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Disciplined and undisciplined repression: illicit economies and state violence in Central Asia's autocracies

Lawrence P. Markowitz & Mariya Y. Omelicheva

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ARTICLE



Disciplined and undisciplined repression: illicit economies and state violence in Central Asia's autocracies

Lawrence P. Markowitz^a and Mariya Y. Omelicheva^b

^aDepartment of Political Science and Economics, Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ, USA; ^bDepartment of Political Science, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, USA

ABSTRACT

What explains the use of disciplined repression in some autocratic regimes and undisciplined repression in others? Despite its relevance to these broader debates on authoritarianism, this question remains inadequately explained in conventional approaches to repression. This article proposes that autocrats' discipline over the use of state repression is a consequence of their differential control over illicit commercial networks. Autocratic regimes that consolidate their control over rents become dependent on security apparatuses to deepen and maintain that control. These regimes invest in and support the development of coercive capabilities, which leads to more disciplined state repression. Where autocratic regimes do not control illicit networks and rents, their dependence on security offices is low. Consequently, their investment in coercive capacity suffers, giving rise to patterns of undisciplined repression. This article explores the empirical implications of these regime trajectories through a controlled comparison of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, two drug transit states in post-Soviet Eurasia whose coercive institutions and patterns of state violence have developed in markedly different ways.

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What explains the use of disciplined repression in some autocratic regimes and undisciplined repression in others? In some countries, coercive apparatuses employ collective violence against a broad swath of victims targeted on the basis of their location or group identity. In other countries, state violence is selective, carefully targeting individuals or organizations that are perceived to pose a threat to the regime.

This question is critical to our understanding of authoritarian durability, which is often said to depend on well-developed, well-funded coercive institutions (Bellin 2004; Levitsky and Way 2010; Albertus and Menaldo 2012). As Slater and Fenner (2011, 20) have noted, in order to be effective, governments “deploy violence in a controlled way, ensuring that state repression does not go beyond specified targets and limits.” While disciplined instruments of state repression are typically seen as crucial in putting down mass protest (Lichbach 1987; Della Porta 1995; Goodwin 2001; Davenport, Mueller, and Johnston 2005; Tarrow 2011;), they are also essential in the use of everyday forms of repression that is far more subtle and calibrated. These repressive actions – such as tightening regulatory controls over civil society organizations and independent businesses, detaining and harassing opposition leaders, shuttering unwanted religious institutions, or stifling critical media outlets – constitute “civil liberty violations” that seek to constrain, not eliminate, actors and narrow their avenues for challenging the regime (Davenport 2007b).

Exercising such “low-intensity” forms of repression, in short, requires a coercive apparatus that is broad in scope and extensive in its administrative reach (Levitsky and Way 2010, 57–59; Soifer 2015), but also be able to wage violence that is disciplined (i.e. that targets selectively). Otherwise, collective state violence will threaten to undermine regime legitimacy because it “targets at a higher level of aggregation and thus cannot sufficiently distinguish between the guilty and innocent at the individual level” (Hultquist 2017, 510). Indeed, under conditions of civil conflict, collective state violence tends to drive nonparticipants to join insurgent groups while selective violence deters them (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). Even purposely selective violence can be plagued by misinformation, disinformation, personal grievances, denunciations, and extortions by corrupt government officials (Kalyvas 2006), making the use of disciplined state repression all the more important for autocratic regimes seeking to reduce the kind of arbitrary and collective violence that delegitimizes them and threatens their durability (Gershewski 2013).

This article argues that autocrats’ ability to exercise discipline over the use of state violence is a consequence of their differential control over illicit commercial networks. Autocratic regimes that consolidate their control over rents become dependent on security apparatuses to deepen and maintain that control. These regimes invest in and support the development of coercive capabilities, which leads to more disciplined state violence. Where autocratic regimes do not control illicit networks and rents, their dependence on security offices is low. Consequently, their investment in coercive capacity suffers, giving rise to patterns of undisciplined violence.

To assess the causal effect that state control over the illicit economy has on the scale and targeting of state violence in autocratic regimes, this article focuses on countries known as drug transit states. Defined as countries through which narcotics travel but are neither producers nor destination points, drug transit countries can be found in every major region of the world. A report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime identified over a dozen transit countries through which large quantities of heroin and cocaine were believed to pass from 2005 to 2014.¹ The US Department of State identifies 22 drug transit countries (including a number of Central American and Caribbean states), and nongovernmental agencies have added to that list several Southeast Asian countries (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs 2016). As key commercial links within an illicit global economy, drug transit states are ideally suited to explore the variable effects of economic resources on the development and use of state violence (Andreas 2015).

We address this question through a comparison of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, two drug transit states in post-Soviet Eurasia whose illicit income from drug trafficking is estimated to equal or surpass their GDP and significantly outpaces other sources of illicit income². Moreover, their coercive institutions and patterns of state repression have developed in very different ways. Tajikistan has experienced a remarkably rapid development of its security apparatus that has come to exercise disciplined violence targeting regime opponents. Despite a destructive civil war in the 1990s, Tajikistan’s security institutions now possess advanced technical resources, employ extensive monitoring and surveillance capabilities, and reach far into society. This marked improvement in coercive capacity and discriminate violence contrasts with its neighbor, Kyrgyzstan, where a perennially underfunded and weak security infrastructure has accumulated a record of undisciplined violence (especially against its minorities). How did Tajikistan rebuild its coercive institutions so quickly after state failure and civil war, enabling it to employ focused state violence against regime opponents, while Kyrgyzstan’s security infrastructure has remained anemic and susceptible to resorting to collective violence?

The similar historical, political, and geographical conditions in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, moreover, make their divergent uses of state violence all the more puzzling. Both countries occupied similar positions within the Soviet Union, both experienced post-Soviet transitions that led to a weakening of central political authority (that contrasted with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), and both countries are critical transit points for drug trafficking, organized criminal activity, and insurgents based in Afghanistan (Heathershaw 2009; Markowitz 2013; Driscoll 2015; Engvall

2016). As a result, both countries' past two decades have enabled greater interrelations and collusion between organized criminal actors and state officials, producing a "state-crime nexus" (Marat 2006) that has extended across the region (Engvall 2006; Kupatadze 2009; Latypov 2009; Lewis 2010; Cornell and Jonsson 2014; De Danieli 2014).

Using a controlled comparison of these two most similar cases in Central Asia (Slater and Ziblatt 2013), we assess competing explanations that are pertinent for understanding differences in state repression, leading us to attribute these differences to the nature of state control over the illicit economy. Our analysis draws on a combination of data designed to systematically study coercive apparatuses, including primary documents, US State Department reports, and a series of expert interviews (of journalists, academics, security and law enforcement officials, international organization staff, and members of civil society) conducted in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2016 and 2017. Carefully selected to represent a range of backgrounds, professional interests, and areas of specialized knowledge, these interviews provide a rare look at the inner workings of security agencies, specifying their informal practices alongside their formal structures.

The remainder of the article consists of four sections. The first reviews alternative explanations of disciplined state repression. The second section elaborates the argument. The third and fourth sections apply the argument to the cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The final section concludes with a brief discussion of the findings and their broader comparative relevance.

Explanations of disciplined state repression

What explains the ability of some autocratic regimes to exercise disciplined state repression? Because it is widely acknowledged, by activists and autocrats alike, that state repression is a central pillar of authoritarian rule, we assume that autocratic leaders have strong incentives to discipline their use of coercion. Yet, the comparative study of repression often does not even recognize the differences between these types of repression or those studies that do inadequately explain why some autocrats have found it exceedingly difficult to discipline instruments of repression while others have not.

One explanation draws on a consensus in the literature, termed "the law of coercive responsiveness," which finds that the frequency and intensity of state repression is positively associated with the presence of threats to an autocratic regime (Davenport 2007a). While most scholars accept that autocrats use state violence when confronting such a threat, there is little clarity on the conditions under which these regimes use disciplined (against selective targets) or undisciplined (against collective targets) repression. Some have argued that divergent patterns of state violence emerge as autocratic leaders face different threats. Sheena Greitens (2016) has found that autocrats confronting an existential threat – either social mobilization against the regime or the seizure of power from within the elite (Policzer 2009; Svolik 2012) – will make strategic choices about their use of (un)disciplined violence. According to Greitens' model, Kyrgyzstan's rulers (who have faced recurrent threats of social mobilization) would be expected to build a coherent, consolidated security apparatus that exercises discipline over its repressive apparatus in order to put down protests in the future. Likewise, it would suggest that Tajikistan's rulers (who face threats primarily from within the elite) would foster a fragmentation of security services to prevent internal power seizures, which would result in patterns of undisciplined, collective violence. Yet, precisely the opposite trajectories have emerged in each country, running counter to what a threat-based analysis would predict ³.

A second explanation points to institutional continuity and path dependence, tracing patterns in repression to long-term trajectories of state-building. Historical and macro-sociological works in this vein might explain the different outcomes in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as a product of war and state-building (Tilly 1992; Ertman 1997; Callahan 2005; Tin-Bor Hui 2005; Vu 2010), the institutionalization of violence in particular social and economic orders (Giddens 1987; North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009), or historical legacies of imperial rule (Weitzer 1990; Young 1994; Cooley 2005).

Though these accounts of the institutional origins and development of coercive apparatuses are highly instructive, their broad scope cannot explain the variation in levels of disciplined violence across such similar countries as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, since the causal variables driving institutional change are shared by these two cases.

A third set of arguments focuses on the effects of international factors on domestic uses of repression. Early studies highlighted the effects of external threat in shaping repressive infrastructures (Tilly 1992), and a handful of recent works have focused on changes in the international environment since the end of the Cold War (Cingranelli and Richards 1999; Levitsky and Way 2010). Yet, there remains little consensus on the effect of international conditions, such as economic globalization, on the type of state repression – disciplined versus undisciplined – deployed by regimes (Hafner-Burton 2005). Extending such arguments to Central Asia, moreover, might attribute these divergent trajectories to differences in foreign military aid, yet the total volumes of assistance to countries in the region are in fact quite comparable (Gorenburg 2014).

A fourth approach centers on the fiscal basis of coercive apparatuses. Yet, here too the empirical evidence is mixed as to whether economic resources promote disciplined or undisciplined uses of state violence in autocratic regimes. On one hand, a number of studies contend that economic wealth bolsters coercive capacity and leads to more disciplined violence. Autocrats and the wealthy that support them rely on a well-funded coercive apparatus should they seek to use targeted repression to halt democratic transition (Boix 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). Strong fiscal support for a coercive apparatus is deemed essential to exercising discipline over its uses of violence because fiscal resources enable states to develop institutionalized practices, foster an *esprit de corps*, and obtain necessary weapons and materiel (Ross 2001; Bellin 2004; Levitsky and Way 2010, 57–59; Greitens 2016). Other studies, however, find that resource-rich environments foster indiscriminate forms of violence among insurgents, war combatants, and terrorist groups (Weinstein 2007; Shapiro 2013; Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood 2014; Zhukov 2017). Applying this latter argument to coercive apparatuses would lead us to conclude that wealthy autocratic regimes will be more susceptible to a broader targeting of victims. These divergent conclusions about the effects of resource wealth on state repression highlight the limits of a blanket approach to economic resources that does not explain their particular linkages to autocratic regimes.

Illicit economies and state repression

This article contends that autocrats' ability to exercise discipline over state violence is a consequence of their control over illicit commercial networks and rents. In drug transit states, autocrats exercising consolidated control over drug rents depend on and develop coercive capacity, which leads to more selective forms of violence. These regimes tend to have less elite turnover, greater coordination across security offices, increased reach into society, all of which promotes institutional cohesion and patterns of disciplined, selective state repression. Conversely, autocratic leaders with fragmented control over drug rents have less incentive to devote their already scarce political and economic resources to the security apparatus. As a result, a coercive apparatus's higher levels of elite turnover, fewer technical capabilities, and limited reach into society make it susceptible to undisciplined, collective state violence (see Table 1).

While such divergent patterns are present in many resource-abundant autocratic regimes, these trajectories are more pronounced in drug transit states (such as those in Central Asia) where autocrats are in an unusual position to strengthen or weaken the fiscal base of their regimes. This is because regimes in drug transit states have potential access to rents that are immediately available, fungible, and highly fluid. Rents from drug trafficking are highly mobile capital – usually cash paid to those providing legal and political protection – that can be quickly passed on to political leaders who build slush-fund accounts to support their regimes (Boix 2003; Cooley and Heathershaw 2017). Autocrats can also shape the drug trade within their borders in ways that eliminate competitors, reorient trade routes away from regime opponents, and concentrate their control over the flow of rents. As with any lootable

Table 1. Illicit economies and state repression in drug transit states.

State-trafficker revenue bargain	Flow of illicit rents to autocrats	Autocrat's incentive to invest in coercive capacity	Nature of state repression
Exclude traffickers from the state	→ Fragmented	→ Low incentive: Frequent elite turnover Many internal divisions Limited reach into society	→ Undisciplined: Targeting victims collectively
Integrate traffickers into the state	→ Consolidated	→ High incentive: Infrequent elite turnover Few internal divisions Extensive reach into society	→ Disciplined: Targeting victims selectively

resource, the challenge these regimes confront, however, lies in controlling an industry that has a very low barrier to entry. Any organized group with access to contacts abroad can traffic heroin or opium through transit states without having to develop the infrastructure needed to grow, extract, or refine the crops (Snyder 2006). While potentially lucrative for autocrats, therefore, regimes with weak coercive apparatuses must use cooptation to extend control over traffickers. Much depends on whether this cooptation absorbs traffickers directly into the government or excludes them and controls them through intermediaries. There arise, then, different “revenue bargains” between autocrats and traffickers that enable the former to claim drug rents in some cases and the latter in others (Easter 2012).⁴ In some drug transit states autocrats can strike bargains that consolidate their control over drug trade rents (and the commercial networks that provide them), while in others autocrats’ bargains provide at best fragmented access to that illicit income.

This differential control over drug trafficking critically determines a drug transit state’s coercive capacity and subsequent use of repression. Where autocrats enjoy consolidated control over the drug trade, they grow dependent on – and continue to build – their coercive apparatuses to maintain their unrivaled access to rents. Where autocrats have fragmented control and limited access to drug trafficking, they are less likely to support the development of an expanded coercive apparatus. In contrast to resource curse arguments, therefore, enhanced access to drug rents provides autocrats with positive incentives to build coercive capacity. Specifically, they tend to support those aspects of coercive capacity that perpetuate their access to drug rents: (1) the central state’s command of technical, financial, and human resources; and (2) the territorial reach of the state and its ability to exercise surveillance and control down to the provincial and district levels as well as along the state’s borders.⁵ Given the regime’s immersion in this illicit economy, it has little interest, not surprisingly, in developing transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption measures. Indeed, those autocrats who consolidate control over drug rents possess both the motive and means to rapidly build their coercive apparatuses in ways that foster the predation on, not policing of, illicit markets. Consequently, autocrats in these countries will carry out marked advancements in coercive capabilities within relatively short spans of time (i.e. implementing over several years what takes their counterparts several decades). Where autocrats lack consolidated control over drug rents, by contrast, they have little interest in supporting such investments in building up their coercive institutions.

Variation in coercive capacity, in turn, shapes the nature of low-intensity repression. Security apparatuses characterized by high organizational cohesion and capacity will be more likely to exercise discipline over state violence – targeting particular groups in society at the behest of the autocrats commanding them. Conversely, security forces with low cohesion and capacity will be more likely to break ranks, often utilizing their position to prey upon civilians collectively (Greitens 2016). As research has shown elsewhere, organizational cohesion tends to promote discriminate violence, and (in the absence of such organization) perverse incentives can promote indiscriminate violence among actors that have unmediated access to resources (Lee 2005; Greitens 2016). In drug transit states, therefore, whether a regime wields more or less discipline over state repression depends on how that resource wealth reinforces or circumvents the organizational capacities of security apparatuses in each case.

Undisciplined state violence in Kyrgyzstan

The case of Kyrgyzstan clearly exemplifies how a state's limited control over an illicit economy undermines its coercive capacity and enables undisciplined forms of repression to predominate. Marked by intra-elite divisions, state paralysis, and twice overwhelmed by elite-led protests (2005 and 2010), Kyrgyzstan has emerged as an intersection of organized criminal organizations, drug trafficking, and limited terrorist activity. Having initiated political liberalization in the early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan's national and regional elite remained influential actors, particularly in parliament where they were in frequent contestation with President Askar Akaev. Moreover, the division and frequent rotation in and out of political positions have undermined the state's coercive capacity during much of the 1990s (McGlinchey 2011).

Fragmented control over the drug trade

The trafficking of opium and heroin through southern Kyrgyzstan has been fragmented since the early 1990s, when much of it was divided between Uzbek and Tajik criminal groups. Seeking to implement political and economic reform at the time, Kyrgyzstan's government struck a bargain over illicit revenues that excluded traffickers from positions within the central government apparatus. In return, a number of criminal groups working under "ruling family representatives" linked to President Askar Akaev became more independent of their patrons. As this patron–client relationship became more attenuated, the regime's control over the drug trade grew increasingly fragile. At best, drug trafficking was only partially consolidated under drug baron Bayaman Erkinbaev from the late 1990s until his assassination in September 2005 (Kupatadze 2012, 142–144). His death, and the aftermath of the Tulip Revolution, however, opened the door to a return of Tajik and Uzbek groups, as well as different state agencies becoming involved in the drug trade via multiple points of access (Marat 2006; Spector 2008). Between 2005 and 2010, there were reportedly 31 different criminal groups (relatively small, consisting of 5–15 members) in the country, many of which operated under the patronage and protection of their own regional and local elites. Many of these criminal groups were able to operate without seeking political protection from weakened law enforcement authorities (UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) 2007). Even though "there was open approval for drug trafficking" at the highest levels of the presidential administration at the time, the state's revenue bargain with traffickers continued to exclude them from key posts in government⁶. Consequently, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's control over the drug trade in Kyrgyzstan remained fragmented. This trend continued even when interethnic violence in 2010 in Osh and Jalalabad provinces enabled Kyrgyz criminal groups to replace their Uzbek and Tajik counterparts' in the drug trade⁷.

In sum, the government of Kyrgyzstan – despite its long history of anti-drug trafficking policing – has been unable to consolidate its control over this booming illicit economy. This is indicated by the consistently low levels of opiate seizures, which have not risen or fallen much over time (Figure 1). As far back as the 1980s, Kyrgyzstan had sought to establish interagency relationships to address the multifaceted nature of trafficking, crime, and instability, but these efforts have been plagued by ongoing competition (over credit and rents)⁸. As one informant noted, there are periods of time when agencies have a standing arrangement regarding how those payments are distributed. But when there is an external reshuffling of elites (i.e. after 2005 or 2010) or when one agency seeks to gain more of a share of the rents, indications of open competition can be seen in the charges of corruption or misuse of office that are brought by one or two agencies against another⁹. Although Tajikistan is deemed to be closer to a "narco-state," in which large portions of the state apparatus are involved in the drug trade, there are only "key persons" within Kyrgyzstan's state – mostly within its law enforcement and security agencies – that provide protection over disparate parts of this economy¹⁰.

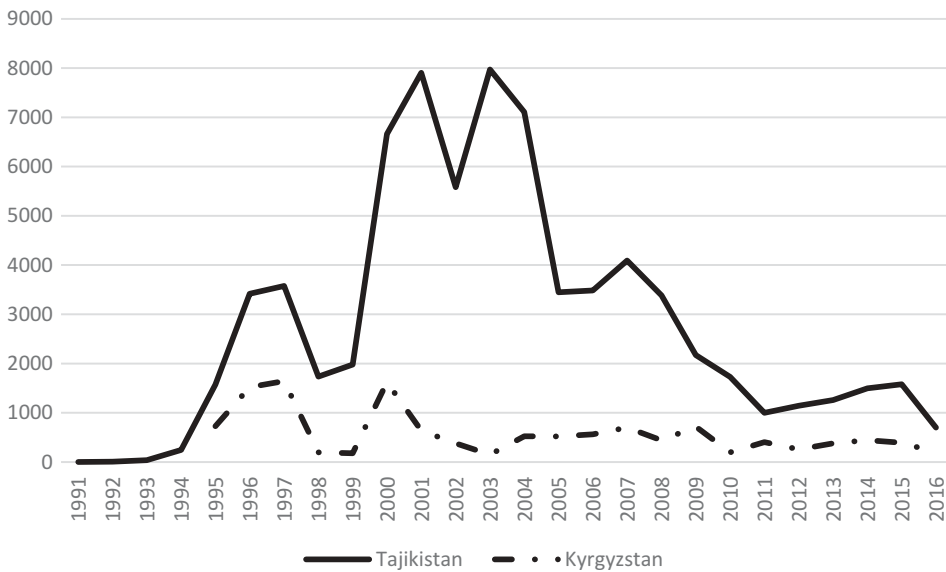


Figure 1. Opium and heroin seizures (kg) in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Sources: UNODC/Paris Pact/AOTP n.d.; Paoli et al. (2007).

The continuing challenges of coercive incapacity

Without exercising control over the commercial networks transiting opium and heroin through Kyrgyzstan, ruling elites have had little incentive to develop enforcement and security capabilities for channeling potentially lucrative rents to the central leadership. Akaev, Bakiev, and Kyrgyzstan's current leadership, therefore, have seen little benefit in investing in the state's coercive institutions, which remain chronically underfunded, internally divided, and lacking technical and institutional capabilities. The Drug Control Agency in Kyrgyzstan is a case in point. In contrast to its counterpart in Tajikistan, it has long had internal problems and faced external pressures that undermined its institutional capacity. Created in 2003, then closed under Bakiev in 2009, it reopened in 2010 and has been disbanded in 2016 (absorbed primarily by the Ministry of Internal Affairs [MIA]). Its seizures were markedly smaller than the National Security Service and the MIA, and it eventually fell victim to a turf war with the latter.¹¹ Border control and customs control agencies remain marginally involved in counter-narcotics efforts. Border control officers were reportedly instructed not to make drug trafficking a priority (and to focus on espionage instead), while customs agents claimed their primary role was to enforce tariffs on cross-border transited goods¹².

There is also very limited strategic analysis, involving the collection and systematic assessment of data on the drug trade, and little interest by higher-ups to "modernize" in this regard. This varies from Tajikistan where there is much greater institutional capacity in strategic analysis (though not necessarily on operations). Compared to Tajikistan's 50-person strategic analysis unit, Kyrgyzstan has only 10 persons (of whom only 2 individuals actually collect and analyze statistical data)¹³. Moreover, there remains a quota system in place in terms of arrests, seizures and operations – as well as reported crimes in a province. As a result, there is a standard practice of having each month's (or year's) quota barely met, which stymies any effort to properly analyze patterns of crime and security threats¹⁴. Likewise, there were only six officials in Kyrgyzstan devoted to human trafficking until 2016, when 300 MIA officers were assigned to focus on the problem¹⁵, and there is no line item for human trafficking in the state budget¹⁶. This lack of institutional capacity has been in part due to the government's dependence on the NGO sector to address human trafficking in Kyrgyzstan¹⁷.

Security incapacities were particularly acute in Kyrgyzstan's southern regions. There were periods of time after the 2005 and 2010 uprisings when local security apparatuses manifested state failure – i.e. when law enforcement agencies lost their monopoly of violence enabling criminal groups and drug trafficking networks to fill this void – but these appear to have been very brief¹⁸. In general, these uprisings did not bring about a reorganization of security institutions, which remained intact as their ministers or deputy ministers were replaced depending on their political ties¹⁹. The largest decline in capacity in the regions occurred during the Bakiev era (2005–2010), and subsequent efforts to counter this downward trend have remained marginal. During this period, law enforcement's role at the local level diminished, empowering criminal groups to fill this vacuum. In rural areas where police were not present, people would seek out criminal groups to solve their problems. This became common enough that some groups even advertised on television openly claiming that they could collect a debt or settle a dispute – something to which many companies and everyday people resorted. It was only the rising political clout of these groups – reaching into parliament and the presidency – that spurred the post-2010 government to crack down on them²⁰.

Attempts at law enforcement reform have been undermined by these incapacities. Although the police and other security offices have generally remained open to instituting reform in collaboration with civil society groups and international organizations, many of these efforts have not been implemented (Marat 2016). Efforts by international organizations seeking to promote joint or inter-agency roundtables and trainings are limited in that they are solely sectoral in nature – focusing on how drug trafficking should be addressed or how to incorporate protections of human rights in prisons²¹. Moreover, each security ministry conducts its own training and these programs are generally not coordinated. As a result, there is little information-sharing across agencies and no effective top-down mechanism to coordinate them²². One attempt at interagency cooperation that has been formed is the Defense Council, which advises the President. As such its work includes a focus on the intersection of trafficking and other security threats, and there are working groups established for each area or field in which there might be relevant threats²³. However, this is mainly a venue for actors to meet; it does not gather or analyze information, nor does it have the capability to enact policies²⁴. Major policy formulations must first be approved by Parliament (which has several factions) before being translated into law²⁵. Likewise, other reform attempts have not come to fruition. Following the 2010 violence, for example, it became evident that a coordinating mechanism would be needed should another mass violence episode or other crisis arise²⁶. Several European governments supported establishing a “situation room” that would bring together different agencies during a crisis, but the donors pulled out after it became clear the government was not committed²⁷. Another proposal in the wake of the 2010 violence sought to establish an early warning system should interethnic violence recur. The Agency for Local Government and Ethnic Diversity that emerged worked well with civil society and local community leaders, but most security agencies were not involved, favoring a focus on investigation and prosecution of crimes over conflict prevention²⁸.

Collective state violence since 2010

Insufficiently funded, lacking morale, and plagued by low-level corruption, Kyrgyzstan's security apparatus has been vulnerable to undisciplined, collective violence (Rickleton 2015). This vulnerability to collective forms of violence has been exploited in two distinct episodes of repression. First, in the aftermath of the 2010 interethnic violence, some of those in the government sought to penalize members of the Uzbek minority and there was also pressure from society on security agencies to be more responsive in order to prevent another clash²⁹. The use of sweeps in Uzbek neighborhoods was the primary means by which law enforcement and security agencies identified participants in the June 2010 interethnic violence. Whereas Tajikistan responded to outbreaks of

violence in its regions by targeting specific individuals and groups for arrest, Kyrgyzstan has deployed broader instruments means of repression (Human Rights Watch. 2010).

This emphasis on blanket sweeps among Kyrgyzstan's Uzbek minority is reinforced by the makeup of security offices. In Osh city, there are few Uzbeks in security agencies and the police, which are largely Kyrgyz. This does not reflect the 45% of the population that are constituted by Uzbeks in the city. Uzbeks are not recruited even though they want to join; they are not recruited because it is feared they will serve the interests of Uzbekistan and not Kyrgyzstan (i.e. that they will somehow share information with Uzbekistan and spy for it). This reflects a broader sentiment in society that sees Uzbeks as aliens and not as equal citizens in Kyrgyzstan. This is also true of political offices in Osh city, which are 95% Kyrgyz ³⁰.

Second, Kyrgyzstan's coercive apparatus has carried out blanket sweeps as central means of its recent crackdown on religious activity. In contrast to a similar wave of repression in Tajikistan, however, the government of Kyrgyzstan has engaged in sweeps and mass arrests claiming ties to Hizb-ut Tahrir, driven by security agencies that regularly exceed their legal and institutional mandates. Security and law enforcement agencies in the southern regions of the country reportedly target Uzbeks for searches, often using false claims of a search warrant to enter their homes. It is claimed that these policing strategies are carried out in order to preserve security, but they are often a means by which security offices extort payments of bribes. According to Ministry of Interior statistics, 1,822 people were arrested or detained for extremist activities in 2012 (of which 70% were from southern Kyrgyzstan), with the number of arrests increasing about 10% annually the following two years. By 2015, the government had registered 4,154 persons as extremist, of which 62% were from Kyrgyzstan's southern regions (US Department of State, multiple years). These mass arrests, however, have not been accompanied by more focused forms of repression: the government has only occasionally sought to close mosques or religious meetings; there has been little attempt to regulate religious practices; and there is no publicly articulated policy to return Kyrgyzstan citizens studying religion abroad (other than vague statements of concern by the central leadership). It was not until mid-2016, in a Defense Council session, in which the branches of security services met with senior religious authorities, that the government sought to design a joint initiative to have the state more involved with madrassas and mosques ³¹.

This collective violence, not surprisingly, has impacted society in Kyrgyzstan's southern regions. Because these searches and abuses tend to target ethnic Uzbeks, they have enkindled considerable anger and distrust between the latter and these provinces' security and law enforcement offices ³². Many of those expecting to be targeted (including religious groups that eschew violence but take a stricter interpretation of Islam) have been "self-isolating," or going underground, in order to avoid the repressive tactics of state security agencies. This is especially true among the Uzbek minority, many of whom believe that they are targeted due to their ethnicity. This trend has intensified in recent years due to triggering events, such as the February 2015 arrest of the prominent cleric Imam Rashot Kamalov (which generated fear of arrest in other groups) and news from Syria that a suicide bomber had come from Jalalabad Province (which led many to fear an intensified crackdown in the region) ³³. As a 2016 survey by the NGO Search for Common Ground found, the state and Uzbek minority are increasingly pulled into a cycle of perceived extremism, repression, marginalization, and extremism. As it describes, collective acts of repression has led to "an increased fear of arbitrary arrests, especially among members of non-Kyrgyz ethnicities... [and] a high level of distrust in law enforcement and government authorities..." (Search for Common Ground 2016, 18). As these marginalized groups are targeted, they self-isolate themselves from social life in their communities, becoming more vulnerable to radicalization (Search for Common Ground 2016, 18–19). More broadly, this trend demonstrates how ethnic tensions, weak state apparatuses, and the misuse of law enforcement, security, and court institutions can interact to inadvertently lead religious activists to become further marginalized. While very few, if any, activists have taken up violence, there are a number of "pull and push factors that could very quickly lead to

violence” given the tense relationship between local communities and security services in Osh and Jalalabad Provinces ³⁴.

Disciplined state violence in Tajikistan

Tajikistan demonstrates how a state’s control over its illicit economy can support and incentivize the rapid build-up of coercive capabilities and promote highly disciplined uses of violence. Following its civil war, Tajikistan’s central government struggled to re-establish control over many parts of the country. One regime strategy for stabilizing postwar Tajikistan was to cede control over key institutions (including parts of the security apparatus) to former commanders and prominent politicians and allow them to establish ties to organized criminal groups and the drug trade (Heathershaw 2009; Markowitz 2013; Driscoll 2015). By the late 1990s, a weak central government left Tajikistan with degraded security capacities to address the rise of drug trafficking and organized criminal activity in the country (much of it protected by local elites). For much of the mid-1990s, former commanders-turned-politicians competed for state offices and at times openly revolted against President Emomali Rahmon’s government.

Consolidating control over drug trafficking

One of the most significant features of Tajikistan’s post-conflict state-building has been the regime’s revenue bargain with traffickers that has enabled it to consolidate and exploit its control over the drug trade. As in Kyrgyzstan, the drug trade in Tajikistan in the mid-1990s was somewhat fractured, constituted by several competing medium-sized groups that were residual formations of warlord militias from the civil war period. The heads of drug trafficking operations were also former commanders of militias during the civil war – leaders such as Yaqub Salimov and Mirzo Ziyoev (Paoli et al. 2007). As part of the post-conflict power-sharing and reintegration process, these commanders were appointed to senior positions in government, which enabled them to conduct the drug trade from within state structures. This not only enabled these political elites to use their positions to influence counter-trafficking efforts, eliminate rivals, and centralize the drug trade. It also enabled President Rahmon to concentrate the central leadership’s control over the drug trade by gradually removing (and at times arresting) those senior officials and replacing them with persons beholden to him ³⁵.

Drug seizure patterns demonstrate the state’s consolidation of the drug trade. The rise of the seizures in the late 1990s and early 2000s occurred as the regime eliminated small-scale, independent traffickers and established control over trafficking routes under its own supporters. Once the regime consolidated its control by the mid-2000s, the level of seizures declined precipitously (see Figure 1). Indeed, most observers attribute this decline to the consolidation of drug trafficking by senior Tajikistan government officials vis-à-vis their opponents ³⁶.

As a consequence, the drug trade has been effectively centralized under the control of the ruling elite (with ties extending into the presidential administration). By the early 2000s, it was widely believed that drug trafficking is supported and protected by a range of officials, including border officers, customs officials, and those in the Drug Control Agency (DCA) and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). Advance payments for senior government and military (border patrol) positions lead officials to engage in the drug trade to recoup costs. As one NSS official noted, there are many “hidden hands” aiding the drug trade that serve as intermediaries enabling former warlords and others in this illegal activity ³⁷. It is generally believed that dealers and sellers are protected, and in return smaller dealers and traffickers are turned over to maintain an image of regular seizures and arrests ³⁸. Thus, larger organized syndicates remained untouched, allowing the central government to continue to benefit from large profits generated from the drug trade.

The rapid rise of coercive capacity

Over the past 20 years, however, Tajikistan's security apparatus has markedly changed, shaped by an increasingly closed political environment in which the authoritarian regime seeks to retain its control over the drug trade. It has supported substantial domestic and foreign investment in Tajikistan's security apparatus generally and on its border with Afghanistan. Stark advancements in security capabilities emerged in specific areas, resulting in extensive closed circuit TV monitoring throughout parts of Dushanbe, forensic resources, border infrastructure, and technical resources of special forces ³⁹. These increased technical and human capabilities have improved Tajikistan's overall security, providing more professionalized policing, reducing crime rates, and creating a greater sense of security among the public. They have also enabled more extensive monitoring and surveillance of religious activity as well as extensive crackdowns that proponents claim have reduced insurgent/terrorist attacks in the country.⁴⁰ In fact, there has been a significant decline in the number of terrorist attacks and episodes of instability. While several prominent ones are well known in 2010, 2012, and 2014 – indicative of weak state capacity in certain security areas – the number of these events has reduced and no longer appears to many experts interviewed as a significant issue ⁴¹.

Building on domestic and international investment in the technical resources, training, and infrastructure of its security apparatus, Tajikistan has witnessed gradual improvements in the capacity and coordination among its various agencies. Despite a number of drawbacks, international organization staff have found that capacity-building in Tajikistan has been greatly aided by the long-term presence of senior officials, limited elite turnover, and continued support from the central leadership. The Security Council and other security ministries are reportedly engaged in more robust and substantive efforts to impose coherence across Tajikistan's security institutions ⁴². The government has invested in other specialized areas of its security apparatus. Backed by US financial support, the Drug Control Agency has built up its strategic analysis section, staffed with approximately 50 analysts, to collect, analyze, and use statistics on criminal activity and security threats ⁴³. The government has designed rapid alert response systems to enhance its emergency response (via the Ministry of Emergency Situations). In addition, the government has sought to extend the reach of its security apparatus into the Rasht Valley and Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) – two areas of Tajikistan that supported the opposition in the civil war and have since been difficult for the Rahmon government to control. Among other tactics, the regime has drawn on security officials from Khatlon Province when filling security posts in GBAO's capital city (Khorog) and its outlying villages – a Soviet-era strategy by which the center seeks to more reliably monitor and police potentially independent regions ⁴⁴.

This is not to say that there are no underlying problems in Tajikistan's security apparatus. These technical advancements have not substantially improved coordination among security agencies or led to broad-based anti-corruption efforts. And there remains a deficit in the "human resources" of these institutions because the people being trained lack basic education, which has been allowed to languish for years ⁴⁵. Indeed, many have concluded that these developments have produced tactical and technical skills useful in effecting state repression necessary for the regime's longevity, while weakening norms of transparency and accountability to the public.

Selective state violence since 2010

The investments in Tajikistan's security capabilities have not institutionalized norms of accountability, giving rise to increased abuses of authority, widening repression, and more systemic predation. While Tajikistan's enhanced capabilities have enabled creeping authoritarianism for several years, the discovery of a reputed coup attempt in 2015 has led to a significant intensification of repression. Yet, that repression has been highly targeted against both political and religious groups. In the wake of the coup attempt, the regime arrested over 150 members of the country's

main opposition party, Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), which caused another 1000 IRP activists to flee the country. Members of Group 24, another opposition group living abroad, were targeted with arrest or assassination (and their families in Tajikistan were harassed as well). Ratcheting up its repression against political opponents to the regime, therefore, has been highly focused on specific individuals and organizations. While the everyday person who speaks against the government will likely be fired from his or her job and face a lawsuit ⁴⁶, no forms of collective violence have been extended to broader groups based on ethnicity, region, or religion.

The regime has been similarly focused as it intensified repression of religious activists. Between 2013 and 2015, it had closed 1,032 independent (unregistered) mosques, given “refresher” courses to 2,543 imams and clerics, installed video cameras in virtually every mosque and madrassa in the country, returned 3,008 of its 3,360 students abroad (who the regime feared was receiving illegal education), and has aggressively detained individuals for supposedly unlawful religious dress and appearance. At the same time, there have been no mass arrests accompanying this crackdown. By 2013, an estimated 600 religious activists were serving prison sentences, and reports from the Tajikistan government claim that roughly 100–200 persons were arrested each year for extremist activities in 2014 and 2015 (US Department of State, multiple issues). While some of these arrests were more active in Sughd Province, they were generally countrywide ⁴⁷. Predatory behavior undoubtedly pervaded many of these arrests, but they have not been implemented as a means of mass extortion by police and security offices.

With its focus on particular religious groups, institutions, and modes of practice, the increased repression of religious activity in Tajikistan has demonstrated that the regime can exercise discipline over its use of state violence. The potential backlash effects of this heavy hand of the state have led even some security professionals in Tajikistan to question this approach ⁴⁸. Government officials, however, saw little reason to scale back its more targeted approach to monitoring and policing religious activists, as there have been numerous cases of its successful prevention of attacks. The only way the regime might change course would be if there were several attacks that clearly demonstrated the negative consequences of the current harsh approach ⁴⁹.

Conclusion

This article has examined why some autocracies exercise disciplined repression (targeting victims selectively) while others resort to undisciplined repression (targeting groups or localities collectively). As the comparative study of authoritarianism has shown, this variation is important to understanding why state repression can serve as a central pillar of autocratic rule in some countries but remain ineffective, even counterproductive, for autocratic durability in others. Despite its relevance to these broader debates on authoritarianism, the question of what enables autocrats to build apparatuses disciplining state violence remains inadequately explained by conventional approaches to repression. Through the examples of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, this article has found that autocrats who strike a revenue bargain that integrates drug traffickers into the state (and concentrates rents directly to them) will invest in coercive capacity to maintain control over those rents. This, in turn, lays the foundations for disciplined state violence (targeting opponents selectively). Conversely, autocrats whose revenue bargain excludes drug traffickers from the state apparatus (and diffuses rents from their control) will have less incentive to build coercive institutions, creating conditions for undisciplined state violence (targeting opponents as a collective group).

The first trajectory is illustrated by Tajikistan, whose post-conflict power-sharing arrangement brought leading drug barons into the state, providing its new president opportunities to consolidate control over drug trade wealth and invest in rapidly rebuilding its coercive institutions decimated by civil war. As a result, its crackdown in recent years has been highly disciplined, selectively targeting political and religious actors. A similar pathway can be found in Guinea-Bissau, Mexico, and other Central American states, where government officials, immersed in the drug

trade, support investments in coercive capacities that tend to carry out more targeted, disciplined forms of violence. The second path is demonstrated by Kyrgyzstan, whose political and economic reforms excluded drug traffickers from top posts in government, leaving its drug trade fragmented. With little incentive to develop its coercive apparatus to access these rents, Kyrgyzstan's use of state violence has been far more undisciplined, targeting purported regime opponents collectively (especially among its Uzbek minority). This pathway is also evidenced in Sri Lanka, where the government's limited control over drug trafficking routes (which link its northern coast to Southeast Asia's "Golden Triangle" hub) has left little incentive to improve its degraded security capabilities and allowed undisciplined repression to define the regime's crackdown on its Tamil minority. As these examples of drug transit states illustrate, the willingness and capability to build coercive capacity and the nature of state violence that emerges is a direct consequence of the illicit commercial rents at a leader's disposal.

Beyond Central Asia, this exposition carries implications for the study of illicit economies and authoritarianism. First, it finds that resource wealth does in fact impact patterns of state violence. In contrast to resource curse arguments that more wealth in the hands of insurgents or war combatants tends to generate undisciplined (even indiscriminate) attacks, patterns of state violence may differ. Autocratic regimes with resource abundance within their reach will reinvest that wealth into their coercive institutions as a means of maintaining that income – a trajectory of institution-building that leads to more disciplined state violence. Second, this analysis suggests that autocrats view their coercive apparatuses not solely as a force against impending threats but also as one of the regime's primary instruments of rent-seeking and revenue generation. Third, it reinforces the long-standing argument by Tilly (1992) and others that the predatory nature of autocratic regimes can unintentionally lead to state-building. This is particularly true of drug transit states, an illicit market that – under the conditions identified above – gives autocrats powerful incentives to develop their coercive institutions and exercise highly disciplined state violence. As such, it highlights the important, yet often overlooked, illicit political economy of authoritarian durability.

Notes

1. These include Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Peru, Tajikistan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates (UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) 2015).
2. See 2011 estimates by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Illicit_financial_flows_2011_web.pdf; for other illicit income, see Cooley and Heathershaw (2017).
3. Empirical analyses taking a similar approach might point to Kyrgyzstan's elite turnover (versus Tajikistan's relative continuity of rule) as a source of their different modalities of repression. Elite turnover in Kyrgyzstan, however, neither altered posts below the cabinet (and sub-cabinet) levels nor affected their overall capacities (interview #5 with political analyst and former government official, Bishkek, June–July 2016).
4. Many spatial, geographic, demographic and economic factors determine the revenue bargain that emerges in drug transit states (see Omelicheva and Markowitz *Forthcoming*).
5. On these dimensions of the state's infrastructural capacity, see Soifer and Vom Hau (2008) and Mann (1985).
6. Interview #1 with political analyst and academic, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
7. Interview #1 with political analyst and academic, Bishkek, June–July 2016; Kupatadze (2012, 147).
8. Interview #9 with former senior law enforcement official, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
9. Interview #2 with political analyst and academic, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
10. These include well-known cases, such as Minister of Internal Affairs Melis Turgenbaev and so-called "gray cardinal" Kurson Asanov (interview #1 with political analyst, Bishkek, June–July 2016; interview #9 with former senior law enforcement official, Bishkek, June–July 2016; interview #5 with political analyst and former government official, Bishkek, June–July 2016). On the involvement of the customs service, see <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1071272.html>.
11. Interview #6 with former senior law enforcement official, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
12. Interview #9 with former senior law enforcement official, Bishkek, June–July 2016.

13. Senior officials demand only aggregate data, so lower-level officials see little incentive to collect these data. Efforts by international organizations to change these practices are met with suspicion, with security officials believing such reforms are an attempt to access secret information (a mentality some ascribe to their age and their Soviet-era training). Interview #12 with UNODC expert, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
14. Interview #12 with UNODC expert, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
15. This planned surge of police left OSCE officials distressed that the government poorly understood how to address the needs of victims of human trafficking. Interview #14 with project analyst on human trafficking, OSCE, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
16. Interview #15 with project analyst on human trafficking, OSCE, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
17. After 2005, international agencies decided to avoid working with the state and set up a network of 30 NGOs to address human trafficking. Interview #13 with project analyst on human trafficking, International Organization for Migration, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
18. Interview #4 with political analyst and academic, Bishkek, June–July 2016. Indeed, the flow of rents to elites for oil delivered to the Manas air base went uninterrupted during these uprisings, so it stands to reason that rents from the drug trade were similarly unaffected. Interview #2 with political analyst and academic, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
19. Interview #5 with political analyst and former government official, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
20. Interview #3 with political and security analyst, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
21. Interview #12 with UNODC expert, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
22. Interview #3 with political and security analyst, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
23. Albeit most of these working groups consisted of academics. Interview #4 with political analyst and academic, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
24. Interview #3 with political and security analyst, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
25. Interview #7 with academic, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
26. It was known that at least one top-level law enforcement official could not be reached during the 2010 violence for lack of a satellite phone. Interview #2 with political analyst and academic, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
27. Similarly, a proposal put forward by Interim President Roza Otunbaeva to carry out reforms of the MIA was not carried out. Interview #3 with political and security analyst, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
28. Interview #3 with political and security analyst, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
29. Interview #10 with NGO head and expert on religious extremism, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
30. Interview #3 with political and security analyst, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
31. Interview #5 with political analyst and former government official, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
32. Interview #3 with political and security analyst, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
33. Interview #10 with NGO head and expert on religious extremism, Bishkek, June–July 2016. See also Eurasianet (2015).
34. Interview #10 with NGO head and expert on religious extremism, Bishkek, June–July 2016.
35. On the arrests of senior government officials (or their relatives) for involvement in drug trafficking, see De Danieli (2014).
36. Interview #17 with academic, Dushanbe, December 2016; interview #20 with senior law enforcement official, Dushanbe, December 2016; interview #23 with NGO staff, Dushanbe, January 2017. See also Lewis (2010) and Bleuer and Kazemi (2014).
37. Interview #21 with senior law enforcement official, Dushanbe, December 2016.
38. Interview #25 with NGO staff, Dushanbe, January 2017.
39. Interview #16 with an international NGO senior staff member, Dushanbe, January 2017.
40. Interview #17 with academic, Dushanbe, December 2016; interview #23 with NGO staff, Dushanbe, January 2017.
41. Multiple interviews, Dushanbe, December 2016, January 2017, and April 2017.
42. Interview #33 with UNODC staff, Dushanbe, April 2017.
43. Interview #12 with UNODC expert, Bishkek, June–July 2016; see also Bleuer and Kazemi (2014, 24).
44. However, this has created potential conflict between these officials and local leaders in the province, which appear to have contributed to open clashes among state security actors. Interview #26 with international NGO staff, Dushanbe, January 2017.
45. Interview #29 with NGO staff, Dushanbe, April 2017; interview #34 with former security services official, Dushanbe, April 2017.
46. Interview #28 with NGO staff, Dushanbe, April 2017; on the threat of firing workers as an instrument of repression in the region see McMann (2006).
47. Interview #26 with international NGO staff, Dushanbe, January 2017.
48. Many felt that repression tends to push religious activity underground; others contended it undermined effective intelligence collection and recommended closely monitoring groups before arresting them. Multiple interviews, Dushanbe, December 2016, January and April 2017.
49. Interview #35 with senior official from US Embassy, Dushanbe, April 2017.

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