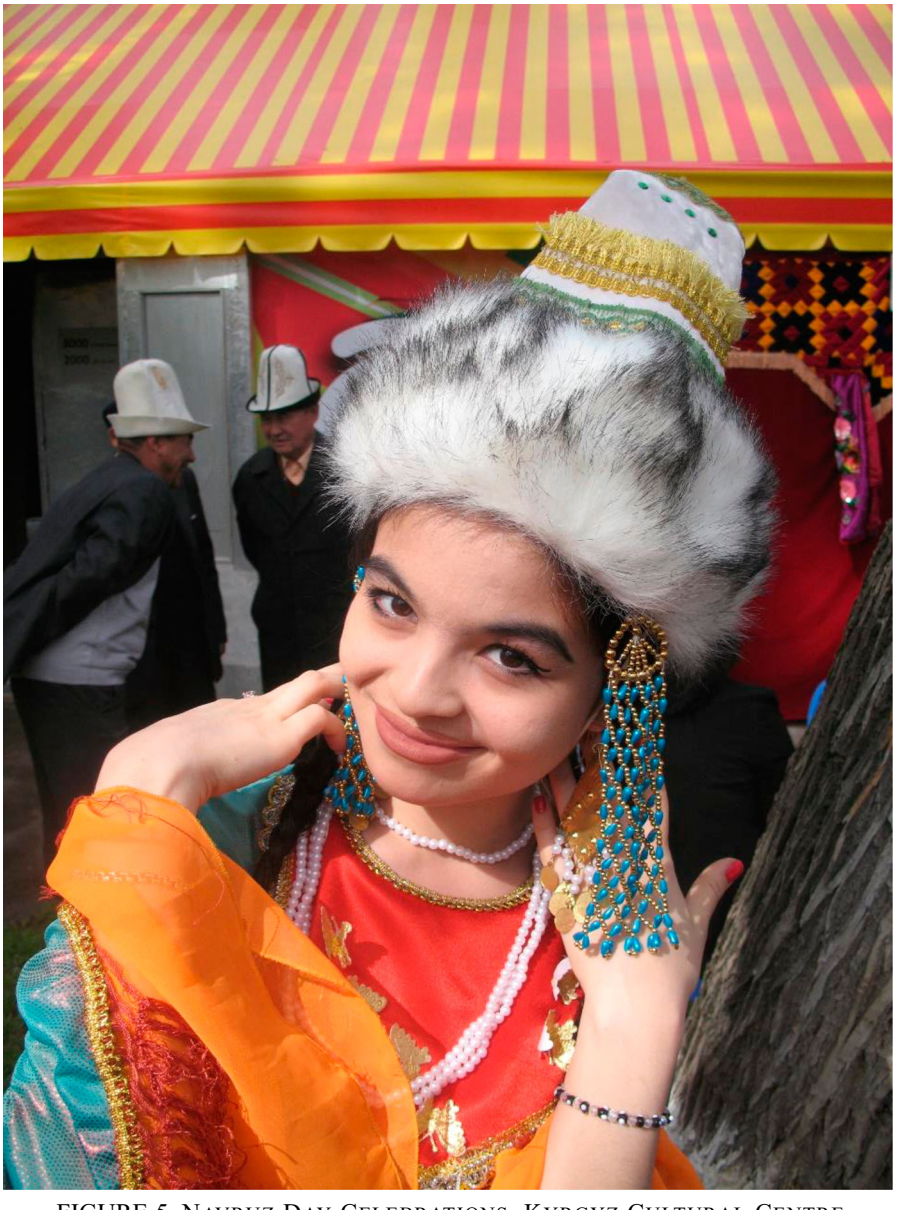

FIGURE 5. NAVRUZ DAY CELEBRATIONS, KYRGYZ CULTURAL CENTRE, TASHKENT, 2016
Source: Nick Megoran.

These highly stylised cultural contributions are demonstrated in the role that the Tashkent Kyrgyz cultural centre takes in the annual Navruz (spring equinox) celebrations in Tashkent. Kyrgyz ethnic food, dress and music are put on display (see Figures 5 and 6) alongside similar displays by the Polish, Kazakh, Jewish, German, Belorussian and other cultural

FIGURE 6. NAVRUZ DAY CELEBRATIONS, KYRGYZ CULTURAL CENTRE, TASHKENT, 2016
Source: Nick Megoran.

centres, who join together at the end of the day for a pageant of colour and ethnic music. This celebration takes place in Babur Park, while the main celebration, attended by the president and covered live on national television, is staged in central Tashkent and is largely ethnic Uzbek. The geography of this celebration is thus telling of the power relationships under titular ethnicisation, an illustration of Khan's conclusion that national minorities' real interests—political rights, and spiritual and economic development—have been deliberately set aside in this framework, as minorities are 'simply reduced to cultural centres with limited political autonomy' (Khan 2010, p. 19).

The government of the Kyrgyz Republic does not provide much support for the Kyrgyz minority in Uzbekistan. It maintains limited links with the Kyrgyz National Cultural Centre in Tashkent, for example, in promoting Kyrgyz art and literature in Uzbekistan**.** This general lack of support may arise from a lack of resources, but it may also be a product of titular ethnicisation in the region, which has discouraged the involvement of states with their co-ethnic 'stranded minorities'. It is true that there is a spectrum, from Uzbekistan's arm's-length policy towards co-ethnic minorities in neighbouring states (Fumagalli 2004) to Kazakhstan's active encouragement of co-ethnic minorities abroad to immigrate as *oralmandar* (Diener 2009). However, no state has attempted significant active involvement in minorities *in situ*. Gaziyev summarises Kyrgyzstan's approach as follows:

FIGURE 7. RIO OLYMPICS CHAMPION, HASANBOY DO'SMATOV, DEPICTED IN A ROADSIDE POSTER, ANDIJON, 2017
Source: Nick Megoran.

> In Kyrgyzstan, the government had no policy of external national homeland, but it tried to gather Kyrgyz co-ethnics from all parts of the world through the organization of the World Congress of the Kyrgyz. The first Congress took place in 1992. The second World Congress was held in 2003, and brought three hundred Kyrgyz diaspora from more than 20 countries … . The event was controversial because President Askar Akaev promised to help diaspora in the field of education, opening Kyrgyz-language schools in areas with Kyrgyz populations, and designating quotas of places in higher-educational institutions for ethnic Kyrgyz from abroad. (Gaziyev 2010, p. 162)

Gaziyev goes on to say that the president's promise of educational support was blocked by the Kyrgyz parliament, although the Kyrgyzstani government provides 20 scholarships a year, administered by its embassy in Tashkent, for students from Uzbekistan to enter higher education establishments in Kyrgyzstan. The intention is to support the minority in Uzbekistan; however, members of the minority told the authors that, often, the young people decide to remain in Kyrgyzstan rather than return to Uzbekistan.[11]

A few Kyrgyz have achieved some prominence in the cultural sphere, such as author Xudoyberdi To'xtaboyev and athlete Hasanboy Do'smatov, an ethnic Kyrgyz wrestler from Andijon region who won a gold medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics (see Figure 7).

[11] 'Özbekstan 20 abiturent Kïrgïz joldoryna kirishti', *Kïrgïz Tüüsü*, 18 August 2009, p. 5.

Kyrgyz contributions to the cultural sphere can be celebrated, within tightly prescribed limits.

However, being a relatively recently settled semi-nomadic group, most Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan live in villages, and many are engaged in the agricultural economy. As part of our research, Rakhmatullaev undertook a preliminary survey of the socio-economic life of Kyrgyz villagers in Tashkent and Andijon *viloyatlar*. Most people he spoke to were engaged in everyday occupations, the majority making a living through arable and pastoral agriculture. At the same time, some had private companies and shops, or worked for state agencies or in education. Two examples from the Kyrgyz village of Korgon-Tepe in Andijon *viloyat* will suffice to demonstrate this. We spoke with a number of males aged 40–60 and asked them about their economic life. Sultan, born in 1966, worked as a farmer. Living in a brick-built house (a demonstration of relative wealth), he was married with two children. His wife had a higher education diploma and worked as a teacher in a Kyrgyz-language school. Their son was studying in the Kyrgyz department of Andijon State University, whilst their younger daughter was still at school. They had, he reported, 12 *sotiks* of land (one *sotik* is one hundredth of a hectare), which they used for cattle farming. Like many people in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, Sultan had spent time as a migrant labourer in Russia, first in 2001–2004 and subsequently in 2010–2012. At the time of our meeting, he had rented two hectares of land behind his house and was using it to grow potatoes and maize, hiring seasonal labour to help.

Sultan's fellow-villager, Asan, was born in 1959. Acquiring a higher-level education in Tashkent, he worked in the Soviet period as a lawyer in the local area. In the 1990s he taught in a Kyrgyz school. In the new century he worked for almost a decade as a migrant in Russia. His son was engaged in sericulture, raising silkworms and growing mulberry leaves on a two-hectare plantation. He raised 10–12 crates of silkworms annually, each crate producing around 60 kg of silk cocoons. In 2018, for example, this yielded nine million Uzbek so'm. According to Asan, all the local Kyrgyz were living sedentary lifestyles now.[12] In the Soviet period, Uzbekistani Kyrgyz used to pasture animals in the Kyrgyz SSR in the summer but Asan said this had stopped due to the border being closed. Two of his daughters were seamstresses, and the third lived in Bishkek and had taken Kyrgyzstani citizenship. The whole family went to visit them each year.

Asan told us about the people who lived near him. His neighbour, Erkin had a grocery shop and 30–40 cows. Another neighbour, Talantbek, was the headmaster of a school. Other villagers had similar profiles. Overall, in rural areas, Kyrgyz villagers live very much like Uzbek villagers. This does not mean there are no difficulties. There is insufficient work paying a decent wage, so many Uzbekistani Kyrgyz go to Russia or Kazakhstan for work. Also, the schools lack sufficient funds and resources. But these are problems that Uzbek communities also face. Although we have not conducted the type of large-scale, thorough research that would enable more precise comparisons, we do feel confident in saying that the Kyrgyz of Uzbekistan have a range of public and private sector employment opportunities open to them, as well as opportunities for Kyrgyz-language secondary and higher education (although provision of the latter is

[12]This is discussed by Abdullaev (2005, p. 209).

limited). Those Kyrgyzstanis who excused the mistreatment of Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks by claiming that 'the wretched Kyrgyz of Uzbekistan have absolutely nothing' were unaware of this. But whilst it is the case that, under titular ethnicisation, the Kyrgyz of Uzbekistan have economic and limited cultural rights, there is no ethnically based political organisation. This raises the question at the heart of this essay: what happened to them during the violence of 2010?

June 2010: the Uzbekistani government and the Kyrgyz minority

In June 2010 cities, towns and villages in the part of the Ferghana Valley under Kyrgyzstani jurisdiction experienced outbreaks of communal violence. In April of that year the unpopular regime of Kurmanbek Bakiev was forced out of power by public protests, driven by anger at the depth of corruption and nepotism that was in part facilitated and enabled by international financial geographies that enabled the offshoring of plundered wealth (Heathershaw & Cooley 2015). This created a power vacuum marked by the further assertion of organised crime and attempted counter-revolutions that brought the country to the brink of civil war. Although narratives are hotly contested, it would appear that a city-centre altercation in Osh on the night of 10 June quickly escalated into a mass stand-off between Kyrgyz and Uzbek youths. False reports of rape and other atrocities, and unfounded rumours of a sinister Uzbekistan-backed plot to dismember Kyrgyzstan, spread rapidly by mobile phone and word of mouth, mobilising youths from within the city and surrounding rural regions at extraordinary speed (Ibraimova 2011). With the security forces unable to contain spiralling events, many parts of the city experienced widespread and increasingly systematic looting, arson, rape and murder, and the mass movement of people fleeing the city and youths entering it to avenge their communities. Up to 100,000 ethnic Uzbek women and children fled to the nearby Andijon region of Uzbekistan as violence spread to nearby villages, towns and the city of Jalal-Abad (Khamidov 2015).

Although Uzbekistani media maintained a news blackout, the violence was widely reported by the world's media. Many Uzbekistanis have friends and relatives in Kyrgyzstan, and anger over the unfolding catastrophe in southern Kyrgyzstan had the potential for violent repercussions in Uzbekistan, with the precedent of the Uzbek–Kyrgyz violence of 1990 in the same parts of the valley.

One potential repercussion was that Uzbekistan would be drawn into the conflict, intervening militarily to protect the lives and rights of co-ethnics. Rumours were circulating in Kyrgyzstan of a rapid military build-up on the Uzbekistani side of the border, as put by Melis Myrzakmatov in 2011, the populist mayor of Osh at the time. A Tashkent insider told us in an interview that there was indeed a rapid deployment to border areas as Uzbekistan took precautionary measures, and added that the government was split, with some more hawkish members advocating military intervention to restore order and prevent further violence against the Uzbek minority.[13] Despite public

[13]Interview with anonymous Uzbekistan government official 1, Tashkent, 28 June 2015; research assistant's interviews with two anonymous senior Uzbek diplomats, Washington, DC, September–October 2010.

statements denying these rumours, many Uzbekistani officials privately believed that the Kyrgyz security forces were at least partially implicated in attacks on Uzbeks. Karimov ultimately vetoed intervention but it is reasonable to assume that the fallout of the 1990 violence in southern Kyrgyzstan might have been at the back of his mind: during a brief window of political openness, he had been publicly criticised in the Uzbek parliament for failing to intervene to protect Uzbeks across the border. In 2010 he thus must have known that the political cost of being seen to fail, yet again, to protect Uzbeks could potentially be high.

The second possible repercussion was the potential for revenge attacks against Uzbekistani Kyrgyz. In 1990 there were revenge attacks against Kyrgyz populations in Uzbekistan, and a repeat was certainly possible in 2010. As one Uzbekistani Kyrgyz intellectual put it in 2016, the situation was 'potentially scary': 'Uzbeks were angry at what was happening, some hot-headed youths were showing signs of making trouble. This happened in 1990. I was there, I saw it with my own eyes. Kyrgyz living in compact areas—neighbourhoods mostly populated by the Kyrgyz minority—were threatened by Uzbek youths who were angry'.[14]

The twofold potential for violence in Uzbekistan was recognised by Karimov himself. Mentioning the June violence in an address to the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) in Moscow that December, Karimov claimed that, 'if at this critical period had we not kept the situation under control then the inter-ethnic conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan could have turned into an interstate conflict between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan'. He went on to say, 'I am not going to speak about what would have taken place on the territory of the Ferghana Valley of Uzbekistan, where about 300,000 ethnic Kyrgyz people live, if had we not kept peace amongst our nation and allowed to commit illegal actions towards them' (Karimov 2010).

Authoritarian conflict management and non-securitisation in the Ferghana Valley

The Uzbekistani government claims credit for having prevented both the escalation of a regional conflict and revenge attacks against the Kyrgyz minority in Uzbekistan. Are these claims justified? On the first issue, a government insider interviewed in 2015 confirmed that Karimov, as violence unfolded in June 2010, had spoken on the telephone to Roza Otunbaeva, the interim president of Kyrgyzstan, and acceded to her request that the border be sealed to prevent vigilante intervention, in return for guarantees of an independent investigation, that the perpetrators of violence would be brought to justice, and that the rights of minorities would be fully respected in the future.[15] There was disappointment in Tashkent that, as they saw it, none of these guarantees were properly fulfilled: however, as Alisher Khamidov noted, Uzbekistan managed to 'avert a regional crisis' (Khamidov 2015). The government's swift and effective humanitarian operation in supporting the refugees and its openness in dealing with international organisations and even foreign media, which it usually kept at arm's-length, was warmly welcomed by

[14]Interview with anonymous Uzbekistani intellectual, Tashkent, 18 March 2016.
[15]Interview with anonymous Uzbekistan government official 2, Tashkent, 28 June 2015.

these bodies. The official Kyrgyz government-initiated National Inquiry Commission on the June 2010 violence, chaired by Abdygany Erkebaev, went so far as to raise the possibility that it would nominate Karimov for a Nobel Peace Prize for his role in preventing an escalation of the conflict (Sieff 2010). These events have been much-analysed and bear no further elaboration or repetition here. What this essay focuses on is the second issue. We suggest that the best way to understand the Uzbekistani government's attempts to protect the Kyrgyz minority is through the conceptual lens of authoritarian conflict management (ACM).

ACM describes the prevention, de-escalation or termination of armed rebellion or inter-communal riots through methods that rely on instruments of state coercion and hierarchical structures of power (Lewis *et al*. 2018). ACM is not about the use of brute force but, rather, seeks to manage conflict in the long-term through control of discourse, space and the economy. This tripartite framework allows us to unpack and analyse the actions of authoritarian regimes in building peace, rather than simply seeing them as the negation of a liberal, democratic order (Owen *et al*. 2018). In particular, the first two parts of this framework—control of discourse and space—are helpful in elucidating Uzbekistan's actions.

Control of discourse

The Uzbekistani government sought to calm the domestic situation through control of the media. In his presidential speeches, Karimov vigorously rejected the idea that this was an ethnic conflict. He stated publicly that the Kyrgyz people were not guilty of these events, which, he claimed, were 'organised by external forces' in order to 'draw Uzbekistan into' the conflict (Lukmonov & Turakulov 2010, p. 1). As the inter-ethnic hostilities continued to spread, the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a stern statement on 12 June 2010:

> The people of Uzbekistan are seriously concerned about the events occurring in Osh city, in the south of Kyrgyzstan. Especially as is occurring in the city of Osh and nearby towns, the mass killing of Uzbeks and the plunder and burning of their houses is intolerable. We believe that all these events, which are the results of the intrigue of abominable [external] forces, are not in the interests of Kyrgyz people. These occurrences challenge the spirit of centuries-old, traditional, historic friendship among different nationalities.[16]

Restating the discourse of friendship between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz peoples, Karimov insisted that refugees who had flooded into Uzbekistan had not done so because 'they didn't like the south of Kyrgyzstan'—on the contrary, 'they [have] lived there for centuries and shall live together with the Kyrgyz' (Karimov 2010). Although we did not find transcripts of this, a number of Kyrgyz people in Uzbekistan told us that at that time they had seen Karimov on the television, threatening 'if you harm the Kyrgyz, you harm me'.[17] They said that such statements were reassuring.

[16]'O'zbekiston Respublikasi Tashqi Ishlar Vazirligi bayonoti', *Halq So'zi*, 14 June 2010.
[17]For example, interview with anonymous Uzbekistani Kyrgyz, Tashkent, 28 March 2016.

A senior Tashkent official involved in the response described a geographical approach to their media strategy:

> Locally we ran newspaper interviews with Uzbekistani Kyrgyz who were calling for quiet, stressing their future in Uzbekistan. These were [printed] in local media only. At such a time [of heightened emotions] it would be dangerous to show news images of inter-ethnic issues on national television.[18]

By 'locally' he meant in the Ferghana Valley press. This control of discourse—disaggregating and controlling messages at the regional level—would only be possible under an authoritarian system and demonstrates how control of discourse was an important part of the response to preventing the conflict spilling over into Uzbekistan.

To better appreciate the nature of this strategy, it is worth drawing a contrast with how ethnic issues—in particular, related to the Uzbek minority—have been handled in Kyrgyzstan. As Megoran has argued elsewhere, the Kyrgyzstani populist/non-government press has routinely demonised Uzbeks, conflating the geopolitical threats from Uzbekistan and terrorist and Islamist groups with spurious claims about the supposedly disloyal Uzbek population of Kyrgyzstan, a nefarious 'fifth column' scheming with terrorists, jihadists and Uzbekistan itself for the destruction and territorial dismemberment of Kyrgyzstan (Megoran 2017). The securitisation of Uzbekness in Kyrgyzstan has used xenophobic language that, whilst stopping short of actual incitement to violence, has defined the Uzbek minority as an existential threat to the state and to Kyrgyzness itself.

Such xenophobic language intensified in the Kyrgyz press right up until the violence of June 2010. For example, in the weeks before the violence, the populist paper *Alibi* carried a series of articles demonising the country's Uzbek minority. An open letter to the government from the 'March People's Revolution Public Foundation' (*Mart Eldik Revolutsiya Koomduk Fondu*), a populist political movement, warned about the alleged domination of Uzbek media in the south of the country and the failure of the government to force Kyrgyzstani Uzbek television stations to broadcast in Kyrgyz.[19] A newspaper report on a fight at the freight railway terminal in Osh—a murky business involving criminal gangs—was described in terms of Uzbek violence against Kyrgyz.[20] An open letter from youth organisations to the temporary government days before the violence argued that a decision to issue drafts of new laws in Uzbek (to enable more people to read and understand them) would destabilise the country.[21] An article published at the start of the violence—which would have gone to press before the paper was aware of unfolding events—was entitled, 'Southern Kyrgyzstan: Will it Become a Caliphate or an Uzbek state?'[22] The incessant stream of anti-Uzbek xenophobic language in semi-liberal

[18]Interview with anonymous Uzbekistan government official 1, Tashkent, 28 May 2015.
[19]'KR Ubaktïllu ökmötünün törayïmï R.I. Otunbaevaga, Ubaktïllu ökmötünün Tushtuk Kïrgïstan boyuncha koordinatoru S.Sh. Jeenbekovgo', *Alibi*, 30 April 2010, p. 14.
[20]'Oshtogy Jangjal', *Alibi*, 4 May 2010, p. 4.
[21]*Alibi*, 4 June 2010, 30 (095), p. 6.
[22]'Tüshtük Kïrgïzstan: Xalifatpï je Özbek Mamleketibi?', *Alibi*, 2010, 32 (097), pp. 2, 6.

Kyrgyzstan fuelled xenophobia and made the violence of 2010 more likely. In contrast, Uzbekistan's ACM was characterised by a control of discourse that not only banned such xenophobia but also carefully managed the placing of articles on ethnic issues in a way designed to inculcate a different attitude and response.

Control of space

The second characteristic of authoritarian conflict management displayed by the government of Uzbekistan in an attempt to prevent the spread of the violence was the control of space using the security forces. This took the most obvious form in the sealing of Uzbekistan's border with Kyrgyzstan. Karimov later recounted how he responded to a request from the Kyrgyzstani government to do this:

> Early in the morning of 11 June I had a long phone conversation with Rosa Otunbaeva on her initiative. In response to her request, I assured her that no one from our side under any circumstances would cross the border of Kyrgyzstan. And I kept my word. (Karimov 2010)

This move was, in part, intended to prevent retaliatory attacks by Uzbekistani Uzbeks crossing into Kyrgyzstan in support of relatives, friends and co-ethnics. Such an occurrence, with inevitable casualties amongst those potential vigilantes, would potentially have increased anti-Kyrgyz sentiment in Uzbekistan with negative consequences for the Kyrgyz minority. As a Tashkent policymaker told us, 'the Kyrgyz were afraid that Uzbek people would cross the border and intervene. This would have led to not just localised riots but an inter-state war'.[23] Less visible was the swift deployment of security forces to Kyrgyz villages in Uzbekistan to prevent revenge attacks. One official in Tashkent told me, 'there was a lot of anger and concern amongst our people; they knew what was happening' and therefore, 'we sent increased numbers of police to Kyrgyz villages close to the border. People find it reassuring to simply see lots of police'.[24]

Field visits to Kyrgyz villages corroborated this claim, and not simply villages near the Kyrgyzstani border. An elderly Kyrgyz man in a Kyrgyz village in Taskent *viloyat* told Megoran, 'we were really scared at the time of the violence in Kyrgyzstan. We were afraid that people would attack us'. He recounted that, at night, he heard knocking at his door and found it was the state security services. Addressing him respectfully as *Ata* (father), the officer asked, 'are you all well? No one has come to disturb your peace, have they?' The elderly man recounted that as long as the violence continued, there were security forces stationed all around the village to prevent any revenge attacks. 'A thousand thanks to Karimov', he added, raising his hands in a blessing.[25]

It is possible that people were speaking in this way to us because they feared repercussions from the authorities. However, such accounts were further corroborated by interviews in 2015 with Uzbekistani Kyrgyz who had moved to Kyrgyzstan after 2010.

[23]Interview with anonymous Uzbekistan government official 2, Tashkent, 28 June 2015.
[24]Interview with anonymous Uzbekistan government official 2, Tashkent, 28 June 2015.
[25]Interview with retired Kyrgyz farmer, anonymous village in Tashkent region, 27 March 2016.

Some people said that in June 2010 and its aftermath there were a few incidents of verbal abuse; others reported nothing. No one reported experiencing any direct violence or hearing about violent attacks on co-ethnics. In 2015 we spoke to Jolboldu, the head of the village administration (*ayïl ökmötü*) in Kyrgyzstan's Jalal-Abad region where emigrees from Uzbekistan had been resettled. We asked whether there had been violence in Uzbekistan at the same time; he replied, 'no, I don't think so, we heard nothing about that. The reason is that Islam Karimov governs them very strictly'.[26]

Although ACM is a term we use analytically, we find telling a comment by an official in the Uzbekistani government during an interview in 2015. When Megoran asked him why he thought the 2010 violence in Kyrgyzstan did not spread to Uzbekistan, he replied, 'we have developed state institutions to provide for the rule of law for all. This doesn't mean that we advocate authoritarianism: elements of that may be necessary at some stage, but democratisation needs to evolve from the bottom up'.[27] We suggest that the tight and specific control of discourse and space is an example of authoritarian conflict management that prevented both the escalation of inter-state tensions and conflict erupting between the Kyrgyz minority of Uzbekistan and the majority ethnic group.

The Kyrgyz minority since 2010

Nationalism and border closures

We have thus seen that Uzbekistan's approach to ethnic minorities—which we have characterised as authoritarian conflict management under titular ethnicisation—has both provided for the limited continuance of Kyrgyz-language cultural and socio-economic life in the republic and ensured their immediate protection from violence when faced with its very real possibility in June 2010. However, although the extreme negative characterisations of Kyrgyz life in Uzbekistan as depicted by populists in Kyrgyzstan are blatantly untrue, neither is it the case that life is without difficulty. In this final section we therefore consider the condition of the Kyrgyz minority in Uzbekistan since 2010 and going forwards under President Shavkat Mirziyoev, who replaced Islam Karimov following his death in 2016.

Despite the Uzbekistani state's protection and provision, since 2010 many Kyrgyz have left Uzbekistan and moved to Kyrgyzstan. It is difficult to know how many overall, but some reasons can be gleaned. Our research associate, Saniya Sagnaeva, conducted 30 interviews in 2015 with ethnic Kyrgyz Uzbekistanis who had recently emigrated to a border-area village in Kyrgyzstan's Jalal-Abad *Oblast'*. Jolboldu, the head of the village administration (*ayïl ökmötü*), told us that 167 families from Uzbekistan had been resettled in his village: these families mostly came from the nearby villages of Toktogul, Kydyrsha and Kara-Bagysh across the border.[28] Some had subsequently returned to Uzbekistan but most had stayed.

[26]Interview with Jolboldu (pseudonym), head of *ayïl ökmötü* (village administration) of anonymous village in Jalal-Abad region near Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan border, 20 June 2015.
[27]Interview with anonymous Uzbekistan government official 2, Tashkent, 28 June 2015.
[28]Interview with Jolboldu (pseudonym), head of *ayïl ökmötü* (village administration) of anonymous village in Jalal-Abad region, 20 June 2015.

In interviews with some of those who had stayed in Kyrgyzstan, they indicated a variety of reasons, mostly related to the formation of nation-states and national borders in the Ferghana Valley.

In the Soviet period, life in the border regions of Kyrgyz and Uzbek SSRs was closely interconnected. For example, in a Kyrgyz village in Uzbekistan, a family might have children in Andijon and Tashkent as well as in Osh and in Bishkek. They may have worked, studied or married on different sides of the border at different times of their lives. They may have chosen marriage partners from the other republic. In one family, in one house, some people might have Uzbek passports, some Kyrgyz. Local relations between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, who lived in close proximity, were good and often based on symbiotic economic activities. However, the creation of independent states in 1991—the advent of nationalism as the governing principle of organising territory in the Ferghana Valley—imposed a new biopolitical logic on life and movement, putting pressure on the *status quo*. People had to be either citizens of Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan and new border regimes emerged, making cross-boundary studying, working or moving increasingly difficult (Megoran 2006). This was cited by our Kyrgyz interviewees as the main reason for leaving Uzbekistan. While some spoke of fear for the future and worry after the 2010 events, the main reason cited generally over the interviews was the border. Subject to ever-tighter controls since 1999, it had been completely sealed in response to the events of June 2010, and remained very tightly controlled until September 2017 when there was some opening up of cross-border movement in the post-Karimov period. For example, Gulnara, 50, who had moved from Uzbekistan, told us:

> In the old days, when the road was still open [young people] studied in Osh because in Andijan they teach in Uzbek. Kyrgyz people were not going to study in Uzbek, right? As for the education in Osh, it is taught in Kyrgyz. Kyrgyz people who wanted to study in the Kyrgyz language studied in Osh, but [when the border was closed] they were no longer eligible for work when they returned [because their diploma from Osh was not recognised].[29]

Respondents (interviewed prior to the relaxation of border controls in 2017) frequently cited the difficulty in crossing the border for weddings and funerals for family members in Kyrgyzstan as a reason to leave Uzbekistan. Another Kyrgyz émigrée, Asel, a middle-aged woman, asked why she had left, said she did not want to leave her home in Uzbekistan but 'the borders being closed made it difficult for us. If it wasn't to do with the border then we would still be living there'. We asked her, 'Even after the events [of 2010]?', to which she replied:

> We would still be living there! If there were no issues with the border then we would still be living over there in our house and be working over here too. It was only because the border was closed. Nobody would have moved.[30]

[29]Interview with Gulnara (pseudonym), Uzbekistani–Kyrgyz emigree to Kyrgyzstan, Jalal-Abad region, 4 September 2015.

[30]Interview with Asel (pseudonym), Uzbekistani–Kyrgyz emigree to Kyrgyzstan, Jalal-Abad region, 20 June 2015.

As another Kyrgyz woman, Anara, who had moved from Uzbekistan said, 'if the borders weren't closed and if we could still travel back and forth then we would still be living over there'.[31] An ethnic Kyrgyz Uzbekistani academic told us in 2019 that he had observed the phenomenon of ethnically Kyrgyz people writing 'Uzbek' in their identification papers.[32] Although he provided some specific examples, it is not possible to know how widespread this is. The significance of this is, as with the pressure felt by the materialisation of borders, that it is part of the relentless logic of the ideology of the nation state that remains the greater threat to the long-term survival of the Kyrgyz minority than the potential for ethnic-based violence. Titular ethnicisation may prevent the extremes of a mass exodus or genocide, but it has been unable to act as a sufficient bulwark against the impact of nationalism.

Titular ethnicisation after Islam Karimov

In September 2016 Uzbekistan's long-standing president, Islam Karimov, died, and by the end of the year his successor was confirmed as Shavkat Mirziyoev. As a protégé of Karimov, he has surprised many people with his apparent willingness to embark swiftly on a series of reforms. What might his tenure as president mean for minority policies in general, and the Kyrgyz minority in particular?

In 2017 Mirziyoev delivered a speech on ethnic minority policy. He stated that 138 national cultural centres were 'playing an important role in extending the ethnic uniqueness and further harmonising the inter-ethnic relations in our country' (Mirziyoev 2017). This sounded very much like a continuation of titular ethnicisation, as under Karimov. However, he went on to say:

> Recently we have adopted an important decision in terms of taking the activity of these centres up to a new level and with an aim of further developing the cultural friendship ties with foreign countries. According to this, the Committee for International Relations and Friendship Ties with foreign countries has been established on the basis of the Republican International Centre [the *Baynalmilal Madaniyat Markazi*, or International Cultural Centre, see above]. (Mirziyoev 2017)

Emphasis on using these centres to promote relations with neighbouring states is new and reflects the priority Mirziyoev set on repairing relations with neighbours. In 2017 he not only dramatically relaxed border control regimes in the Ferghana Valley but made an official visit to Kyrgyzstan, where he announced the sponsoring of a new Uzbek-language school in the city of Osh as well as joint economic cooperation projects. Soon afterwards, Megoran interviewed a foreign policy official in the Uzbekistani government and put it to him that this was a striking break with Karimov's policy of keeping the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan at arm's-length. The official agreed, recognising that previously engaging with them 'was seen as a risk because Kyrgyz elites and the

[31]Interview with Anara (pseudonym), Uzbekistani–Kyrgyz emigree to Kyrgyzstan, Jalal-Abad region, 20 June 2015.

[32]Interview with anonymous Kyrgyz academic, Tashkent, 8 December 2019.

Kyrgyz population might have been afraid of Uzbekistan gaining influence through the minority'. He went on to say:

> Twenty-five years since independence is a long time. We needed time to learn about nation-building, but now it is high time, we are grown up, we have built our economy, and can share it for good of our neighbours. So when President Mirziyoev visited Kyrgyzstan recently, the Kyrgyz side asked if we could set up a car factory there, and we agreed, so they will be able to produce Uzbek buses in the south of Kyrgyzstan, creating jobs. We are sharing our wealth and economic progress.[33]

In 2018, another Tashkent insider made a similar comment:

> [Previously] we were cautious: if we gave any support to the Uzbek ethnic minorities, they could be perceived as a 'fifth column'. There were rumours in neighbouring countries that Uzbekistan wanted to enlarge its territory, using ethnic Uzbeks, so we had to be cautious. These rumours disappeared after 2010, because everyone expected Uzbekistan to intervene, and they didn't. People said Uzbekistan would send its military to protect its ethnic brothers, but it didn't. People saw that we weren't aggressive.[34]

Whatever the reason, it is clear that Mirziyoev was well-received in Kyrgyzstan. This might have been in part because of some high-profile work he did for the Kyrgyz minority in Uzbekistan earlier that year. Visiting the ethnic Kyrgyz village of Manas, in Jizzakh *viloyat*, near his hometown, Mirziyoev ordered it rebuilt and refurbished, returning 45 days later to inspect the outcome (Jabborov 2019, p. 4). Further, the opening of a new Kyrgyz-language department at a university in Jizzakh is planned, in an attempt to address the question of how to train local cadres of schoolteachers who can no longer easily travel to Kyrgyzstan for education.[35]

Concluding discussion

On 22 June 2010, with southern Kyrgyzstan still reeling from communal violence, the populist Kyrgyz paper *Alibi* published a poisonous diatribe entitled 'If You Could Shoot the Past with a Gun … the Uzbeks Left, We Stayed' (Rakhmankulov 2010, p. 2). The two parts of the title linked the mass exodus of Uzbek refugees to Uzbekistan with regret over how the Uzbek minority had been treated in the past. But this was not regret at mistreatment: on the contrary, it was regret that so ungrateful a diaspora had been treated so generously. The article implicitly justified the violence against ethnic Uzbeks in two ways. Firstly, it used the same word, 'Uzbek', to describe alleged attempts by the Uzbekistani state to seize Kyrgyzstani territory in the south of the Ferghana Valley as it did to discuss its own Uzbek minority: the two were conflated as one existential threat to the Kyrgyz state. Secondly, it compared the state of the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan with the Kyrgyz minority in Uzbekistan. On the first point, author Mashakbay Rakhmankulov was told by a relative in Osh that the local Uzbeks:

[33]Online interview with anonymous Uzbek government official, London, 18 December 2017.
[34]Interview with anonymous Uzbek government official, Tashkent, 5 July 2018.
[35]Interview with anonymous Uzbekistani official, Tashkent, 6 December 2019.

> had bakeries, cafeterias, cafes, restaurants. They were served by kindergartens, schools, universities, theatres, TV and radio stations, and newspapers. They'd built countless mosques and madrassas. … They had plenty of elected Uzbek deputies at the local and regional administrations and in the *Jororky Kengesh* [parliament]. … Whatever else did they need for a full and plentiful life? (Rakhmankulov 2010, p. 2)

After criticising Uzbeks for failing to participate fully in the political life of the country and stating that henceforth only 'pure speakers of the state language who are citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic' should be employed by the state, Rakhmankulov drew a stark comparison with the supposed lot of the Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan:

> Currently in Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz ethnic group has been completely eliminated. In Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, the Uzbeks have a strong desire for [territorial and political] autonomy and are trying to make the Uzbek language equal to Russian as an official language. In Uzbekistan there are no Kyrgyz-language kindergartens, schools or universities. (Rakhmankulov 2010, p. 2)

This view is widely held in Kyrgyzstan and is used to justify discrimination against Uzbeks there, but our research clearly refutes it. The Uzbekistani government makes extensive provision for the maintenance of Kyrgyz minority educational and cultural life in the republic. Further, by refusing to allow the securitisation of minorities as existential threats, as happens in Kyrgyzstan, an environment is created where anti-minority violence is less likely to occur. In 2010 itself, when there was a real danger of retaliatory violence against the Kyrgyz minority, the Uzbekistani government mobilised swiftly to de-escalate tensions and prevent violence by tight control of discourse and space. We argue that this 'authoritarian conflict management' answers the key question of this essay, explaining why there was no spread of violence to Uzbekistan in 2010.

The objection may be raised that the comparison between the Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan is unfair. The Kyrgyz minority of Uzbekistan is substantially smaller than the Uzbek minority of Kyrgyzstan. More relevantly, the Uzbeks of Kyrgyzstan are relatively wealthy urban dwellers surrounded by Kyrgyz, whereas the Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan are concentrated in poorer rural communities and thus not vulnerable to urban riots. Even so, in a situation where violence could have been expected, there was none. If the Kyrgyzstani government had sent security services into Uzbek neighbourhoods, many lives would have been saved.

This raises another question: is authoritarianism better than Kyrgyzstan's democratic experiment? Not necessarily. In discussing the violence of 2010 with an Uzbekistani Kyrgyz villager, Megoran asked if the villager had been harmed or involved in any incidents. The villager answered: 'No, everyone here is afraid of the police'.[36] This points to other forms of violence undergirding authoritarianism, the suppression of individual freedom.

Finally, this in turn raises a fundamental question about the nature of plural, multi-ethnic societies in Central Asia. Writing in 1999, Pamashova argued that national independence requires a rethink of minority education in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (Pamashova 1999,

[36]Interview with anonymous resident of Kyrgyz village in Tashkent region, 28 April 2016.

p. 6). As both the 2010 violence in Kyrgyzstan and the steady out-migration of Kyrgyz from Uzbekistan shows, the framework of titular ethnicisation has been unable to counterbalance the homogenising trends of nationalism. Since 2000 the number of Uzbek-language schools in Kyrgyzstan has fallen from 141 to 43, and the number of Kyrgyz schools in Uzbekistan from 87 to 56. Valerii Khan argues that, to prevent continued emigration of minorities, there should be a new ethnic policy for the Central Asian states that shifts from ethnocentrism to an expansion of minority rights (Khan 2018). What would that look like? It seems that neither Uzbekistan's Karimov-era authoritarian conflict management nor Kyrgyzstan's early twenty-first-century version of populist democracy has the answer.

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